Hegel and the Problem of Language

by

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Despite the popular proposal that 20th century philosophy is characterized by a decisive “linguistic turn,” language features prominently in G. W. F. Hegel’s writings on the philosophy of mind nearly a century earlier. Yet Hegel devoted no book, essay, or set of lectures to the topic of language. Rather, in the effort to build a systematic philosophy, he discusses language only in a piecemeal fashion across different texts, tying certain characteristics of language to its role in addressing and overcoming epistemic problems, which the mind experiences in its drive to understand itself and the world. This dissertation presents a new interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy of language by dialectically linking his discussions of language. I argue that Hegel shows how language, in resolving epistemic problems, functions as a key tool for enabling us to become free thinkers and knowers. Part I examines language in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind*, particularly his philosophy of “subjective mind,” where language appears as a system of signs produced by subjects to overcome the given form of our intuitive experiences. Part II analyzes and links discussions of language in the *Philosophy of Right*, where as a means of communication it serves to create and make recognizable particular social relationships, which both inform our own sense of self and enable us to surpass the subjective character of our knowledge. Part III analyzes Hegel’s account of “speculative” uses of language, where philosophers express their own practice of freely gathering and traversing the concepts.
constitutive of their own epistemic activity. By critically engaging the literature on Hegel and language over the past 70 years, this interpretation shows not only the significance of language in Hegel’s philosophy but also its role in freeing us from entrenched, habitual, and otherwise limited ways of understanding ourselves and the world.
DEDICATION

To those like Hegel who continue to churn and enrich my thinking.
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1 Introduction

This dissertation analyzes G. W. F. Hegel’s conception of language and defends a particular interpretation of it. I argue that Hegel provides not so much a theory, but a problematic of language. Specifically, I argue Hegel thematizes language both as a tool for solving particular, epistemic problems and as itself a reoccurring problem limiting our self-knowledge and our knowledge of the world. Language is best accounted for in Hegel, I maintain, not by espousing a general problem language is meant to solve (e.g. intersubjective communication or comprehensive knowledge of the world), but by tracing how it repeatedly emerges in his philosophical texts as a means for resolving, and how it in turn generates, a series of different, progressively emerging problems of knowledge. My claim is that Hegel never analyzes language in itself, but only in the strict context of its being used to overcome problems in our efforts to know ourselves and our social world, with the ultimate aim of thinking and knowing freely.

This introduction will explain my interpretive approach to Hegel’s philosophy of language and how it intersects with and diverges from key commentaries on Hegel and language. In so doing, I aim to acknowledge the diverse range of scholarship on this topic and my indebtedness to its authors, while suggesting the novelty of my approach, which attempts to integrate and expand upon the insights of this literature. I conclude the introduction by outlining

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1 The separation between a theory and problematic of language is something of a false dichotomy, for a theory of language can certainly outline its role in addressing epistemic and social problems. I am also aware that my proposal perhaps places Hegel in undue intellectual proximity to K. L. Reinhold, a contemporary of Hegel’s who he criticizes in his early polemical texts, The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy and Faith and Knowledge. While I acknowledge these concerns, I put my thesis in this way to highlight a puzzling feature of Hegel’s account of language: the lack of a clear definition of what language is in his philosophical system. Below in the Introduction, I outline why this puzzle persists across Hegel’s scattered discussions of language and argue that we should not understand any of his claims about language as strictly definitional or proposing any unequivocally essential elements of language.
the three parts of this dissertation and how each invokes and discusses language from within the context of certain modes of knowing and the particular epistemic problems each mode confronts.

1.1 Approaching Hegel and Language: How to begin?

The result is the same as the beginning, only because the beginning is the purpose; in other words, the actual is the same as its concept only because the immediate, as purpose, contains the self or pure actuality within itself. The realized purpose, or the existent actuality, is movement and unfolded becoming; but it is just this unrest that is the self (PG § 22).

One might justifiably begin with the question: how does the topic of language actually appear in Hegel’s works and what end does it serve therein? Language (Sprache) appears most conspicuously in his published texts devoted to the philosophy of mind or spirit (Geist), which includes the Phenomenology of Spirit (1807); the third volume of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, the Philosophy of Mind (published in three editions: 1817, 1827, 1830); and Elements of the Philosophy of Right (1820). Of his unpublished works, his lectures on natural right and political science (LNS), on history (LPH), on aesthetics and poetry (those from 1823 have been translated as LA), and on religion (LPR) each provide scattered discussions of language as well.² Hegel’s philosophy of Geist (as opposed to his philosophies of logic and nature) thus serves as the most obvious focal point for approaching his conception of language.

Many commentaries on Hegel and language have focused on the encyclopedic Philosophy of Mind, where under the heading of “Psychology” Hegel discusses the nature of

² This list does not include Hegel’s passing mentions of language in his lesser (i.e. less systematic) works, most conspicuous in his later reviews of K. W. F. Solger’s writings and those of J. G. Hamann. For the former published in 1826, see MW, 354-400; for the latter published in 1828, see HH.
signs and language at length. Others have homed in on the lengthy prefaces to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Science of Logic*, both of which discuss the role of language in philosophy, particularly for expressing the progressive and developmental nature of Hegel’s own philosophical system. Still others direct us to the crux of language in his lectures on “absolute spirit,” including those on art, religion, and philosophy. All highlight key features of Hegel’s view of language and its relation to his concept of *Geist*, providing an invaluable basis from which to grapple with his philosophy of language.

Yet as some of these authors point out, Hegel never provides a fully articulated and clearly delineated philosophy of language, whether as a separate text or within a particular section of his writings on the philosophy of mind. Accordingly, as Jere Surber points out, it

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6 Jere O’Neill Surber makes this point most explicitly in “Hegel’s Philosophy of Language: The Unwritten Volume” in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2011). For similar claims, see Jim Vernon, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Language*, and John McCumber,
seems one can either attempt to reconstruct an Hegelian philosophy of language by linking his many discussions fragmented across many of his works or one can forego such a reconstruction and instead elect to draw interesting insights from a select few of these limited discussions. Surber, for his own part, claims that the absence of any work by Hegel devoted specifically to language is itself significant, for he “suggest[s] that [this omission] was a deliberate choice in favor of a systematic conception of philosophy and against a project [i.e. a philosophy of language] that would serve to disrupt the general economy of his systematic enterprise.”7 For Surber, the particular sort of systematicity of Hegel’s philosophy, its “economy,” foregoes systematic consideration of language, the very medium of the system’s expression. He thus sees Hegel’s construction of a system of philosophy, which excludes topical consideration of language, as a sort of bridge or hinge “bringing to completion one epoch of philosophy and laying the foundations for the next, which remains our own to this day.”8

While I agree with Surber (and Jim Vernon and John McCumber) that Hegel never composed a text exclusively or primarily devoted to the topic of language, and while I find provocative his suggestion that Hegel’s exclusion of language from systematic and more detailed consideration is itself significant philosophically and historically, his conclusion that one cannot construct a philosophy of language out of Hegel’s systematic philosophy is altogether premature.9 Jim Vernon challenges this contention with his Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, and

8 Ibid.
9 Surber suggests the incapacity of constructing a Hegelian philosophy of language both in “Hegel’s Philosophy of Language: The Unwritten Volume” and in his review of Jim Vernon’s Hegel’s Philosophy of Language. See Jere
this dissertation follows Vernon’s work in attempting to draw a philosophy of language out of Hegel, albeit with a different tact. To what extent the present work addresses Surber’s charge that it is impossible to construct “a philosophy of language that would have a determinate place within Hegel's system (like his philosophies of art, religion, etc.) and whose internal structure would conform to all the criteria of systematicity that Hegel presupposes,” the reader must judge for themselves.

Let us look briefly at the opening of Jim Vernon’s reconstruction of Hegel’s philosophy of language, which will provide a useful counterpoint to our own. Vernon begins with the problem language is meant to solve for Hegel. “Language arises, Hegel argues, in response to the problem of subjective idealism; a problem that itself arises out of our immediate intuition of the world.” He then proposes “three elementary questions that a theory of language must be able to answer,” to which he provides and defends Hegel’s responses in the remainder of the text. Coincidentally, answering these three elementary questions—(1) finding and (2) demonstrating the “universal ground of linguistic expression” and (3) explaining the relation between “the form of the universal ground expressed in language and the form of the language through which it is expressed”—requires only that Hegel’s account of language resolve the problem it initially arises to solve: “the problem of subjective idealism,” i.e. “to demonstrate the objectivity of our (determining forms of) experience.” Solving the problem of subjective idealism itself provides

<https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/hegel-s-philosophy-of-language/>
10 Surber, “Review of Jim Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language.”
11 Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 2.
12 Ibid., 3.
13 Ibid.
responses to the three fundamental questions any philosophy of language must address.

We will return to the rich detail of Vernon’s reading in Parts I and III below, for he often demonstrates meticulous care and perspicacity in his interpretation of Hegel, but what concerns us here is the form of his approach. Unlike Vernon, I am quite wary of proposing anything like “elementary questions” that a (or any) philosophy of language should address, for that suggestion presupposes a single goal or end language is necessarily intended to satisfy. We thus do not approach Hegel’s discussions of language on their own terms. I am likewise cautious of pinpointing a single problem as the impetus for why language emerges in Hegel’s systematic philosophy, and indeed, I disagree with Vernon that the specter of subjective idealism is the (main) problem language arises to address. In fact, I want to forego the guiding assumptions that steer Vernon’s account as well as any similar sort of assumptions, even while I agree that an interesting, coherent philosophy of language can be drawn out of Hegel’s system.

Instead, let us return to our original question: where and how does language appear in his texts? What is puzzling about this question is that Hegel never provides a clear definition of what he thinks language (Sprache) is. In the opening section of the Phenomenology of Spirit on “Sense-Certainty,” he claims that language “belongs to consciousness” and “is inherently universal,” but these attributes hardly constitute a definition (PG § 110). Later in his analysis of culture (Bildung), Hegel claims that language “alone expresses the ‘I’, the ‘I’ itself,” such that an individual person can “alienate” and distinguish themselves from others (while grounding the capacity of others to recognize their individuality) through “the power of speech,” for “in speech, self-consciousness, qua independent separate individuality, comes as such into existence, so that it exists for others” (PG § 508). He reiterates this idea later when providing what is closest to a
definition of language “as the existence [Dasein] of spirit [Geist]. Language is self-consciousness existing for others, self-consciousness which as such is immediately present, and as this self-consciousness is universal” (PG § 653). In this instance, it would seem appropriate to call language for Hegel the existence of self-consciousness for others.

Yet Hegel muddies the issue in the “Anthropology” of his Philosophy of Mind, where he claims speech is a “more perfect expression” of the mind than the human figure (EPG § 411 Remark), a statement concerning the relation between mind and body that does not clearly square with his claim in the Phenomenology that language, or rather the power of speech, is the sole way an individual person distinguishes themselves from others and enables mutual, self-conscious recognition between them. Is language the “expression” (Ausdruck) of mind (Geist) or the “existence” (Dasein) of self-consciousness (Selbstbewusstsein) for others, or could it somehow be both? Why then does language not appear in Hegel’s accounts of self-consciousness in the Phenomenology or Philosophy of Mind? The subsequent “Psychology” section in the Philosophy of Mind does little to settle the issue, introducing the notion of a linguistic sign for the first time and proffering the idea that language is the “system” of speech with the goal of “manifesting its representations in an external element” (EPG § 459). Yet he does not specify what such a system would or should look like, nor how such a system relates to the socially recognitive role of language outlined in PG §§ 508, 653.

This truncated summary of the appearances of language in Hegel does not even touch on its many appearances in his book-length treatment of the forms of “objective spirit” in the Philosophy of Right, nor his notable discussions of language in the prefaces to the Phenomenology and Science of Logic, nor the invocations of language in his lectures on history,
art, and religion. My point here is simply to point out the puzzling feature of Hegel’s engagement with the topic of language—the lack of a definition of Sprache and hence the irreducibility of its appearances to some essential nature of language—and to emphasize, contra Vernon, the importance of not presupposing what Hegel’s philosophy of language should look like given both the lack of a clear definition of what language is and his silence over what a properly philosophical treatment of language entails.

Avoiding as much as possible the presupposition of what Hegel’s philosophy of language does or should look like is, however, not the only danger here. We must avoid two extremes: adopting the form of Hegel's philosophy of language from those provided by his contemporaries or 20th century philosophers of language; and merely collecting and cataloguing the content of what Hegel says of language. The latter tactic runs counter to Hegel’s own aim to systematize knowledge, so providing an Hegelian philosophy of language means both collecting what he says of language and organizing what he does say into a specific form consistent with his own philosophical method.

The fact of Hegel’s discussions of language appearing scattered across multiple works and multiple parts of the same work is perhaps more significant than for other philosophers, for he never ceases to emphasize the systematicity of his philosophy, and indeed of philosophy in general. It was Fichte and his project of a science of knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre) who

14 There are several versions of Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre, which was published and revised based on his lectures in the 1790s and 1800s. The introductions to these editions are provided in Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800), ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994). Many of the early written accounts of the Wissenschaftslehre and its relation to other topics can be found in Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, 2nd ed., 1993). The foundational principles of the Wissenschaftslehre are laid out in Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge, trans. Peter Heath. In Fichte: Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre), ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970; 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
influenced the young Hegel to begin emphasizing the importance of developing a scientific system of philosophy, and he evinces the importance of systematicity as early as the introduction to the short-lived *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, which he edited with his more prestigious friend F. W. J. Schelling in 1802-3. Until the end of his life, Hegel would continue to assert that philosophy should always comprise a system, setting certain demands on philosophers, including himself, to attain the internal consistency of a system of thought and to establish the interconnected development and interdependence of its parts. Indeed, philosophy as a system becomes one of Hegel's hobbyhorses to which he appeals quite often in the *Phenomenology* and every text thereafter.

Hegel claims that systematicity requires that philosophy be demonstrated a science, *eine Wissenschaft*, a unified whole instead of miscellaneous collection of disconnected pieces. As

1982). Fichte's system had a tremendous impact on the young Hegel and Schelling, positively in their endorsement of a “systematic” treatment of knowledge after Kant’s critical philosophy and negatively in their various attempts to distance their own views from Fichte’s. For two of Hegel’s Jena writings that both praise and criticize Fichte in certain respects, see *D* and *FK.*

The introduction to this journal along with a brief introductory essay by H. S. Harris can be found in *MW*, 207-225. While Harris notes the slight controversy over whether Hegel or Schelling was its lead author, it is clear that the essay reflects both men’s dedication to crafting a “system” of philosophy in line with Schelling’s first major attempt to do so in 1800, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993. Hegel’s first overtly systematic work, in his sense of the term, is the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit.*

It would be too ambitious to reference every time Hegel mentions the demand for philosophy to be systematic. For but two references, see the preface to *PG* § 34, where he enumerates some key features of what he calls his “scientific method”: “This movement of pure essences constitutes the nature of scientific method in general. Regarded as the connectedness of their content it is the necessary expansion of that content into an organic whole. Through this movement the path by which the concept of knowledge is reached becomes likewise a necessary and complete process of becoming.” See also the preface to the first edition of *SL*, p. 27: “But the higher demand is that [philosophy] should become systemized knowledge.”

“*Wissenschaft*” has a greater extension than most current uses of the English “science.” The former typically refers to a system of knowledge more cohesive and integrated than the latter. However, “science” also connotes systematicity even if it is not always made explicit. Hegel often uses “systematisch” and “wissenschaftlich” interchangeably—they possess the same extension. So our use of “science” always implies systematic knowledge. On Hegel’s sense of scientific systematicity, see the introductory essay in *SL* entitled “With What Must Science Begin?”

9
Hegel claims, “what really is excellent in the philosophy of our time takes its value to lie in its scientific quality, and even though others take a different view, it is in fact only in virtue of its scientific character that it exerts any influence” (PG § 71). After the Phenomenology, and perhaps in light of Schelling’s continued inability to construct a system of philosophy, he only becomes more emphatic on the scientific systematicity of philosophy. “A philosophizing without system cannot be scientific at all” (EL § 14). This is because a philosophy for Hegel must justify its initial presuppositions, how it begins and how it proceeds, and it can only do so if the process of laying out philosophical content itself comes to ground its point of departure.

The difficulty, according to Hegel, is not simply in positing or espousing esteem for a scientific philosophy (whatever that may look like), but in demonstrating its truth. The philosopher must be patient, careful, and methodical in their quest, for “impatience demands the impossible, to wit, the attainment of the end without the means” (PG § 29). Philosophers must undertake great work and labor (Arbeit) to develop a systematic philosophy, for “in order to become genuine knowledge, to beget the element of science which is the pure concept [Begriff] of science itself, it must travel a long way and work its passage” (PG § 27). Hegel has nothing but derision for those who careen ahead and avoid difficulties, objections, or great effort in following the trajectory of conceptual thought and how it upends “ordinary” ways of thinking, understanding, and talking about things.\(^{18}\)

Turning back to language, I am particularly interested in how language appears in

\(^{18}\) See PG §§ 67, 69, 70 for Hegel’s criticism of the “prevailing prejudice” that we can grasp the truth of our objects of cognition, including sensory things and God, through immediate intuition. If we think cobblers require training, practice, and work to become skilled at their craft, then why, Hegel queries, should we expect anything less rigorous and laborious in the case of doing philosophy? This is also the thrust of his repeated criticisms of F. H. Jacobi, most clearly articulated in FK and the “Third Position of Thought” in the introduction to EL.
Hegel’s “mature system,” that is, from his *Phenomenology of Spirit* on, when he began constructing a philosophical system, which he outlines in the three volumes of *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, publishing expansions of two parts, the logic and “objective spirit,” as the *Science of Logic* and the *Philosophy of Right*. What seems absent from or at least given short shrift in many readings of Hegel and language is a sustained attempt to link the diverse appearances of the term “language” (*Sprache*) across Hegel’s post-*Phenomenology of Spirit* texts on *Geist*. The most glaring lacuna is an interrogation of Hegel’s multiple discussions of language in the *Philosophy of Right* and any attempt to integrate these with his analyses of language in the *Philosophy of Mind* and his discussions in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Science of Logic*. Hence, my method will be to trace Hegel's use of key terms, in particular *Sprache* and its derivations, through the *Philosophy of Mind* (*EPG*) and *Philosophy of Right* (*GPR*). *Sprache* is typically translated into English as “language” or “speech,” and we will use this term as a key to

19 Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*—the most comprehensive expression of his philosophy—is comprised of his *Encyclopedia Logic* (*EL*), *Philosophy of Nature* (*EPN*), and *Philosophy of Mind* (*EPG*). I include also in his “mature system” the 1921 *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (hereafter, *Philosophy of Right* or *GPR*) and the *Science of Logic* (*SL*), which functions largely as an expanded and revised version of the *EL*.

20 The most notable exceptions to this trend are Vernon’s *Hegel's Philosophy of Language* and McCumber’s *The Company of Words*. However, neither author interrogates language in the *Philosophy of Right* and integrates it systematically with discussions of language elsewhere.

21 Though not strictly a part of his tripartite *Encyclopedia*, Hegel explicitly identifies the *Philosophy of Right* as a crucial element of his systematic philosophy. “This textbook is a more extensive, and in particular a more systematic, exposition of the same basic concepts which, in relation to this part of philosophy, are already contained in a previous work designed to accompany my lectures, namely my *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Science* (Heidelberg, 1817)” (*GPR* Preface). Like the *Encyclopedia*, this text, published in 1921, served as an abbreviated discussion of the many forms of “right” or law (*Recht*), which Hegel would then expand upon in his oral lectures. For his lectures in Heidelberg (1817-19) that culminated in the publication of *GPR*, see *LPS*.

22 Readings of these texts comprise Parts I and II. To supplement readings of these focal texts, I also draw on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*PG*); lectures on art (*L4*), religion (*LPR*), the philosophy of world history (*LPH*), and history of philosophy (*LHP*); earlier works like *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (*D*) and those compiled in *Early Theological Writings* (*ETW*); as well as later essays like those published in English as *Miscellaneous Writings of G. W. F. Hegel* (*MW*). The final Part III draws heavily from the prefaces of both *PG* and *SL*, where Hegel addresses at length the issue of philosophical language.
unlock and connect pieces of Hegel’s philosophy of language. We will also trace the appearance of related terms like *Wort* (word), *Name*, *Ausdruck* and *Äußerung* (expression), *Schreiben* (writing), and *Grammatik* (grammar), which often appear alongside discussions of *Sprache*. Tracing the appearance of these terms will allow us to proceed carefully and methodically, pinpoint Hegel’s discussions of language, and collect a fuller picture of his philosophy of language than he provides in any one section.

But importantly, to lend *systematic* form to this collection and construct his philosophy of language, we require a philosophical method analogous to Hegel’s own. We must analyze and link Hegel’s discussions of *Sprache* just as he does with “forms” of *Logik*, *Natur*, and *Geist*.23 Hegel speaks of language primarily in his texts on *Geist* or mind, so our method must unite the different forms of *Geist* the discussions of which involve these terms.

Therefore, my contention and what this dissertation will demonstrate is that language appears in Hegel in the context of its addressing particular epistemic problems, whether faced by an individual thinker or an intersubjective community. These specific problems arise in the effort of individuals and collectives to think and live freely, and language addresses them. Language is thus a tool that enables persons and groups to overcome determinate obstacles to our freedom. In so doing, however, the solution to a problem, which language provides, grounds a new form of thought and conscious action, i.e. a new form of *Geist*, which again confronts a new obstacle to its freedom. In Part I, the aim is to overcome the limitations individual subjects face by deriving their knowledge from the material of an external world, a world on which knowledge of their

23 Systematizing Hegel’s philosophy of language makes it into a science in the vein of his encyclopedia, as the German title indicates: *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse.*
subjectivity depends. In Part II, the aim is to overcome the limitations of individual subjectivity to form an intersubjective community, which itself shapes the outside world, transforming it into something informed by a communal spirit, enabling individuals to recognize themselves as part of an ethical community. In Part III, the aim is to overcome the representational quality of language itself in order to express the free, dialectical flow of philosophical thought. In each case, language appears, or rather a specific form of language appears, to address these problems.

Since my goal is to demonstrate that Sprache and its variants appear in the context of different forms or modes of mind encountering and attempting to solve or overcome problems to its operation, the systematized collection of these modes of mind (Geist) and how language is conceptualized and deployed by them is what I call Hegel’s problematic of language. “Problematic” signifies the method of my interpretation of Hegel since language always appears in some specific form in his texts, always in the context of some specific form of mind, in order to address problems a person or group encounters in its effort to be free. In short, language never appears in Hegel all at once, never in its essential nature, so what Hegel provides is a dialectical account of language.24 What we will do is trace the emerge of certain problems in Hegel’s philosophy of mind and account for how language (and in what form) arises to address them. This way of reading Hegel’s philosophy of language as a fragmented, but systematically coherent set of solutions to epistemic problems, I believe begins to address why Hegel never provides a clear definition of the essence or nature of language as such. The following Parts are intended to defend this reading of Hegel’s philosophy of language.

24 Such a dialectical account could be contrasted with a straightforward definition of language (e.g. a system of signs, a means of communication, a means of power), which would state its enduring essence and list its particular attributes.
My interpretative method will become clearer as we proceed, so we need only make some preliminary clarifications. Framing an interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy of language as a problematic foregrounds how individuals and groups use language to tackle specific problems. These problems are problems for mind or spirit (Geist), for individuals or intersubjective groups, for their actually thinking through and understanding themselves, each other, and the world. These problems constitute barriers and limits to understanding and informed action.

If, for instance, I want to act in an ethical way, but cannot understand what would count as ethical action in a given situation, I face a problem. It is a problem either with my ethics (e.g. its dictates are too abstract and cannot be applied without ambiguity), my understanding of the concrete situation, or perhaps even both. Similarly, if I wish to communicate with others to build camaraderie, but cannot figure out what to say, I face a problem. What is my ultimate goal in cultivating friendships, and what can I say to further that end? And what would make those friendships healthy or enabling or good? Of course, these problems are not the same, but they are not unrelated. In Hegel’s philosophy, ways of thinking or modes of mind each face their own particular problems, and these modes can be related based on how individuals understand themselves, the world they face, and how to address the epistemic problems they encounter.

I intend to string together a “dialectic” of sorts, which links modes of mind by how they each conceptualize and use language. Different understandings of Sprache coupled with the different ways mind uses language to solve problems are progressively built one off another. Explaining how Hegel invokes Sprache as a tool for tackling problems and how those solutions in turn generate new obstacles for knowing will therefore require unpacking, in each instance, how the solution to epistemic problems yields yet another form of mind, a new way of thinking.
This new form will in turn encounter new problems and so on. I will show how a dialectical progression emerges between the dynamic relation between forms of mind and how they invoke Sprache to solve problems, the solution of which grounds the emergence of new forms of mind and new features of Sprache. Mind and language form a dialectical unity, where each shapes and internally complicates the other, and problems are the nexus and motor of this unity. Hence, we trace a philosophical movement in Hegel, not simply fixed representations or arguments that defend propositions to be judged true or false. The proof is in the process.

1.2 Geist and Freedom

As this movement of exposition, a movement which carries itself along with it, as a way and manner which is its absolute identity-with-self, the absolute is the manifestation not of an inner, nor over against an other, but it is only as the absolute manifestation of itself for itself. As such it is actuality (SL, 536).

It is paramount to understand two complementary elements of Hegel’s philosophy of mind (Geist): the meaning of Geist and the goal or purpose of Geist. These might seem tangential issues in relation to language in Hegel, but throughout they will remain crucial factors in our interpretation of his philosophy of language as a problematic.

In Hegel’s usage, Geist is a slippery term that often eludes simple, clear characterization. Indeed, it signifies not merely an entity, a substance, nor even a concrete, human subject, and though Geist is a common German term often translated as “mind” or “spirit,” Hegel uses it in a broader and more flexible way. In fact, demonstrating the true nature of mind for Hegel

25 It should always be borne in mind that “mind” and “spirit” both translate Geist, for these English terms do not strictly capture Hegel’s usage. Indeed, the story of the Phenomenology of Spirit is the tortuous tale of a conscious being coming to understand themselves as always already part of a dynamic and complex intersubjective community. For the importance of others in grasping ourselves as self-conscious agents, see Robert B. Pippin, Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). For a recent reading of Hegel that emphasizes the role of others in us becoming agents and the
requires not merely a definition of Geist, but the full delineation of the subtle contours of the Philosophy of Mind (which, of course, we will not provide here). As with Sprache, Geist eludes simple characterization and a straightforward expression of its meaning.

Yet we can get an initial, albeit abstract sense of what Geist means by looking at a seemingly simple claim we find early in the Philosophy of Mind. “The absolute is mind. This is the highest definition of the absolute” (EPG § 384 Remark). Compare this with the quotation above about the relation between “absolute” and “actuality,” and even without knowing what “absolute” means, notice the characterization of the “absolute” as a movement that strives to actualize itself, i.e. to make itself real, but as an “absolute manifestation of itself for itself.” Imagine a swimmer that sees their activity of swimming not as a particular activity they perform, but as itself the manifestation of what they call “a swim,” as when someone says that they are going for a swim. Perhaps we could then say of “the swim” that it had a particular velocity, used a certain amount of caloric energy, covered a certain distance, felt painful or arduous to the swimmer, displaced five liters of water, etc. Now imagine if you will that the swim itself (as an odd sort of “thing”) could manifest its own nature (e.g. its velocity, locale, distance) not to a separate swimmer or observer, but to itself qua “the swim,” as if the swim could come to understand its own nature “for itself.” At this odd juncture, we begin to approach the odd nature

importance of sowing trust between agents to form a truly ethical community, see Robert B. Brandom, A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2019). As I explain below, I translate Geist as “mind” in Part I because it signifies in Hegel’s philosophy of subjective spirit what characterizes an individual subject, whereas in Part II when we analyze his philosophy of objective spirit and philosophy of right I begin translating the term more often as “spirit” because it characterizes in this portion of Hegel’s philosophy not strictly the “mind” of an individual subject but the “spirit” of many different human relationships, such as the recognition and spirit of agreement between two people, the “spirit” of a partnership or marriage, or the spirit of a community or nation-state. “Absolute spirit” in Part III is the active synthesis of these two dimensions of Geist: the “spirit” of an ethical community continuously fed and shaped by the philosophical (and artistic and religious) practices of individual subjects, who are themselves active elements of the ethical substance of the community.
of the mind or Geist, which is a movement that manifests its own activity for itself in order to know itself as the sort of movement it actually is. Thus, Geist cannot be reduced to a “thing,” a “substance,” or a “person,” or can be only in a strange heterodox way as the movement of an entity, substance, or person, or rather the way these entities move, or even the modality of their movements.

If “the absolute is Geist,” then Geist must in turn be a “movement” that strives to manifest itself for itself, to know itself. For Hegel, the mind strives to make itself known, apparent, visible even, but only for itself or to itself, not for something other than itself, such as a spectator or audience. Indeed, following the famous Delphic tenet and the thrust of the first two of Descartes’ Meditations on First Philosophy,26 the “movement” of Geist is toward self-knowledge, which Hegel makes clear in the introduction to his Philosophy of Mind is an “absolute command” that mind gives to itself.

The knowledge of mind [Geist] is the most concrete knowledge, and thus the highest and most difficult. Know thyself. The meaning of this absolute command—whether in itself or in the historical circumstances of its first pronunciation—is not only self-knowledge in respect of the particular capacities, character, propensities, and foibles of the individual. The knowledge it commands is knowledge of man’s genuine reality, as well as of genuine reality in and for itself—of the very essence as mind (EPG § 377).

Subsequently in the Philosophy of Mind, Hegel accounts for Geist as a progressively developmental series of forms, first as “soul,” then as “consciousness,” then as “intelligence” and “will,” then as “person,” “subject,” and “ethical community.” Each is Geist in a certain form,

given how the mind knows itself—i.e. how the mind sees itself given its own activity. As an active power (*Macht*) of thinking and knowing,\(^27\) which always takes on a particular form according to how we actually think the world, and *Geist* also functions, as we will see in this dissertation, as a self-transformative power. Put differently, *Geist* signifies a movement, the very movement of thinking that modifies itself through its activation. The writing of this very sentence requires the activation of *Geist*, a thinking process. So, Hegel’s philosophy of mind is a philosophy of the multifarious movements of thought.\(^28\)

Alternately, *Geist* can be understood as designating a set of particular “modes”, “forms” (*Formen*), or “ways” of thinking and acting, a set of thinking processes.\(^29\) What can sometimes confuse the matter is the fact that Hegel uses the same term, *Geist*, to denote both the general notion of mind's thinking activity and its particular modes of movement. The “will” is *Geist* in practice, in action, but it is also only one *form* of *Geist*, in fact, one form abstracted from the multitudinous activities constituting its actual, concrete existence. The different forms of *Geist* are different ways thought manifests and occurs, each of which charts a particular trajectory or

\(^{27}\) Hegel calls *Geist* a “power” in *EPG* § 484, which is a key transition section between “subjective” mind and “objective” spirit.

\(^{28}\) Hegel makes clear the problem with arresting the movement of *Geist* in an attempt to understand it. See *EPN* § 376 Addition for his identification of *Geist* with activity, both the activity of subject and “the world’s activity.” It is in *PG* § 33 that he notes the need to make “thoughts become fluid” to overcome the “fixity” of both the ‘I’ and sensuous, empirical objects. For his explicit identification of *Geist* with *Macht*, a “spiritual power,” see *GPR* § 359. See also *PG* § 32: “spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it.” I will sometimes use the terms “mind” and “spirit” as translations of *Geist* to emphasize different connotations of the term. At other times, I will use the German *Geist* to avoid confusion. But it should be always be remembered that *Geist* in Hegel (and accordingly, our use of “mind” and “spirit”) expresses a *dynamic* and not a thing or entity.

\(^{29}\) Hegel’s *Logic* and other texts are full of references to form, including a detailed discussion of the relationships between form and essence, matter, and content. See *SL*, 447-456. For his discussions of modes, see *SL*, 534-536 and 824-825. At the culmination of *SL*, Hegel summarizes the project of the remainder of his philosophical encyclopedia: “The derivation and cognition of these particular modes [of the absolute idea] is now the further business of the particular philosophical sciences” (*SL*, 824).
line of thinking, each embodied as a particular, activated power of thought.30

For instance, one may believe the external world is comprised of subatomic particles, quantum fields, or perhaps “medium sized” persons and things. Others may believe the world comprises a host of actual material objects along with unrealized potentialities, possible worlds, or underlying physical forces. Still others may assert the existence of “things” like emotions, imaginary creatures, human rights, labor conditions, or multinational corporations. Regardless, each of these beliefs—if adopted and secured as the ground for other beliefs, concepts, and adventures of thought—constitutes a particular presupposition concerning the relationship between a thinker and the external world. Together, these presuppositions are epistemic to be sure, but they have real, ontological consequences—effects on the constitution of mind and world—if used as grounds for further thought and action. Without ontological effects, what significance could such epistemic assumptions have?

As presuppositions, these beliefs are springboards into a sea of thought, which can enable thinkers to paddle using conceptual equipment and previous, educational experience to an undiscovered shore of understanding. Or they can fail to open an unobstructed path forward and swamp us in rigid dogmatism or a din of propaganda. Epistemology and ontology are linked

30 One can find in the Phenomenology what appear to be clear definitions of Geist, which identify the term with a particular type of entity. For instance, “Spirit [Geist] is thus self-supporting, absolute, real essence [Wesen],” or “Spirit, then is consciousness in general which embraces sense-certainty, perception, and the understanding” (PG § 484). Yet if one reads the second sentence further, one finds an crucial qualification: “Spirit, then is consciousness in general which embraces sense-certainty, perception, and the understanding, in so far as in its self-analysis spirit holds fast to the moment of being an objectively existent actuality to itself, and ignores the fact that this actuality is its own being-for-self.” Each form of Geist, including self-consciousness, is limited by its particular approach to knowing and understanding itself. Each form has specific blinders in its self-knowledge such that the term Geist is not exhausted by any one of the forms it takes even though it encompasses all these forms into a concrete “thing” or spirit, such as the body of an individual person or the spirit of a particular community or culture.
inextricably once we consider the existence or actuality of thinking. As Hegel claims in the opening to the Encyclopedia Logic, “Pure being [Sein] makes the beginning, because it is pure thought as well as the undetermined, simple immediate [existence]” (EL § 86). Epistemic presuppositions set preliminary starting gates from which thinking takes off, orienting how each mode of thought comes to distinguish self and world and conceptualize their relation. The subject who leaps into thought is thereby transformed in the very process of thinking: “The solid ground which argumentation has in the passive subject is therefore shaken, and only this movement itself becomes the object” (PG § 60). Only by dislodging the position of subjectivity and setting it into motion can we avoid stagnating in the listless and fetid swamps of dogmatism.

Allow me to quote Hegel at length on the connection between experience, knowledge, belief, and the activity of Geist.

For this reason it must be said that nothing is known that is not in experience [Erfahrung], or, as it is also expressed, that is not felt to be true, not given as an inwardly revealed eternal verity, as something sacred that is believed, or whatever other expressions have been used. For experience is just this, that the content—which is spirit—is in itself substance, and therefore an object of consciousness. But this substance which is spirit is the process in which spirit becomes what it is in itself; and it is only as this process of reflecting itself into itself that it is in itself truly spirit (PG § 802).

Knowing is the process of developing a felt belief into an object of conceptual consideration, and this process transforms an initial belief into a rich experience of objects, which is constitutive of Geist itself.

Hence, movement and becoming are primordial or, as Hegel says, “the truth of being and nothing [Nichts]” (EL § 88). Becoming (Werden) underpins all fixed determinations of thought and existence, even abstract ideas like being and nothing. The movement of Geist determines both thinking subject and object thought as well as their multifaceted relation.
Spirit is *this movement* of the self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself into substance, and also, as subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between objectivity and content (*PG § 804*).

There is no immediate need to grasp the entirety of what Hegel says here, for later we will trace and explicate in detail stages of “*this movement*.” But this sentence does highlight the strange power of *Geist*. It is both the potential power of thought and the actual process of thinking—a power that exerts and modifies itself through its actual deployment. Not only is *Geist* a movement, it is a movement which modifies itself. Hence, *Geist* manifests in particular forms or modes its own potential power of thinking, and it does so only *for itself*.

Already, we can see the complex dynamism of *Geist* as the term circulates within Hegel's writing. In the above sentence, key linguistic terms are coupled but distinguished (“making the substance into an object and a content”) while the distinction is simultaneously obliterated (“cancels this difference between objectivity and content”). “Spirit” (*Geist*) is less a distinct term, thing, or concept than a process of thinking embodied through the very reading and comprehension of the words themselves—all in a sentence comprised of commonplace, philosophical terms from modernity.31 In Part III, I analyze this relation between Hegel’s philosophy and its expression in language, specifically how speculative interpretations and expositions of his sentences demonstrate how the statements of his philosophical texts expose the movement of conceptual thought that his philosophy as a whole traces.

31 This interpretation of *Geist* is at odds with more traditional metaphysical accounts, e.g., in Robert C. Solomon, “Hegel’s Concept of “*Geist*”” *Review of Metaphysics* 23, no. 4 (June, 1970), 642-661, who claims it refers to “some sort of general consciousness, a single mind common to all men” (242). My interpretation hews closer to that espoused in Karen Ng, “Life and Mind in Hegel’s *Logic* and Subjective Spirit” *Hegel Bulletin* 39, no. 1 (May, 2018), 23-44, who claims that “understanding mind as activity requires that we understand *Geist* in its free self-development” (25). Bearing in mind *Geist* as activity and not as *thing* is paramount for grasping Hegel as he appears and is treated here.
In this introduction, I can only stress that Geist designates what we could call a creative
dynamic, and the proof of this claim lies in the body of this dissertation. As we will see, Geist
shifts and determines the relations between self and substance, thinking subject and object
thought, depending on how their difference is thought and acted upon, i.e. depending on how
Geist knows itself. I will sometimes say that Geist charts a trajectory, a seeking or journey, to
understand both itself and the substance, the “other,” it encounters. Put in a purposely ambiguous
way, we could say that Geist sets the terms: it transforms, through its own dynamic, a self into a
thinking, conscious subject and an encountered substance into particular objects of knowledge.32

But what is Geist seeking—what does this movement drive towards? What is the goal of
Geist in Hegel's philosophy? Hegel often expresses the goal or purpose (Ziel or Zweck) of Geist
in different terms, so I must parse his different formulations to avoid confusion in the future.

Ultimately, I think it best to see freedom as the goal of Geist. In an early section of the
Philosophy of Mind, he proclaims that “formally the essence of mind is freedom” (EPG § 382).
But more important than this abstract claim, the Phenomenology of Spirit and Philosophy of
Mind not only posit this “essence” but strive to demonstrate that freedom is the aim of Geist.

All will readily assent to the doctrine that spirit, among other properties, is also endowed
with freedom; but philosophy teaches that all the qualities of spirit exist only through
freedom; that all are but means for attaining freedom; that all seek and produce this and
this alone. It is a result of speculative philosophy that freedom is the sole truth of spirit
(LPH, 31).

32 For the emphasis on Geist as a rather torturous activity in Hegel, see Richard J. Bernstein, Praxis and Action:
Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971), 19: “Geist is
perpetually alienating itself, dirempting itself, and struggling with itself. But it is not a meaningless struggle. It is
by means of this life and death struggle with itself that Geist emerges triumphant and realizes itself.” We could
add, as John Russon notes, that the movement of Geist also lends meaning to objects and itself out of this
struggle. See Russon, Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), chs. 1
and 6.
For Hegel, *Geist* seeks to become free, such that subject and object do not restrict but rather enable each other, freeing *Geist* to seek richer knowledge of subjects and objects who are continuously becoming (other and themselves). Indeed, this aim is the ultimate goal of self-knowledge, according to Hegel. So, freedom is the “essence” of mind in the sense that freedom is *Geist* becoming what it always implicit *is*, that is, free movement. Most often, I express the goal of *Geist*, “the sole truth of *Geist*” as Hegel claims, as the movement towards (its) freedom.

Hegel also expresses the ultimate goal of *Geist* in terms of gaining self-knowledge to the extent that the mind becomes “plastic” (*plastisch*). “Plasticity” of thought enables individual and collective self-consciousness to traverse its many different forms or modes at will (e.g. to conceive of oneself at one moment as an individual person habituated to everyday tasks, then as a citizen governed by a set of cultural norms and state laws, then as participating in the spirit of a corporation that aims to grow its business and provide for the well-being of self and others, and to recognize these are all forms of the same *Geist*), i.e. capable of transforming its own way of thinking by first “positing itself over and against itself, in order to be for-itself” to then overcome the limits constraining the freedom of its finite, particular form while still remaining identical and “at home with itself” (*EL* § 18). By understanding its own plasticity of thought and the freedom this realization opens for itself, *Geist* grasps itself as the self-transformative activity it has always been, or that it implicitly is, even if, e.g. in times of loneliness, anxiety, or disgust, we can sometimes lapse back into seeing ourselves as strictly individual persons alienated from others—for Hegel, an undeveloped and limited form of subjectivity where persons fail to recognize their true intersubjective reliance on (and flourishing with) others. Hence, “the goal [Ziel] [of science] is spirit's insight into what knowing is,” a knowledge of what constitutes
knowing (PG § 29), but also, “through this movement the path by which the concept of knowledge is reached becomes likewise a necessary and complete process of becoming [Werden]” (PG § 34). The ultimate aim of this becoming is to “achieve the goal of plasticity [Plastizität]” (PG § 64).33

Though it is true enough that Hegel does not specify precisely what plasticity entails, it seems to involve the capacity to take form or shape, while remaining open to taking a new shape, open to transformation.34 Much like heating and rolling a sheet of plastic to make a soda bottle, or heating the bottle to remold it into a new shape, Geist remolds itself. In other words, achieving plasticity of thought means at once understanding the nature of knowing itself and also participating in the process of knowing, which transforms and sculpts mind itself in its very act of knowing. Expressed using another of Hegel’s preferred formulations, becoming plastic is a becoming “at home” (zuhause or daheim) in the transformative process of knowing itself.

Therefore, Hegel’s formulations can be distilled to specify his understanding of freedom (Freiheit). The goal of Geist is to become free in thought, in its activity of knowing itself and the world, which entails grasping while actually undertaking the process of knowing, thereby becoming plastic in its own thoughtful activity. Its goal is to become at home (and not, for instance, resistant or disturbed) in the transformative process of thought itself, which requires attaining an understanding of the process of knowing. For Hegel, freedom requires understanding

33 This section does not actually use the terms Ziel or Zweck, but it is clear that Hegel intends that being plastic (plastisch zu sein) is the achievement aimed at by Geist. The original German sentence in PG § 64 reads, “Die eine Weise stört die andere, und erst diejenige philosophische Exposition würde es erreichen, plastisch zu sein, welche strenge die Art des gewöhnlichen Verhältnisses der Teile eines Satzes ausschöße.”

34 See below and in Part III for our discussion of Catherine Malabou’s account of plasticity in Hegel.
what knowing is and how one knows—the project, we might say, of epistemology. Furthermore, each particular mode or form of Geist thinks and knows in a particular fashion, based on certain epistemic presuppositions and a certain way of understanding the subject and object of knowledge. Each modification is particular. This entails that each form of Geist understands the nature of knowing in a specific way. What it means to know (form) and what is known (content) is different depending on the way subject and object of knowledge are distinguished and related. So freedom accordingly looks different (i.e. what constitutes freedom and how to achieve it) depending on the form of Geist under consideration.

A final note on the relation between Geist, freedom, and language. My thesis is that Hegel depicts language as a tool, and this proposal, demonstrated in the Parts below, reveals how Geist conceptualizes and uses language to tackle epistemic problems in its struggle for freedom. This tool is unique for Hegel since language, as a creation of Geist, reflects the very movement of Geist itself, accounting for why, as we will see, he asserts that language is “the existence

35 We will return to this point (i.e. that recognition of being free is necessary for actual freedom) in many sections. Hegel is often blunt about the connection between freedom and thought: “Thinking immediately involves freedom” (EL § 23 Remark). For Hegel’s expression of the relation between freedom and willing, see GPR § 21 Addition: “The will in its truth is such that what it wills, i.e. its content, is identical with the will itself, so that freedom is willed by freedom.”

36 Unfortunately, the ambiguity and dynamism of the idea of freedom in Hegel is overlooked by commentators who analyze his theory of freedom in abstraction. See, for example, Alan Patten, Hegel's Idea of Freedom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); G. H. R. Parkinson, “Hegel's Concept of Freedom,” Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures 5:174-195 (1971); and Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” in Four Essays On Liberty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). However, other commentators who focus particularly on the Phenomenology of Spirit have astutely pointed out this aspect of freedom in Hegel. For example, see John Russon, Reading Hegel's Phenomenology, 93: “This initial way in which our explicit self-recognition as free selves happens […] is on other grounds still inadequate to living up to the hermeneutical pressures of the situation of self-consciousness […] In fact, the phenomenology of Sittlichkeit, of commitment to traditional, ethical duties, shows that our ownmost choices—the choices through which our familiarly recognizable self-identity becomes shaped—are not immediately our own. Our original choices are communal rather than singular […] We need, then, to conceptualize the nature of our free, self-conscious selfhood in such a way that we define ourselves neither as slaves nor as stoics.” There are better and worse ways of understanding freedom.
[Dasein] of mind [Geist]” (PG § 652). Language is a tool that reveals, in its capacities for abstraction, signification, order, declaration, and transformation, how mind exists in the world.37

### 1.3 My Approach Situated in Hegel Scholarship

The true is thus the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose. Judged in the court of this movement, the single shapes of spirit do not persist any more than determinate thoughts do, but they are as much positive and necessary moments, as they are negative and evanescent (PG § 47).

The question of Hegel’s philosophy of language has largely been a marginal topic in academic philosophy, though it has seen notable crests and troughs of engagement. The most recent surge in English-language commentaries occurred over the past 25 years, and I will conclude this introduction by noting key similarities and differences between my view and this rich body of work. Several earlier commentaries also address the issue of language in Hegel, if only briefly, and some have helped to shape my view. Thus, I will also discuss aspects of these commentaries.

My organization and presentation of the secondary literature on Hegel and language will not be scientific or systematic in Hegel’s sense of the terms. It is only meant to give a brief overview of some useful commentaries. Throughout the body of this dissertation, I will raise

37 The linguist Daniel L. Everett, in his *Language: The Cultural Tool* (New York: Pantheon, 2012), has recently argued for an understanding of language as a social tool, though in a different way than Hegel. Everett defends his view by utilizing aspects of many social sciences, showing how various social forces shape language and emphasizing an open-ended process of language use, refinement, and change. For a conception of communication first and foremost as a technical activity, see Jonathan Sterne, “Communication as Techné” in *Communication as...: Perspectives on Theory*, edited by Gregory Shepard, Jeffrey St. John, and Ted Striphas (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 91-98. Situating Hegel as a philosopher in this lineage of thinkers who understand language as a tool—a techné helping to shape the epistemic interrogation of the nature of mind and the linguistic tool—helps demystify his view of language. However, we should point out that language for Hegel is not a mere tool if this is taken to mean a mere appendage to thought. Instead, language is the necessary expression and expressive medium of thought, so it is a tool that works as much on the world as it does on thinking subjects who utilize it. For Hegel, language does not merely reflect the mind and reveal its knowledge, it transforms and retools Geist in its very deployment.
specific details of their arguments to draw from them important insights and highlight what are, to my mind, their respective lacunae and shortcomings.

Many scholars briefly address the question of language in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, yielding particular insights on language from within analyses of the particular forms of experience Hegel discusses. For instance, some commentators have focused on the opening section, “Sense Certainty,” and Hegel’s discussion of what seem to be what we now call “indexicals.”38 Others have analyzed later sections on social forms of experience, like Culture (*Bildung*) and Morality (*Moralität*), where Hegel maintains that language serves key social functions.39 I have chosen to avoid diving deeply into this literature in this dissertation, for most topics and interpretive trends concerning language in the *Phenomenology* are reflected in commentaries on his later encyclopedic texts. While I will directly engage some of this literature as it bears on arguments from the *Science of Logic*, *Philosophy of Mind*, and *Philosophy of Right*, the scope of my project is limited to these later works and the corresponding body of literature.40

I have thus divided what I see as the main scholarship on Hegel and language into two types: those that account for Hegel’s view of language by relating it primarily to that of his contemporaries, comparing and contrasting their benefits and shortcomings; and those that derive


40 Collating and examining in detail the discussions of language in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a large project on its own, which I hope to pursue in a subsequent work.
Hegel’s philosophy of language from a global interpretation of his philosophical system in order to solve a particular problem language poses for his philosophy.

The first stream of interpretation is historically insightful and useful for coming to terms with Hegel’s views on language in light of his contemporaries’ views, but these analyses often come up short when examining Hegel’s own rich and unique treatment of language. The limitation of such historical examinations lies primarily in pre-selecting a set of concerns and problems about language, gleaned from his contemporaries and not Hegel’s own writings, and then gauging how Hegel’s texts respond to these controversies. Accounting for the precise, complex role of language within Hegel’s philosophy is prematurely curtailed simply by circumscribing the analysis of Hegel’s account within the bounds of a problem set by others.

For instance, several authors note that Hegel’s discussions of language can be understood in light of his oblique involvement in a contemporary debate over the relation between idealist philosophical systems (particular I. Kant’s *Kritik* and J. G. Fichte’s *Wissenschafstlehre*), on the one hand, and natural languages, on the other.41 This “metacritical” debate was ignited by J. G. Hamann’s criticisms of Kant’s critical philosophy in 1784 and furthered by J. G. Herder in 1799, who “metacritiqued” Fichte’s further development of Kant’s philosophy into a science of

41 See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) on the contours of this debate, which had decisive importance for views of language espoused by the philosophers between Kant and Fichte and after. For a translation of Fichte’s essay on language (1795) and a helpful essay on its importance in this debate, see Jere Paul Surber, *Language and German Idealism: Fichte’s Linguistic Philosophy* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1996). For an attempt to gauge Hegel’s views on language as a result of this controversy, see Michael N. Forster, *German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Jere O’Neill Surber, “Hegel’s Linguistic Thought in the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit: Between Kant and the “Metacritics.”” Beiser’s later book on Hegel also seems to draw a line from this “metacritique” of Kant and Fichte to Hegel’s “absolute idealism” and his own views of language as an attempt to overcome this criticism. See Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
knowledge (*Wissenschaftslehre*). Despite their differences, both Hamann and Herder argue that no philosophical system like Kant’s or Fichte’s, and to wit, no account of reason and its limits such as Kant provides, can itself be a *rational* whole since such a system omits the characteristic (and limiting) influence of a particular natural language on that system—of expressing that philosophy in a particular, natural language. The argument goes that each philosophical system, each system of “reason,” must be expressed in a natural language, yet because each language develops naturally according to a contingent, historical process and because each language limits in certain ways what can be expressed in it, no philosophical system can stake a claim on its own truth or rationality. Hence, not only does Herder claim that “without language man has no reason, and without reason no language,” he goes on to maintain that language is created by humans necessarily from their own particular felt and lived experiences, such that “each [language] in its own way is both lavish and lacking, but, to be sure, each in its own way.” Any purported “system” or science of knowledge like Fichte’s, developed according to the limits of reason in the proper sense of the term, is itself limited due to the necessity of expressing that philosophy in a language that is, by its very nature, naturally formed and therefore contingently ordered. Jim Vernon expresses the metacritical challenge to Kant and Fichte quite appropriately:


“If all examples of language are [as Kant maintains] merely empirical and devoid of necessity, then any and every instance of language falls prey to the same charge, including the language of (the Critical) philosophy. Every philosophical proposition is necessarily both thought and expressed through a particular language and as such is bound with the empirically contingent history and associations of its words and forms.”

Two important commentators interpret Hegel’s account of language through the lens of this metacritical challenge to Kant and Fichte. Jere Surber has made significant strides illuminating the role of language in German Idealist writings, which are often overlooked or completely forgotten. One of his most important texts in this regard distinguishes Fichte’s transcendental treatment of language from naturalistic approaches to the origin and history of language, such as those proposed by Rousseau, Condillac, and Herder. Another, *Metacritique*, supplies translations of texts that problematize Kant’s (and Fichte’s early) critical philosophies and their seeming inattention to the importance of language. Though the metacritics—primarily Herder, his teacher Hamann, S. Maimon, and F. H. Jacobi—argue for different conclusions among themselves, they share the same critical thrust, namely that language supplies contingent, historical grounds that limit the range of possible experience and any philosophical accounting for its transcendental grounds. Again, the applicable scope of any critical philosophy would itself

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be limited based on its expression in a “natural” language. No philosophy could be properly transcendental across different cultures using different languages, the metacritics claimed, for the particularity and oddities of different languages would block the universality necessary to assert transcendental conditions for all possible experience.

Michael Forster likewise expands the relevance of German Idealism into the halls of analytic philosophy of language, particularly in his esteem for Herder’s philosophy of language. To bring German Idealism and the metacritics in conversation with analytic philosophy, Forster argues that controversies over language raised in this period mirror those that reemerge in the 20th century. Of particular note is his own esteem for Herder and his naturalistic conception of language, which leads Forster to carve out a place for Herder as a sort of proto-linguistic pragmatist who foregrounds the epistemic role of word usage.

While the shortcomings of Surber’s and Forster’s interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy of language are different, they both stem from a presupposition of the greater value of certain problems that a philosophy of language should address. This flaw is not so much about isolating certain themes in Hegel’s discussions of language—surely, this is unavoidable—but rather presuming that any philosophical account of language should address a certain set of issues or problems. In this case, these are problems taken up directly by Fichte, Herder, and others, but not

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49 See Forster, *After Herder*. 
by Hegel himself. To their credit, both situate Hegel’s discussions of language in the historical context of a debate he was surely aware of, but Hegel’s own treatments of language cannot simply be reduced to occupying a bastion in this debate nor can they be treated as a clear response to the metacritical challenge put to Kant and Fichte.

Accordingly, both Surber and Forster cannot but reduce Hegel’s numerous and scattered discussions of language to the terms of this debate—namely, empirical vs. transcendental origin of language—neither of which suits Hegel’s own philosophical method and endeavor.\textsuperscript{50} For Surber, it is Fichte who produces the best of what German Idealism has to offer, arguing that reason and its transcendental limits, rather than contingent, natural capacities or circumstances, determine the nature of language.\textsuperscript{51} Whatever limits natural language provides to thought and philosophy, they are transcendental and hence determined by the same transcendental ego that grounds knowledge in general. Thus, to undermine the metacritique, Fichte argues that language is a direct product of the acts of a self-developing, self-limiting, rational and transcendental \textit{I} (\textit{Ich}) or ego. This way, Fichte accommodates metacritical concerns by developing an account of how language and knowledge are both limited by the transcendental ego, thereby preserving his critical philosophy.\textsuperscript{52} Forster, on the other hand, maintains that Herder serves as the most perspicacious philosopher of language in this period.\textsuperscript{53} Herder’s great importance, according to

\textsuperscript{50} Whereas Hegel shares far more philosophical commitments with Fichte than Herder, he in fact draws aspects of his own views of language from both philosophers—something noted by both Surber (“Hegel’s Linguistic Thought in the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit: Between Kant and the “Metacritics””) and Forster (\textit{German Philosophy of Language}). At the very least, Hegel’s synthesis of different aspects from both accounts should lead us to view the accounting for the dimensions of his philosophy of language in terms of this debate with a heavy degree of skepticism.

\textsuperscript{51} See Surber, \textit{Language and German Idealism: Fichte’s Linguistic Philosophy}.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} See Forster, \textit{After Herder}. Forster even boldly claims that it was Herder and not Hamann (as is typically thought) who developed the idea of a metacritique of Kant and Fichte’s philosophies.
Forster, was his effort to show how the activities and representations of thought are not only bound by language use but reducible to it, in turn collapsing the differences between conceptual content, linguistic meaning, and word usage.\footnote{See After Herder, Part I Ch. 2.} Therefore, Forster sees Herder as an important intellectual predecessor to metaphysical critics like Nietzsche and philosophers of language like Wittgenstein.

These conclusions are not necessarily problematic as interpretations of Fichte and Herder, and their authors marshal significant textual evidence to support their cases. But their analyses of Hegel are flawed as theories of Hegel’s philosophy of language. Their interpretations presuppose too much. They submit Hegel (and always only a specific part of Hegel’s texts) to a particular pre-chosen problem of language and then weigh the value of his discussions of language against a particular concern, which the authors introduce ahead of time (or glean from a different philosopher).\footnote{In my view, Surber is more careful and nuanced than Forster in his treatment of Hegel. Surber also recognizes the Derridean criticisms of naturalistic conceptions of the origin of language, see Of Grammatology, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1974), Part II; and The Archaeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac, trans. J. P. Leavey Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1987). Forster fails to note important advances Hegel makes beyond Herder, away from strictly naturalistic views of language and away from a unidirectional constraint placed on thought by language (instead of bidirectional, mutual determination between thought and language). However, in placing Fichte as a forerunner to postmodern conceptions of language, Surber obscures the subjective idealism firmly rooted in Fichte’s transcendental philosophy. The relation between Fichte’s and Hegel’s philosophies of language is an interesting topic we cannot explore here. But for us, the question hinges on understanding how their philosophical methods differ—an oblique line separating their respective dialectics.} For Fichte (and Surber), the problem is the transcendental conditions of possible experience, and how these conditions are determined. For Herder (and Forster), the problem is the natural origins of language and how language limits thought, the solution of which provides the basis for a natural history of language and, by consequence, thought itself. In effect, it seems as if Surber and Forster both identify an overarching problem or set of problems for a philosophy
of language before even approaching Hegel. Focusing only on these problems instead of those generated in Hegel’s own writings, they fail to take stock of Hegel’s own philosophical method, thereby oversimplifying his complex treatment of language.

Hegel’s analyses of language are not particularly concerned with addressing either of these problems, at least not directly as historically contingent problems for particular thinkers, who were engaged in prickly debates over the origin and history of language.\(^{56}\) For Hegel, both naturalistic and transcendental conceptions of language are irreducibly flawed insofar as their supporters fail to investigate and problematize some of their underlying assumptions. For Fichte, it is the presumptive starting point of the transcendental ego, the “I”, which grounds a transcendental critique. This driving ego, according to Hegel, remains an unquestioned and anchoring assumption, and it blocks a richer understanding of collective unities or complex members of a whole.\(^{57}\) The problem with Herder’s view, for Hegel, is his contention that a naturally constituted language serves as an absolute limit to what can be thought without noticing the mutual and dialectical development of thought and language and without developing

\(^{56}\) Stephen N. Dunning provides, in *The Tongues of Men: Hegel and Hamann on Religious Language and History* (Ann Arbor: Scholars Press, 1979), a more pointed criticism of Hegel by arguing that he misreads and misunderstands Hamann’s philosophy of language. For Dunning, Hegel submits Hamann to his own ends and argues that the latter fails to measure up, and Dunning is right to point out that Hegel’s direct engagement with the metacritics, for instance in *HH*, can be thoroughly uncharitable and miss the directive of Hamann’s polemics and the point of his writing style. Nevertheless, Dunning’s analysis hinges on Hegel’s asystematic review of Hamann’s work and fails to interrogate Hegel’s view of language within his system and beyond the question of his proximity to Hamann on the issue of religious language.

\(^{57}\) For one of Hegel’s criticisms of Ich as the irreducible ground of knowing, which seems to target Fichte and subjective idealism as a whole, see *SL*, 77: “The actual development of the science which starts from the ego shows that in the development the object has and retains the perennial character of an other for the ego, and that the ego which formed the starting-point is, therefore, still entangled in the world of appearance and is not the pure knowing which has in truth overcome the opposition of consciousness.” Fichte’s “subjective idealism” for Hegel misunderstands the dynamic relation between subject and object, thereby deferring the possibility for true freedom indefinitely. Hegel’s oblique criticisms of Fichte’s *Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhaus on and trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) likewise appear to stem from Hegel’s contention that Fichte began his consideration of right from too presumptive a basis, the Ich.
precisely what their mutual limits are and how they can be transformed. Herder’s naturalism for Hegel serves more as a barrier than a boon to his philosophy of language, for it blocks a recognition of the important role of transcendental critique for outlining the limits of our knowledge of nature.

By attempting to glimpse Hegel through the lens of his contemporaries, who address problems at stake in their own philosophies, Surber and Forster in effect block an analysis of language in Hegel on its own terms.58 My intention here is to follow Hegel, to trace how language emerges in particular sections to solve particular epistemic problems, which corresponds, I contend, to the dialectical flow of his own philosophical method. Only in this way can my interpretation of Hegel’s view of language as problematic be justified and avoid these same pitfalls—not prior to our encounter with his texts, but only as we collect and link his analyses of language. While there is great value in comparing and contrasting the views of Hegel and his contemporaries around a given historical problem, this interpretive strategy tends to simplify Hegel’s philosophy of language because the problem they focus on (a transcendental or natural origin of language and its relation to thought) have already been pinpointed as the overarching problem for a philosophy of language in this historical period. This strategy elides much of the novel import of Hegel’s analyses.

58 As previously noted, Surber in fact denies this is possible in Hegel, claiming “that his treatment [of language in “Subjective Spirit” of the Philosophy of Spirit] neither fairly represents something approaching the comprehensive account of language that we might be led to expect from his earlier discussions of language, nor is it even entirely consistent with views expressed elsewhere in his writings” (Surber, “Hegel’s Philosophy of Language: The Unwritten Volume,” 244). Yet Surber fails to investigate in greater detail Hegel’s late encyclopedic system and its treatment of language, overlooking in particular the 1921 Philosophy of Right and its multiple discussions of language that involve forms of “objective spirit,” instead stopping short with Hegel’s discussion of language in subjective spirit. I aim to show that these discussions in the Philosophy of Right, as well as his analysis of philosophical language as a form of “absolute spirit,” are, in fact, consistent with his discussions in “subjective spirit” if interpreted through the lens of a tool for addressing epistemic problems.
The second type of interpretation extracts Hegel’s philosophy of language out of a global interpretation of Hegel’s system. These commentators propose an interpretation of language in Hegel as a way to address a specific problem generated by the need to express his systematic philosophy in language. In fact, nearly all these commentators treat language itself as a problem for Hegel’s own philosophical expression (a problem I discuss in Part III). Hence, I find these authors tend to provide the most interesting and insightful readings of Hegel and language as a whole, focusing more pointedly on Hegel’s philosophical method, his writing style, and his various discussions of language than other streams of interpretation. Paradigmatic of this view, in my opinion, is the French school of Hegel interpretation and more recent English-language approaches that target Hegel’s account of language directly. Within the vast French literature on Hegel, I focus on two texts in particular: Jean Hyppolite’s *Logic and Existence* and Catherine Malabou’s *The Future of Hegel.* 59 In the English-language tradition, four authors stand out: John McCumber, Jeffrey Reid, Jim Vernon, and Angelica Nuzzo. I provide only a brief summary of the texts of these authors here, for we raise specific criticisms of their views in the Parts below. 60

Jean Hyppolite’s *Logic and Existence* is ambitious and illuminating in its attempt to link in a novel way Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and *Science of Logic*. According to Hyppolite, understanding Hegel revolves around his response to the following question: “What are the limits of knowledge and of language? This is the problem of non-knowledge and of the

60 The interpretations we mention here are all interesting and complex, and we cannot go into great detail here. All are worth exploring in great depth, but here we must suffice with a brief summary of the work and what we see as their predominant successes and shortcomings.
ineffable.” The key to his proposal for understanding Hegel is the ambiguous term sens (sense, Bedeutung), which implicates simultaneously the bedrock of thought and language. How do utterances and thoughts become sensible and meaningful? Hyppolite circulates between the Phenomenology and Logic to address two related questions foundational for Hegel’s philosophy: (A) how do thought and language relate? (B) how does the language of representation become the language of the concept or the absolute? Hyppolite contends that in Hegel (a) thought and language comprise a dialectical unity formed through their mutual creation of sens out of non-thought and non-sense; and (b) sensation and sensible language—given or immediate (unmittelbar) intuitions and linguistic signs that possess fixed meanings—develop into speculative thinking and language (i.e. speculative propositions), which express the process of thinking the nature of thought itself. The Phenomenology is meant to reveal (a), and this sets the stage for the Logic, which performs (b).

Malabou’s The Future of Hegel is undoubtedly influenced by Hyppolite’s reading of Hegel, and she, like Hyppolite, anchors a reading of Hegel (particularly EPG) using a nexus of his own conceptual terminology. By homing in on certain terms (or key words and phrases) Hegel uses, noting the interesting places they appear, and following them as they circulate throughout his philosophy of mind, Malabou is able to unify Hegel's account of Geist around the question of temporarily and the future. In particular, Malabou adapts Hegel's use of “plastischen” and “plastisch” to develop a concept of plasticity (plastique) through which she interprets him and discovers different modes of temporarily linked with different modes of Geist.

61 Hyppolite, Logic and Existence, 7. Hyppolite’s framing of the problem at root in Hegel’s philosophy had profound consequences, influencing, among many others, his students Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault.
There is a direct effect on and by language in Hegel (i.e. on the topic of Sprache in Hegel and on his own idiolect). His writings, according to Malabou, participate in shaping the temporality of Geist by using key terms and transforming their meanings to demonstrate malleability and plasticity of mind and language. The Future of Hegel is intended to do something analogous—to illuminate for us, her readers, Hegel’s own language and philosophical system using one of his own terms (“plastisch”), expressing his philosophy anew in terms of the plastic temporarily of Geist and the opening of a future in the face of the completion or closure of his system. “Plasticity designates the future understood as future within closure, the possibility of a structural transformation: a transformation of structure within structure, a mutation ‘right at the level of the form.’”62 She argues that Hegel makes “natural language” plastic, which not only provides a conception of the future in Hegel’s philosophy but also opens “a future for the philosophy of Hegel.”63 For Malabou, at stake in Hegel’s philosophy of language is the possibility of overcoming a stilted understanding of language as something over and done with, something of the past that merely repeats the same underlying linguistic structures, without any power to change either the forms of language or of Geist.

For Malabou following Hyppolite, the problem at root in Hegel’s philosophy is again the relation between language and philosophical thought. Malabou’s approach is to interpret the plastic forms of mind and eventually Hegel’s account of speculative language as enabling thought and language to mold each other, take a stable form, but also remold and transform each other as plastique into an unknown, unformed future. The solution she sees: “Far from

63 Ibid., 5.
imprisoning thought within a circle, the labour of philosophy ushers into language, as into philosophy, the unexpected event of language and of philosophy.”64 In the end, it is what she calls “plastic reading” that, as a practice, “gives form to the utterance it receives.”65 Reading Hegel’s philosophy is an activity that stretches the reader—if they are open and attentive—beyond their initial form, remolding mind and Geist itself. Plastic reading embodies speculation in thought and language, a creative gesture disturbing ossified ideas and linguistic norms, which opens future possibilities for the emergence of new shapes and modes of mind and language.

There is much to praise and learn from Hyppolite and Malabou, but how do their readings fall short? In truth, they do not come up short at all, at least not according to their stated purpose. They approach language in Hegel as something used in a particular, transformative way acting on “natural language,” and their readings of Hegel are equally transformative, producing almost an Hegelian sub-idiolcet. In the end, this is akin to my own approach, at least in broad strokes.

However, language in Hegel is not the chief concern of either Hyppolite or Malabou. As I said, Hyppolite tackles the problem of stitching together the Phenomenology and the Logic, and Malabou interrogates the question of the future of/in Hegel. They approach language not so much through a pre-chosen philosophical problem that a philosophy of language must solve, but from within a different problem which Hegel’s own philosophical project produces and hinges on. The problem of language is a crucial piece of a different project, and their focus is strictly on the nature of philosophical language and its transformative potential. Little is said of how Hegel speaks of language across his philosophy of mind, in which language serves a problematic

64 Ibid., 171.
65 Ibid., 168.
function—solving then generating problems. Their focus is Hegel’s own language, which for them acts as a transformative hinge between “natural” and “philosophical” language or the languages of Vorstellung (understanding) and Philosophie (or Wissenschaft). Our reading, on the other hand, traces how language appears throughout Hegel's philosophy of mind and how new traits of language are generated to serve a transformative function—not simply in the dialectic between these two languages, styles, or Ausdrucksweisen, but as a tool constitutive of Geist, its wealth of knowledge, and its capacity to transform itself and overcome its own prior limits. Hegel’s language is only a paradigmatic instance of this transformative function. 66

The work of John McCumber, Jeffrey Reid, Jim Vernon, and Angelica Nuzzo likewise focus on the transformative operation performed by Hegel’s particular use of language in his texts. Yet each has their specific focus: McCumber on words and names; Reid on the language of Hegel’s Realphilosophie (philosophies of nature and spirit); Vernon on Hegel’s synthesis of “lexical content” (semantics) and “logical grammar” (syntactics); and Nuzzo on the meaning and semantic transformations of Hegel’s Logic. We will give a broad outline of each and discuss particular details as they arise within our reading of Hegel’s philosophy of mind in Parts I, II, and III below. 67

John McCumber’s The Company of Words is an ambitious and significant contribution to

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66 Also important in 20th century French interpretations of Hegel’s philosophy of language is Jacques Derrida’s essay, “The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel’s Semiology” in Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 69-108; and Jean-Luc Nancy’s The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel’s Bons Mots), trans. Céline Surprenant (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). We examine these texts in greater detail in Parts I and III, respectively, as they engage the parts of Hegel’s philosophy we are interpreting.

67 Important also is Jennifer Bates, Hegel’s Theory of Imagination (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), along with some discussions by John Burbidge and Stephen Houlgate in works devoted primarily to non-language topics in Hegel. I engage these works on and along as they bear directly on the sections in Hegel we are analyzing.
the study of Hegel and language. He draws a wealth of connections between Hegel and other philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, and Kant, all with an eye to how they link philosophical truth, system, method, words, and expression. For McCumber, Hegel is the linchpin, exposing intractable problems for correspondence theories of truth (between propositions and states of affairs) and propositional forms of truth (S is P) and showing how to overcome both problems. McCumber provides two keys that together unlock the connection between language and system in Hegel: an unorthodox distinction between “names as such” and “representational names” and an unorthodox conception of philosophical truth (Wahrheit) as “Nobility (kalon).” On McCumber’s account, Hegel develops an ideal philosophical idiom by relating meaningless “names as such” to meaningful “historical language,” using the former as a “metaphor” for the latter to achieve “the identity of [philosophical] system and history.”

Jeffrey Reid’s Real Words explores a variety of sections in Hegel with a keen eye to the question of language, arguing that his Wissenschaft creates an “objective discourse” that expresses and determines real relations between objects of science. For Reid, Hegel demonstrates how “the adequation of thought and being is realized in language, in a language that can, therefore, be grasped as truth and ‘objectivity,’ in both senses of the word, namely, language that is not based on subjective representation and language that is itself a real object or thing (Sache) that is both thought and being.” In other words, language for Hegel is not strictly a subjective affair, whether a vast collection of individual utterances or an irreducibly subjective

68 John McCumber, The Company of Words. I discuss this in greater depth below in Parts I and III.
69 McCumber, The Company of Words, 112.
70 Ibid., 332.
71 Jeffrey Reid, Real Words: Language and System in Hegel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
72 Ibid., 6.
expression. Rather, Hegel makes language itself both an object of science (prior to the appearance of modern linguistics) and a set of real Wörter that express relations between real objects. Reid argues that Hegel reveals the objectivity of language within a variety of discourses, including the languages of the natural sciences as well as musical and religious discourses, historiography, and speculative philosophical writings like Hegel’s own. Concluding the work is an explanation of Hegel’s criticisms of romantic irony and Reid’s contention that the language of Hegel’s philosophical science overcomes the solipsism inherent in irony and actualizes “objective discourse” in the real words of Hegel’s philosophical science.

Jim Vernon’s *Hegel’s Philosophy of Language* is a significant milestone in the literature on Hegel and language. He argues that Hegel’s philosophy demonstrates a synthetic relationship between a universal grammar or grammatical form and a particular lexical or semantic content. “If language consists of a material, particular lexicon and a formal, universal grammar, then Hegel’s philosophy of language must make both their opposition and unity explicit.” On Vernon’s well-argued account, Hegel performs a grand synthesis by demonstrating the logical necessity of grammatical form (i.e. the *Logic* provides the basis for a universal grammar), the subjective generation of particular lexical content (i.e. attaching meaning to linguistic signs), and the interpenetration of the two. Akin to Malabou’s conception of plastic reading, Vernon argues that Hegel’s own philosophy expresses the progressive and dialectical unity of grammar and semantics, of universality and particularity, of necessity and contingency, which readers of Hegel must tarry with, recognize, and participate in themselves.

74 Ibid., 44.
“Thus, speculative philosophy should be expressed such that it brings its readers to attend to the speculative, dialectical nature of language.” In the end, Hegel’s philosophy of language demonstrates the necessary unity of grammatical form and semantic content through the very process of doing speculative philosophy, an educational project which breaks “our dogmatic habits” and “teach[es] others how to think.”

Angelica Nuzzo’s articles on Hegel and language as well as her book, *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel*, argue convincingly for how Hegel’s own writings progressively transform and determine the meaning of key philosophical terms. Hegel’s philosophy works on philosophical discourse itself. In focusing on his dialectical method, Nuzzo explains how the issue of language itself links the *Logic* and Hegel’s writings on the nature of memory and history. While subjective or intersubjective (i.e. cultural) memory serves an important function in generating and storing linguistic content, it is Hegel’s philosophy generally, for Nuzzo, and his *Logic* in particular that submit linguistic content, determined by cultural traditions, historical circumstances, and everyday usage, to transformations that progressively reconfigure and re-determine the semantic relations between key logical terms. Crucial for Nuzzo is the “meaning variance and vagueness” that characterizes Hegel’s own language, which allows him to exploit the underdetermination in systems of linguistic meaning. “In Hegel’s logic, terms are not initially defined but receive their determinate meaning progressively in the unfolding of the logical inquiry. Meaning is a function

75 Ibid., 132.
76 Vernon, *Hegel's Philosophy of Language*, 133.
of the position of the terms within a language system.” So the key for Nuzzo is Hegel’s philosophical method, a progressive procedure for orienting and relating certain conceptual words, thereby determining their respective meanings from within his philosophical system as a whole.

These four authors provide invaluable insights into Hegel’s philosophy of language, and they all explore in greater depth much of what I have summarized in this introduction, which we will return to in the subsequent parts, particularly I and III. Hegel’s philosophy of language is developmental and dialectical at root. It is also reflexive—his philosophy of language must speak to his own unique style of writing and his own language use. Moreover, each of these authors as well as Hyppolite and Malabou approach language in Hegel as a problem in need of solution. In all these ways, my approach overlaps with these commentaries.

However, what sets my reading apart is the method and goal of interpreting Hegel’s philosophy of language as a problematic of language. This means foregoing the conclusion that in the end Hegel provides a philosophy of language that is unproblematic—that is, a view of language which resolves a pivotal problem for his philosophy. On my account, language in Hegel is always used as a tool for solving problems for Geist, which in turn grounds the appearance of a new form of Geist and the generation of new problems. Whereas these authors begin from the idea that language poses a problem for Hegel’s philosophy which must be resolved, I maintain that each time language serves to solve a problem, more problems emerge, as if language cannot help but fend off an immortal Hydra.

Moreover, my procedure is to trace the appearance of terms like Sprache, which I argue

78 Nuzzo, “Vagueness and Meaning Variance in Hegel’s Logic,” 74.
always appear in the context of Geist encountering problems for its own mode of thought. This includes tracing these terms through Hegel’s text on community, sociality, and ethics, the Philosophy of Right, which goes unexamined by these authors. The issue of Hegel’s philosophical language, which these authors treat so carefully and acutely, is only approached at the end of this work in Part III after I first demonstrate the various ways Hegel invokes language as a tool for problem-solving. Hence, I attempt to hew closer than any of these authors to Hegel’s own method by following the multiple, dispersed appearances of Sprache in these published works and tracing it through the lens of the generation and solution of problems.  

It is notable that none of the authors, save perhaps McCumber, underline the goal of language for Hegel: freedom. They are certainly aware of this telos, but it does not structure their approaches. Yet language is foremost a tool for becoming free, according to Hegel, the Ziel and Zweck of Geist. I aim to produce a “dialectical” account of Hegel’s philosophy of language structured and aligned as closely as possible with his own method, which these authors agree is Hegel’s conception of truth, but also to demonstrate how language is a necessary element in

79 However, it is important to note that, due to required limits on textual length, I do not discuss every appearance of Sprache in the Philosophy of Right, specifically his discussions of the language of morality and the technical, legal language of lawyers and judges. I also do not extend my analysis to his lectures on aesthetics, religion, and history, all of which include substantial discussions of language, which I must forego in this dissertation. My discussion of the Phenomenology of Spirit is limited to its preface in Part III and does not delve into the many mentions of Sprache throughout that text, though I believe many of those discussions are mirrored in the portions of EPG and GPR that I analyze. In subsequent projects, I hope to extend my analysis to these works and gauge the applicability of my interpretive method to them.

80 In short, Hyppolite’s aim is to account for how the Phenomenology of Spirit and Logic are linked; Malabou’s is to articulate a vision of the future for Hegel’s philosophy and a concept of the future within it; Reid’s is to explain how Hegel accounts for the objectivity of the language of the natural sciences; Vernon’s is to bridge divergent readings from “left” and “right” Hegelians and show how Hegel overcomes the limitations of both; Nuzzo’s is to grasp how Hegel’s use of language demonstrates the idea of an open philosophical system. This is not to suggest these fruitful interpretations of language in Hegel do not in some way intersect with his idea of freedom and his project of undertaking and demonstrating the freeing of thinking—and indeed, our account here draws much from their work—but only McCumber and I foreground the goal of freedom in our interpretations.
Geist’s pursuit of freedom. Therefore, my goal is to produce, in Hegel’s terms, a true Hegelian philosophy of language, which not only aims to “get Hegel right” but also to further in the process our collective pursuit of freedom.

1.4 Breakdown of Parts

Method may appear at first as the mere manner peculiar to the process of cognition, and as a matter of fact it has the nature of such. But the peculiar manner, as method, is not merely a modality of being determined in and for itself; it is a modality of cognition, and as such is posited as determined by the concept [Begriff] and as form, in so far as the form is the soul of all objectivity and all otherwise determined content has its truth in the form alone (SL, 825).

There are three parts to this dissertation, and they unfold developmentally one into another. They each trace a particular set of geistig forms, or forms of mind, which each utilize language in particular ways to solve problems that appear for their mode of thinking.

In brief summary, Part I (2.1-2.7) investigates the appearance of language in Hegel’s philosophy of subjective Geist, and this part revolves around individual, thinking subjects and the generation of linguistic signs. The notion of a sign emerges in Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind in the first section entitled “Anthropology,” which accounts for mind in its initial appearance, i.e. a “soul” naturally tied to and emergent from a physical body. The sign appears in Hegel’s analysis of what he calls the “actual soul,” where the human body signifies the innerworkings of the soul, albeit in an indeterminate and imprecise way. As an “externality” or external form of the “inner” soul, the speech of the human voice, even more than the human figure, signifies the habits, modifications, and perturbations that mold the soul in its embodied experience of the world. This initial sense of “sign” is developed further when language appears more robustly in Hegel’s philosophical “Psychology.” In Hegel’s discussion of imagination and then of memory,
individuals create and manipulate signs to determine their own individual subjectivities for themselves in an effort to become free from the given impediments of the external world. Signs are created and collected into a differentiated system Hegel calls “language,” and he argues that memorizing such “linguistic” signs can transform them into names that can be freely manipulated and ordered by an intelligent subject. In this way, a subject creates and uses linguistic signs to demonstrate their individual independence from the external world.

Part II (3.1-3.8) analyzes how language appears in Hegel’s philosophy of objective Geist, which is most comprehensively treated in the Philosophy of Right. I analyze Hegel’s arguments for how an intelligent individual only truly becomes a person and recognizes themselves as such in being recognized by others and in recognizing those others as themselves persons. Such recognition of personhood requires, for Hegel, not only the embodiment of our will in external objects (i.e. property) but also the mutual exchange of property with others. The problem of mutual recognition of personhood and property is resolved, according to Hegel, not by a life and death struggle (as famously proffered in the “Lordship and Bondship” section of the Phenomenology of Spirit, but which concerns the recognition of “self-consciousness,” not “personhood”) but by a declaration in language, where two persons agree to exchange particular objects of property at a particular moment in time. This linguistic declaration of agreement to exchange property enables each person to recognize each other as of equal, ethical value qua persons, where such an agreement itself constitutes what Hegel calls a “general will.” In raising the “will” from an individual pursuit for satisfaction to a collective agreement on our equality, this use of language serves to overcome the limited, “formal” freedom of the intelligent subjectivity analyzed in Hegel’s philosophy of subjective mind. Language enables an individual
to shape and participate in the collective endeavors of an intersubjective spirit while recognizing that the protection of their individual well-being is dependent on taking care of others and satisfying everyone’s needs. The subsequent sections of Part II (3.4-3.7) trace the appearance and operation of language in five subsequent domains of right—marriage, positive law, state constitutions, freedom of expression, and international treaties—to show how language serves to overcome in each case the limitations of particular forms of social spirit. In each case, Hegel invokes language as the means to overcome social problems generated from the complex interactions between persons and the social groups they form. Language supplies the means for recognizing oneself as a member of particular kinds of social groups, which if structured appropriately can collectively enable the satisfaction of one’s needs, the accomplishment of one’s goals, and the pursuit of one’s own freedom within the group. The goal is to produce a free collective, society, or state, what Hegel calls a free objective Geist, which is dependent on using language in specific ways.

Part III (4.1-4.5) analyzes Hegel’s descriptions of his own philosophical language proffered in the prefaces to the Phenomenology of Spirit and Science of Logic. The problem for Hegel’s philosophy and its linguistic expression is that language in the philosophies of subjective and objective spirit serves only as a tool of representation, where a linguistic sign or declaration represents a meaning or objective state of affairs for Geist. As shown in Parts I and II, the representational function of language serves to overcome particular problems faced by subjective and objective spirit, yet (Hegel’s) speculative philosophy as an example of “absolute Geist” sets as its task not merely to represent the truth of mind and its self-knowledge, but to express the very epistemic movement that constitutes Geist, i.e. to express the truth of mind. In other words,
a system of linguistic signs as representational media itself hinders a speculative presentation of Geist, where the active process of knowing would itself be demonstrated. This is the point at which Hegel most directly confronts Hamann and Herder’s metacritical challenge to speculative philosophical systems. Hegel intends his philosophical system to be a demonstration of the truth of Geist, so his solution is to propose the idea of a speculative language or a speculative use of language by which to express it. Taking Hegel’s philosophy as the exemplar, I show that such a speculative understanding and use of language involves transforming the initial, commonplace representational meanings of conceptual terms like “reality” and “mind” into markers of a particular conceptual trajectory of thinking. In other words, I argue the myriad conceptual terms in Hegel’s philosophical system do not have representational meanings in any orthodox sense, but rather mark paths of thought that relay with each other across his system. I discuss Hegel’s notion of a “speculative proposition” and his account of philosophical syllogisms to support my interpretation, arguing for the importance of reading Hegel speculatively instead of as offering “true” propositions that represent and correspond with the world. I contend that Hegel’s use of language coupled with those open to reading him speculatively makes his texts a site for developing our capacity for self-transformation and plasticity of thought. Speculative philosophy for Hegel not only speaks in heterodox and aberrant ways but does so with the aim of transforming both mind and language and demonstrating their freedom for self-transformation.

I conclude by noting some limitations to Hegel’s philosophy of language as I have accounted for it, and I pose some questions or concerns that remain outstanding. I suggest potential avenues of future inquiry into Hegel and language, including how such scholarship could further illuminate the role of language in Hegel’s analyses of morality, culture, education,
history, art, and religion.
2 Part I: Psyche and the Semiological Problematic of Language

Man acquires an even freer relationship to the external world by walking; by this he sublates [aufhebt] the asunderness [Außereinander] of space and gives himself his own place. But speech enables man to apprehend things as universal, to attain to the consciousness of his own universality, to the enunciation of the I (EPG § 396 Addition).

2.1 Introduction: The Linguistic Sign as Problematic

The methodology I employ in Part I locates in Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind how language emerges to address a fundamental problem for subjective mind: how to determine and recognize the subjective form of one’s individual experiences. In overcoming this problem by first creating signs and then specifically linguistic signs, one recognizes and becomes free from reliance on the naturally given form things have when they first or immediately appear in the world for us as external to our mind.1 Hegel explains that the philosophy of mind charts the specific determinacies of mind in the form of a logical development—not an empirical catalogue or historical development of its attributes—“towards its goal, namely, to make itself into, and to become for itself, what it is in itself. The same process takes place within each stage [of mind], and its product is that what the mind was in itself, or consequently only for us, at the beginning of the stage, is now for the mind itself—i.e. for the mind in the form which it has at that stage” (EPG § 387 Remark).

1 As we will see, it is the mind itself that draws the distinction between what appears internal and what appears external for itself. Hegel published three versions of his Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences (Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften) (1817, 1827, 1830), and I draw primarily from the final version (1830) on which the current English translations are based and on which my insertions of Hegel’s original German derive. My citations of Hegel flag when the quotation comes from a Remark (Anmerkung) in Hegel’s original text or from an Addition (Zusatz) derived from Hegel’s lectures and subsequently added by translators. For the most part, I draw from Hegel’s originally composed sections and remarks rather than the added Zusätze, though I occasionally use the latter when they provide clarification. Where certain translators (e.g. Miller) use “Notion” to translate “Begriff,” I replace this term throughout with “concept,” which I find less vague and more common amongst contemporary commentators. Whenever translators capitalize a noun to emphasize it as an important term for Hegel, I have de-capitalized it since the German texts make no such distinction.
To this end, I follow the word *Sprache* and its derivations (e.g. its adjectival form *sprachlich*) as this is the common German noun Hegel uses to speak of “language in general” and to distinguish one codified “language” from another (e.g. German instead of English). I also track the appearances of related terms like *Zeichen* (sign), *Name*, *Wort* (word), and *Ausdruck* (expression), each of which implicates features of *Sprache* and its use. Together, this constellation of terms appears in the sections Hegel evokes, discusses, and analyzes the nature of language. By so doing, I will develop or unfold what I call Hegel’s semiological problematic of language, and we will see how the linguistic sign serves to address this problem for subjective mind in its effort to become truly free.

More specifically, *Sprache* appears in Hegel's philosophy of subjective mind (the first part of his *Philosophy of Mind*) linked inextricably with the concept of the sign (*Zeichen*), where the linguistic sign serves as a tool for recognizing the subjective form of our experiences such that we can overcome the “givenness” of how objects first appear for us empirically. For Hegel, mind first “has the ideal totality of the idea arise within it, i.e. what its concept is comes before it and its being is to be together with itself, i.e. free. This is subjective mind” (*EPG* § 385). Mind for Hegel inherently strives to be free. The philosophy of subjective mind develops the outline of a semiology of language, demonstrating how the linguistic sign, in its concept and through its actual creation, enables a new kind of subjective freedom for mind—a way for mind to understand itself and its own activity as reflected in the empirical objects it experiences and seeks to understand. As we will see, mind becomes “together with itself, i.e. free” when it creates, encounters, and then memorizes linguistic signs.

These semiotic creations solve a specific problem for mind: how to overcome the
givenness of the content of intuition. This overcoming requires constructing the very content that mind intuitively experiences and seeks to know as its world, thereby changing what was originally found in our intuitive activity into something created by it. Hegel expresses this cognitive transformation as a change in the mind itself, from an activity as a knowing consciousness of an independent object to a free mind comprehending both how its own subjective activity constructs epistemic objects as well as how the mind itself takes on attributes of an object.

For consciousness the progressive determination of the I assumes the semblance of an alteration of the object independent of the activity of the I, with the consequence that in the case of consciousness the logical consideration of this alteration fell only in us, whereas it is for the free mind that the mind itself produces from itself the developing and altering determinations of the object, that the mind itself makes objectivity subjective and subjectivity objective. The determinations of which it is aware are of course inherent in the object, but at the same time posited by mind. In free mind there is nothing only immediate (EPG § 441 Addition).

The mediated creations that make mind aware of its own constructive activity are signs.

At the same time, the generation of signs and the mind’s comprehension of their significance—a semiology—raises a new problem for mind in its efforts to think, know, and act freely for which the linguistic sign—at least how subjective mind conceives it—will prove inadequate to resolving. This new problem—that of constructing a free, intersubjective world—acts as a new barrier to mind attaining its freedom in and with the world. Our goal is to see how the linguistic sign is invoked first to address the problem of the givenness of intuitive content, but also how such an invocation reveals the limits of knowledge and freedom possible for subjective mind. Let us now see how Sprache and Zeichen converge in the Encyclopedia to initiate the construction of an Hegelian semiology.
2.2 From Logic and Anthropology to Psychology: Signs Emerge in the Encyclopedia

In Hegel’s Encyclopedia, the term Sprache does not first appear in Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, but rather in a supplementary remark to an introductory section to the Logic, the first of three books comprising the Encyclopedia. It emerges in a discussion on the relation between Sprache and Denken or Gedanken, language and thinking, in particular the relationship of Sprache to what it expresses (ausdrücken). “Because language [Sprache],” Hegel claims, “is the work of thought [Gedankens], nothing can be said in language that is not universal [allgemein]” (EL § 20 Remark).

Though the meaning of this sentence is not immediately clear, an important clue to deciphering it lies in the body of EL § 20 in which Hegel relates the nature of thinking to the being that calls itself “I”.

If we take thinking [Denken] according to the most obvious notion of it, then it appears (α) first in its ordinary subjective significance [Bedeutung], as one spiritual [geistigen] activity or faculty side by side with others such as sensation, intuition, imagination, etc., desire, will, etc. What it produces, the determinacy or form of thought [Form des Gedankens], is the universal [Allgemeine], the abstract in general. Thus, thinking as an activity [Tätigkeit] is the active universal, and indeed the self-actuating universal, since the act [Tat], or what is brought forth, is precisely the universal. Thinking represented as a subject is that which thinks [Denkendes], and the simple expression [Ausdruck] for the existing subject as thinking is I (EL § 20).

If we initially identify “thinking” with a commonsensical understanding of the term—as one mental faculty or capacity existing alongside others in the mind—thinking appears as a distinct

2 Hegel raises this problem in a similar way in the opening chapter of the Phenomenology of Spirit, “Sense-certainty”: “If they actually wanted to say ‘this’ bit of paper which they mean, if they wanted to say it, then this is impossible, because the sensuous This that is meant cannot be reached by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal” (PG § 110).

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activity of mind, different from seeing, hearing, visualizing, remembering, willing, etc. Even here, however, Hegel highlights two features implicit in this commonsensical view—namely, that thinking like all “faculties” of the mind produces something—producing not just a thought, a representation, a mental image, etc. but the mind itself—and that “subjectivity” is a way of representing and thus conceptualizing the movement and journey of thought.

Both of these ideas can be found in Kant’s account of reason, who claims in the Critique of Pure Reason that “reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design.” But even more directly as an influence on Hegel, Fichte develops the idea of subjectivity as an act and an activity of producing itself, claiming “the self’s own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity. The self posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists; and conversely, the self exists and posits its own existence by virtue of merely existing.” In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel is explicit, following Fichte, that his philosophical science (Wissenschaft) can be understood as a “path” (Weg) subjectivity traverses, “or as the way of the soul which journeys through a series of its own configurations” (PG § 77). A subject for Hegel, following from the accounts of transcendental subjectivity offered by Kant and Fichte, is not a

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3 It would be a significant mistake to believe that Hegel is simply reverting back to an antiquated conception of the mind as a metaphysical collection of faculties. He criticizes this view in EPG §§ 440, 442, and he recasts the faculties from metaphysical entities or powers into particular “stages” of the mind’s liberation. “In this way the so-called faculties of mind in their distinctness from each other are to be seen only as stages of this liberation. And this alone is to be regarded as the rational way of considering the mind and its various activities” (EPG § 442 Remark). In this way, Hegel is deeply post-Kantian, following Kant’s critical philosophy (though not his empirical psychology) and especially Fichte in grasping the mind as fundamentally an act. See Fichte, The Science of Knowledge, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), I, 91: “[The absolutely primary principle] is intended to express that Act which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible.”


5 Fichte, The Science of Knowledge, I, 96.
mere thing, entity, or being, but a self-productive activity.6

Though Hegel later problematizes this initial, or what he calls an “immediate” (Unmittelbar), conception of thinking, his point is that thinking in this initial sense characterizes a capacity to abstract or generalize from lived experiences—whether from our physical sensations of things, our direct or mediated interactions with other persons, our imaginative fantasies derived from the content of our experiences, or our personal desires and practical actions.7 As when we say, for instance, “Can I have a moment to think?” or “Let me think” in contrast to “What do you want to do?” or “I can imagine how you must have felt.”

For Hegel, that which abstracts—generalizing from particular experiences to relate

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6 See note 3. I find inaccurate interpretations of Hegelian subjectivity that attempt to arrest it and treat it as a thing acting and striving to achieve some end. Not only does this treat Hegel as a pre-Kantian metaphysician, this error causes all sorts of problems for understanding how it is possible for mind (Geist) in Hegel’s philosophy to move through and embody itself not merely in an individual, but in collectives, spiritual communities, and historical epochs. For an instance of this error, see Simone Fullagar, “Narratives of travel: desire and movement of feminine subjectivity,” Leisure Studies 21, no. 1 (2002): 63: “It is an Hegelian fantasy of standing alone on top of the world, detached from relations with others (the Nepalese and my companions) who figure as the background for self actualized truth.” Hegel dispels such a misconception in the Phenomenology of Spirit, when he prefigures the conceptual birth of mind or spirit (Geist) in § 177: “What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I.’” Not to mention the numerous instances (of which we have already cited some in the Introduction) where Hegel conceptualizes Geist as movement, as Bewegung.

7 Fichte too emphasizes the act of abstraction to grapple with the nature of a thinking subject. See The Science of Knowledge, Second Introduction, 33-34. Hegel addresses the question of abstraction in an early essay, “Who Thinks Abstractly?” in MW, 283-288. In this essay, Hegel decrees a reliance on abstract thinking, going so far as to claim that it is “uneducated” (ungebildete) people who think abstractly instead of concretely. However, it is not difficult to reconcile this latter claim with the identification of abstraction and thinking in EL § 20. Abstraction is necessary for thinking (i.e. abstraction is how thinking “at first” seems to be, how “common sense” understands the nature of thought), though it is not sufficient. The commonsensical way of understanding what thinking is is important; to think, we must be able to abstract from the flux of our everyday experiences, isolating and comparing what we take as essential features and excluding inessential or extraneous details. But to truly think in Hegel’s determination, to think conceptually and speculatively, we must go further and demonstrate how these abstractions (e.g. being, nothing, concept, human, life, soul, etc.) are necessary to comprehend our messy, concrete, lived reality. We must be able to reconcile the abstract with the empirical. Hegel makes this clear in his dialectical analysis of the concept of a concept in the Science of Logic: “We can, indeed, abstract from the content: but in that case we do not obtain the universal of the concept [Begriff] but only the abstract universal, which is an isolated, imperfect moment of the concept and has no truth (SL, 604).
abstractions to one another (e.g. understanding the general relationship between a plant and the process of photosynthesis)—calls itself “I,” a subject who mentally divides itself in two and thinks itself as both subject and object of cognition. This is altogether similar to Fichte’s account of the transcendental ego, the “First, Absolutely Unconditioned Principle” whereby his *Wissenschaftslehre* begins. For the interrogation of fundamental ontological questions like “What is thinking?” or basic epistemological questions like “What is knowledge?” elicits this internal division of the I—the subject taking its own activities as general “objects” of analysis and knowledge. Thus, insofar as it is thinking (in this initial sense of the term), it becomes a self-identifying I which abstracts and relates generalities or universals (*Allgemeines*).

This raises two interesting questions, to which we will return later with more resources to marshal in support of our response. What is the precise relation between language and thought insofar as the latter is conceived as a capacity for abstraction and comparison of generalities (like the abstract notions of language and thought)? And how does thought “work” on language such that speaking of particular objects, feelings, desires, goals, etc. (instead of generalities) is impossible? We will only be able to determine Hegel’s complex response after we have explored the question of the linguistic sign and how it functions for a thinking I, one who relates and organizes “universals” of thought.

I want to emphasize how these questions manifest in the form of a problem—namely, an inability to express what I as a particular individual mean when I speak. If, as Hegel claims, any use of language expresses only what is general or universal (*Allgemeine*), how can an individual express their particular feelings, desires, goals, wishes, or personal thoughts? How can language

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express one's individuality or any individual beliefs and assertions at all? This problem becomes important once we begin to understand ourselves as particular individuals not only distinct from the surrounding world but from others who also understand themselves as thinking subjects.

Hegel expresses the problem in terms of an inexpressibility at root in a thinking subject who nevertheless aims to express their individuality: “What I only mean [meine] is mine [mein]; it belongs to me as this particular individual. But if language expresses [ausdrückt] only what is universal, then I cannot say [sagen] what only I mean” (EL§ 20 Remark). What constitutes the thinking subject—the capacity to say “I” and to abstract and relate generalities—is the very thing that bars the possibility of speaking of the I in particular, of my I-ness, as an individual, an idiosyncratic subject who says “I” about myself, just me and no other. The same capacity to think and speak in general terms, im Allgemeinen, undermines the possibility to mean (meinen) just myself or what is only mine (mein) when I say “I” or situate “I” as subject of a sentence.

This paradox shows how language first arises in the Encyclopedia as a problem for understanding the relation between subjectivity, thought, and language. As I will often express this key aspect of Hegel's philosophy of language, language first appears to be problematic. In this case, the problem is a rift between what an individual, thinking subject (Ich) can say and what they mean to say about themselves (in particular) when they say “I”.

With a paradoxical gauntlet laid down, the word (and topic of) Sprache then largely disappears for the remainder of the Logic and the entirety of the Philosophy of Nature until it reemerges in early sections of the third and final book of the Encyclopedia, Philosophy of Mind. These two initial mentions of language—first in the Logic and then in Hegel’s philosophical anthropology—are important for us because they show that Hegel’s first presentiment of
language ties it to certain problems it raises while the second conceptualizes it as a semiotic tool.

Hegel divides the *Philosophy of Mind* into three parts: Subjective Mind, Objective Mind, Absolute Mind. “Anthropology,” which forms the first sub-part of subjective mind, raises the issue of language once again but now in relation to a new concept: the sign (*das Zeichen*). Yet here again, Hegel mentions language only in passing—in a remark outside the main sections of the encyclopedic text—as a prime example of the way in which the human body expresses and signifies its hidden, inner, *subjective* life. First, he introduces the importance of the physical and bodily expressions of our inner desires, feelings, inclinations, and suppositions, though he also notes that such bodily expressions indicate only in a quite indeterminate, vague way what is taking place in the mind.

Human expression [*menschlichen Ausdruck*] includes, e.g., the upright figure in general, the formation especially of the hand, as the absolute tool [*absoluten Werkzeugs*], of the mouth, laughter, weeping, etc., and the spiritual tone [*geistige Ton*] diffused over the whole, which at once announces the physical body as the externality of a higher nature. This tone [or sound] is such a slight, indeterminate, and indescribable modification [*unsagbare Modifikation*] because the figure [*Gestalt*] in its externality is something

9 John Russon highlights the importance of this invocation of the sign for the anthropology in *Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel’s Science of Experience* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), ch. 5. See also Angelica Nuzzo, “Anthropology, *Geist*, and the Soul-Body Relation: The Systematic Beginning of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit*” in *Essays on Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, ed. David S. Stern (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 1-18. Nuzzo usefully points out that despite Hegel’s agreement with “Kant’s criticism of the metaphysical propositions of rational psychology,” he does not discard the notion of the soul like Kant but instead “speculatively corrects” it by situating the soul within his logically developmental philosophy of spirit and highlighting the importance of understanding the notion of the soul as inextricably linked to the body, grasped first as an immediate unity with the body, then as different than and opposed to the body, and finally as an embodied soul (10-11). In other words, Hegel does not discard the idea of a soul as a speculative illusion but demonstrates how a soul only becomes actual and real in the physical body. In fact, Hegel contends that the soul becomes actual only by “training” its body to be an outer sign of the inner soul (*EPG* § 411).

10 This “inner” life is conceptualized by Hegel primarily as an anthropological soul [*Seele*], an instance where he deliberately incorporates and systematizes (within his philosophical system) concepts drawn from the history of philosophy and everyday life. The soul is a nascent mind, the mind conceived as “the substance, the absolute foundation of all the particularizing and individualizing of mind, so that it is in the soul that *mind* finds all the stuff of its determination” (*EPG* § 389). A soul is what unites all the various aspects of a particular kind of organismal body, and Hegel brusquely dismisses questions concerning its materiality or immateriality. It is the *unifying* function or essence of the soul and not its natural *thingness* that he believes is conceptually most important.
immediate and natural, and can therefore only be an indeterminate and quite imperfect sign [Zeichen] for the mind, unable to represent it in its universality [Allgemeines] for itself (EPG § 411 Remark).

He esteems in particular the hand and the voice, even though of course the raising of my hand or the utterance of “HA!” could indicate any number of things. Then, he continues by claiming that language is a better indicator of the inner-workings of the mind. “But for the mind [the human figure] is only its first appearance [Erscheinung], and language [Sprache] is straight away its more perfect [vollkommener] expression” (ibid.). Hegel suggests that speech is a more mediated, articulated, and more determinate, sign of the mind.¹¹

Hegel’s anthropology is a progressive, logically developmental analysis of the different ways mind, in the form of a concrete and totalizing soul, understands its own natural features (i.e. given by and developed out of nature), such as its sensations and bodily habits, as well as how a single “internal” soul unites them.¹² Hegel analyzes the three primary ways the relation between body and soul can be understood based on how the ensouled body experiences and

¹¹ In Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of mind, the idea of “articulation” seems important for the distinction between voice and speech, though he does not pursue this idea very intently (EPG § 411 Addition). In these lectures, Hegel maintains that speech is internally “mediated” and further articulated than the mere cries of the human voice. Most important, however, for the distinction between speech and voice is the fact that unlike the utterances of the voice speech is for Hegel voluntary and volitional. Russon highlights this aspect of speech in Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel’s Science of Experience, ch. 5. We return to the idea of “articulation” and the “voluntary” feature of signifying speech when we turn to Hegel’s philosophical psychology and attempt to account for the distinguishing features of linguistic signs.

¹² For a study of habit and the temporal aspect of Hegel’s anthropology, see Catherine Malabou, The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic, trans. Lisabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005), Part I. For an in depth study of the role of the body in Hegel, particularly in the Phenomenology of Spirit, see John Russon, The Self and Its Body in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). See also Angelica Nuzzo, “Anthropology, Geist, and the Soul-Body Relation: The Systematic Beginning of Hegel’s Philosophy of Spirit” on the systematic role the soul and Hegel’s resolution to the soul-body problem plays in his Philosophy of Mind. Russon even touches on language as it bears on the sign and human communication in the Phenomenology, though his discussion is relegated primarily to a “digression” (121). Nonetheless, Russon’s digression is important for highlighting Hegel’s similar invocation of language when discussing the body in the Phenomenology. For an analysis of Hegel’s account of the soul and body in the Encyclopedia, see Nicolas Mowad, “The Soul and the Body in Hegel’s Anthropology,” Dissertations (Loyola eCommons: Loyola University Chicago, 2010).
understands its body and the soul-body relation—as a soul immediately and naturally united with a body; as an internally differentiated soul that “feels” its body as something other than itself; and finally as an embodied soul, where the external body signifies and is united with the inner activity of the soul. Language, or rather “speech,” appears in Hegel’s anthropology in his brief analysis of the “actual soul” where it serves strictly as a corporeal, vocal sign of the soul.13

In bestowing an anthropological significance to language, Hegel follows J. G. Herder and aligns with W. Humboldt, the progenitor of comparative linguistics, in endorsing a thoroughly human origin to language, specifically from the outward expressions of the human body and voice.14 However, for our purposes here, it is perhaps more useful to highlight, as Catherine

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13 Hegel’s anthropology is rich, though he devotes little time to the topic of language. He claims that the “right place” to analyze the sign and language is in relation to the intellect or intelligence (EPG § 458 Remark). As we will see below, the intelligence is a more sophisticated form of embodied mind that sees the soul not merely as something given, something naturally occurring, but as a mind that can develop and produce itself. Conversely, John Russon appears to find the primary significance of language for Hegel in his anthropology. See Russon, Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel’s Science of Experience, ch. 5. While I agree with Russon on the importance of language for the embodied individual, particularly for the process of mutual recognition between individuals, I do not share his view that language in Hegel’s anthropology is intersubjective. And while I agree with Russon that implicitly mind is intersubjective, the idea of multiple embodied individuals is not discussed by Hegel in his anthropology, nor is it raised by Hegel as an anthropological topic (alongside what he discusses in detail, e.g. sensation, feeling, and habit). So I find Russon’s invocation of intersubjectivity in the Philosophy of Mind premature. Most importantly, however, his discussions of language appear to presuppose what language is in Hegel, which is precisely what I am attempting to account for. It is telling that Russon never actually states what language is in Hegel—neither its form or contents, nor its particular function other than allowing individuals to recognize each other as the same sort of thinking subject. I argue later in Part I that Hegel does not highlight the role of language in enabling subjects to recognize each other until his analysis of objective spirit, where embodied, willing persons require a means for recognizing their own personhood through their ownership of property. It is crucial that this discussion comes not in his anthropology but in his account of right. In that analysis that begins Part II, I argue that the intersubjective communication that Russon points to is actually quite complex and variable depending on the form of objective spirit that speaks (whether a person, a culture, or a state). We should also note that for Hegel the intelligence is certainly not divorced or separated from the human body, but rather that the intelligence distinguishes itself from its embodiment to a greater extent than the soul. In general for Hegel, the intelligence abstracts from its corporeality when it represents and thinks, whereas the soul is submerged in its body and does not yet distinguish itself from the body to take it as an object of knowledge.

Malabou does, how the sign forms a crucial, conceptual transition within Hegel’s philosophy of subjective mind.\(^\text{15}\) In particular, the development of the concept of mind, from “anthropology” to “psychology,” can be explicated according to how a signifying anthropological body becomes an “intelligence” (Intelligenz) that deliberately creates linguistic signs, where it bestows subjective meaning on external things.\(^\text{16}\) That said, we must content ourselves with highlighting the transitory significance of signification, for it would take us too far afield to provide a full explication of the conceptual journey from soul to intelligence.

To recapitulate, the Logic introduces language as a problematic between what individuals mean to say (i.e. their individual feelings, beliefs, and thoughts) and the general, “universal” meanings language actually expresses, including the self-referential saying of “I”, while the Philosophy of Mind first introduces language as a tool, a Werkzeugs, the best and “most perfect” means for expressing and shaping the dynamic mindedness at work in an individual subject, of the I. The former poses a problem (or a “barrier,” Schranke in Hegel’s terms) between subjective individuality or individual expressions and the general, non-specific meanings expressed by language. “I cannot read this book” expresses nothing particular about my own thoughts and

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\(^{15}\) See Malabou,\hspace{1pt} The Future of Hegel, 65-76.

\(^{16}\) As Malabou sees it, this progression is a freeing of the soul from its (self-)determination as merely habitual, as a body composed of habits which signify the (unity of) soul, to a mind that expresses its self-awareness by creating linguistic signs. “The economy of signification that appears at the end of the Anthropology has been dialectically liberated from the initial and natural economy of the sign which originally governs man. In the transition from one economy to the other, in a passage which involves the formation of our ‘plastic individuality’, it becomes possible to encounter the real role of language” (65). “Plastic individuality” for Malabou refers to a subjectivity that both gives and takes form, like the molding of industrial plastic, and this is indicative of mind for Hegel, not soul. Whereas habit implies “that human expression […] reduce[s] to a pre-constituted expressed” soul (ibid.), linguistic signification (as we will see below) serves not only to express but to shape the very mind deploying it. I would further suggest this transition from soul to mind be understood as Hegel’s solution in the Encyclopedia to a long-puzzled-over philosophical distinction between a passive self and an active subject. Hegel’s philosophy of subjective mind can be understood as tracing the creation or becoming of subjective mind, of “plastic individuality” in Malabou’s terms, of a movement that calls itself “I”—namely, as the birth (both logically and epistemologically, though not historically) of a subject out of the substance of the soul and its body.
capacities because “I” is a general singular referring not just to me, but to whomever speaks—a
general subject. Paradoxically, if I can say Ich, I cannot mean only mein. Hegel’s anthropology
introduces the sign as a hinge between soul and mind, between self and subject. The body is an
external sign of an internal soul, which unites within a single individual not only all its body
parts but all its bodily movements, and language is prefigured as a “more perfect expression” of
the “inner” mind at work in the “outer” world.

This invocation of Sprache early in the Philosophy of Mind poses some sticky questions,
such as how Hegel justifies a view of language as the “most perfect” sign of an embodied mind,
how linguistic signs differ from other sorts of signs, and how language becomes a tool for
shaping not only individual subjects or minds but the collective spirit of a community as well.
The initial appearances of language raise specific questions concerning the nature of subjective
mind and linguistic signs as well as problems concerning how individuals can express
themselves through language as individuals (and not merely general subjects).

What seems crucial to me about these two remarks is that they set the stage for Hegel’s
deeper analysis of linguistic signs later in the Philosophy of Mind, in the third sub-part of
“Subjective Mind” entitled “Psychology.” Indeed, the general interpretation of Hegel’s
philosophy of language I am proposing stems from the issues raised in both remarks: language as

17 John Russon also highlights the importance of language as a sort of hinge between Hegel’s anthropology and the
remainder of his philosophy of mind, particularly for demonstrating the necessary role of intersubjective
communication in recognizing ourselves as subjects of experience at the same time as we recognize others
likewise. See Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel’s Science of Experience, ch. 5. Yet we must point
out contra Russon that intersubjective communication is not explicitly at stake in Hegel’s anthropology and only
becomes thematized in Hegel’s philosophy of objective spirit. The anthropological significance of language is its
(1) originating in the human body and (2) corporeally signifying the inner soul through the human voice. Other
individuals are first introduced as necessary for our own self-knowledge in Hegel’s account of self-
consciousness in the subsequent “Phenomenology” section.
the nexus of certain problems for mind (e.g. the relation between individual subjects attempting to express themselves and the generalities or universals language actually expresses) and as a tool for mind to work through and overcome those problems. Hegel’s analysis of mind as psychological is where his analysis of language begins in earnest, though with the formerly raised problems still in tow, subsisting in the background. Bearing in mind these two earlier appearances of Sprache in the Encyclopedia, we are now ready to approach his treatment of the linguistic sign as a psychological creation intended to free a subject’s mind.

2.3 Defining Psychology, Individuality, and Intelligence

Human life is always language, sense, without which human life loses its character and returns to animal life, and the singularity with which it thinks it has merged gets lost immediately in universality, but this is abstract universality.

-Jean Hyppolite

The psychology section of the Philosophy of Mind has rightly attracted significant attention from scholars who examine Hegel’s account of language, for it is here that he discusses in greatest detail the nature of linguistic signs. However, I should state emphatically my interpretive position: the discussion of language provided in Hegel’s philosophical psychology is not his complete account since he analyzes language only as a set of created, linguistic signs, admitting that “language here comes into consideration only in the specific determinacy of being the product of the intelligence for manifesting its representations in an external element” (EPG § 459 Remark). As I will show, Hegel demonstrates how this conception of language is limited,

19 While Jim Vernon offers a nuanced and insightful interpretation of the psychology section as providing Hegel’s account of “the acquisition of linguistic content” (Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, Ch. 2), I do not fully share his view. I agree that the psychology provides a formal account of the mechanisms and capacities intelligence utilizes to create and understand signs, but “acquisition” has unfortunate connotations that are not dispelled by Vernon's account. First, it seems crucial in my view that intelligence be taken as a productive form of mind, a
problematic, and gives way to a more robust, concrete account of the communicative use of

subject who creates signs and does not merely “acquire” them or their material basis. The latter seems to imply—and Vernon’s account explicitly affirms—that the “content” of language is “found” outside the intelligence and “inwardized” or recollected to form the material of language. This directly contradicts the explicit thrust of Hegel’s philosophy of subjective mind, wherein the conceptual progression of psychology from intuition to representation and finally to thinking is a progression from greater passivity to greater creative activity, from merely finding oneself determined in intuition (by the content one intuits and the “found” capacity of intuition one employs) to actively bestowing representational significance on newly created intuitions, which together form new signs. The aim of the intelligence is precisely to overcome the found or given aspects of intuitive content, and memorizing signs is what achieves this end. Again, the goal of subjective mind is to become a self-determining individual, to become a free subject, unbound by what presents itself intuitively to that individual. To be clear, the intuitive “material” of signs is first acquired through intuition and recollection; I agree with Vernon on this point. But then this material is transformed into something subjective. The subjective meanings of signs (i.e. what they mean for the intelligence) are not found or acquired, but freely created and associated. This is the power of intelligence, particularly as it exerts its capacity for creative imagination and associative memory. Creating meaningful signs is an attempt by mind to overcome the givenness of merely finding and acquiring, which is for Hegel fulfilled when the intelligence memorizes the very signs it has created. Thus, proposing as Vernon does to capture Hegel’s account of the formation of linguistic content through acquisition seems to overlook the problem intelligence first encounters in intuition (i.e. the “givenness” or “found” nature of intuitive content). It also seems to presuppose the forms and intersubjective activities of objective mind without either expressing or resolving the problem faced by psychology that ultimately drives it to become objective mind, a community of interacting minds. A community is not merely posited by Hegel; he means to deduce its necessity for mind’s freedom. Second, once Hegel delineates the formal mechanisms of the intelligence (i.e. its psychological capacities and understanding of itself qua psyche), the actual content of what is formed into a language is not addressed by the psychology. Rather, explaining the content of language requires delving into Hegel’s account of objective mind, delineated in the “Objective Mind” portion of Philosophy of Mind and in the Philosophy of Right, where language is put to use in intersubjective contexts. Thus, Vernon errs by appealing to an intersubjective community of minds in the psychology where this is not present in Hegel's text. Undoubtedly, Hegel believes intersubjective interactions are necessary to develop language, but the psychological intelligence in its striving for individual self-sufficiency fails to recognize this until its final moments, until its transformation from subjective to objective mind. So in my view, the formal or “abstract” nature of the intelligence’s understanding of language as a sign system is not abated by an equally formal account of grammatical structures (Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, Ch. 3), however fruitful this account is for extracting a grammar out of Hegel’s Science of Logic. I worry that Vernon provides only a thoroughgoing formal account of Hegel’s philosophy of language—a formal account of the creation of linguistic signs, a formal account of grammatical structures and syncategorema, and finally a formal synthesis between these two. This procedure, as well as the underlying importance in Vernon’s account of subjective “positing,” strikes me more as Fichtean than Hegelian, indeed as something Hegel directly criticizes Fichte for in D. In contrast, I contend the concretion of such an abstract account of language qua system of linguistic signs requires explicating how intersubjective uses of language (as in property contracts and laws) determine its content as situated and developed within particular communities and social formations.
language among groups of thinking persons,\(^{20}\) within a communal mindedness or *spirit.*\(^{21}\) Thus, I argue the intelligence is concerned not with signs generally or linguistic signs in particular as bearing on intersubjective communication, but rather how these creations demonstrate the subjective freedom of the sign-making and memorizing intelligence. In defending my view, I will have recourse to the conception of language Hegel first suggests in his remarks to the *Logic* and his philosophical anthropology: language as a problematic tool.

Let us first define, in a preliminary fashion, what certain key terms mean within Hegel’s discussion of psychology. This foothold will allow us to unpack and analyze how mind (conceived psychologically) creates and organizes signs to both enable and demonstrate its individual, subjective freedom.

Psychological mind is one form among many that mind can take, and Hegel’s general conception of psychology hinges on two related features or “determinations” (*Bestimmtheiten*) of

\(^{20}\) “Persons” are for Hegel a particular kind of subject, those who are determined by intersubjective relations and engagements. It is an error to read “personhood” into anything I or Hegel says about subjectivity in his psychology. For a person unlike a psyche (or subjective intelligence) is first constituted by “possession” of “an external thing” (*EPG* § 488). Subjectivity and personhood, subjects and persons, can and should be for Hegel conceptually distinguished, even though one *form* of subjectivity is a person. Another subjective *form* is, for instance, an ethical community or even a philosophical concept. We will return to the issue of personhood in Part II to see how it is first constituted by language use through agreements and property contracts.

First, psychological mind is for Hegel self-directed (i.e. the psyche that investigates itself), much as the modern discipline of psychology is concerned with delineating and analyzing (i.e. using scientific minds to investigate) the various ways minds work. In its most general sense for Hegel, psychology involves certain thinking subjects (i.e. psychologists) analyzing general structures and operations of mind (i.e. mental capacities, disorders, and modes of functioning). It is the psyche thinking and speaking of itself, the logos of the psyche undertaken by the psyche itself.

Psychology accordingly studies the faculties or universal modes of activity of the mind as such, intuition [Anschauen], representing [Vorstellen], recollecting [Erinnern], etc., desires, etc., disregarding both the content [Inhalt], which in appearance is found in empirical representation [empirischen Vorstellen], in thinking [Denken] also and in desire and will, and the forms [Formen] in which the content occurs, in the soul as a natural determination, and in consciousness itself as an object of consciousness that is present for itself” (EPG § 440 Remark).

Hegel’s psychology is a logos of and by the psyche, what I sometimes call (using Hegel’s terms) “psychological intelligence.” I also freely use “psyche” to refer to the same subject.

Psychology for Hegel grasps the mind in an abstract way, the mind grasping its own

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22 Hegel often uses the terms bestimmt and Bestimmtheit, which are typically translated by the adjective “determinate” and noun “determination,” respectively. These terms are contrasted by Hegel with unbestimmt and Unbestimmtheit, “vague” and “vagueness,” “indefinite” and “indeterminateness” or “indeterminateness.” The contrast is between something (e.g. a thought, a thing, an action, an actual state of affairs) whose internal structure and internal/external relation—namely, its limits and bounds—are fixed and clear to mind as opposed to one whose internal structure and bounds are uncertain. For example, if I measure the distance between my toes and the surface of a brick wall in front of me, I have determined the distance for myself, just as if I pondered how to swim across the English Channel and determined, based on research and self-evaluation (or self-search), that I cannot cover the distance. To translate Hegel’s German, I most often use “determinate,” “determination,” and their oppositional terms to signify when something is or is not understood clearly by mind when conceiving, representing, or thinking it. In this case, the psyche understands itself as determined psychologically in two main ways, so mind in this mode of thinking understands the psyche as a clearly defined “form” of mind with specific presuppositions, capabilities, aims, norms, and limitations.

23 See Richard Dien Winfield, Hegel and Mind: Rethinking Philosophical Psychology (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 81: “The psyche relates to its own mental content solely as determinations of itself. As such, the psyche registers nothing but the modifications of its own psycho-physiological existence without relating to anything distinguishable from itself.”
powers, and this is so because the psyche thinks \textit{abstractly}, including about itself. Hegel does not provide an empirical psychology like David Hume’s\textsuperscript{24} or a descriptive psychology analogous to Wilhelm Dilthey’s,\textsuperscript{25} but rather an account of the mind’s psychological capacities ordered conceptually according to the mind’s powers of abstracting from its immediate, embodied experiences. Hegel’s psychology progresses from intuition through representation and finally to thinking as a progression of mind abstracting itself more and more from its dependence on an external world, where it increasingly understands itself as producing mental phenomena (from intuitions to representations to thoughts) separated and abstracted from any content it immediately experiences.\textsuperscript{26} In this way, the mind demonstrates its capacity for becoming increasing independent from the intuitive content it receives from the outside world. Its capacities are then not so much “faculties” of mind existing side by side each other, but potential powers of mind and particular modes of activity it can engage in. Hegel’s psychology analyzes only these general \textit{modes} of activity of the mind, where the mind and its activities explicitly become the epistemic object of mind. We could say that Hegel’s psychology thus enumerates the general ways in which mind grasps its own psychological capacities and its own ability to abstract itself from its embodied experience of the world.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, for Hegel, psychology

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\textsuperscript{26} See Winfield, \textit{Hegel and Mind}, 86. “Unlike the mental progressions by which the psyche advances from feeling to habituation to emotive expression and by which consciousness proceeds from sensation to perception to understanding, the phases of intelligence pass before mind as alterations of mental content that are mind’s own product.”
\textsuperscript{27} As Richard Dien Winfield points out, the psychological “intelligence” unites the intentionality indicative of “consciousness” and the self-relation indicative of “soul,” both logically prior forms of subjective mind. This means that “reason provides the underlying subject matter of intelligence insofar as reason operates with certainty that the contents of mind are objective” (82). Interestingly, and as we will see below in our discussion of the mind’s psychological capacities, this conception of the psychological intelligence entails that the more the
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amounts to an abstract or formal conception of a subject’s mind (*Geist*), namely what capacities all subjects must share if they are to organize themselves into a collective, spiritual community.

The general modes of psychological intelligence are, according to Hegel, intuition (*Anschauung*), representation (*Vorstellung*), and thinking (*Denken*), and as we proceed, we must bear in mind that these modes are simultaneously self and other related. That is, they seek to understand how the psyche itself works (e.g. how intuition functions) as well as the kind of world that appears for it (e.g. an intuitable world of spatial-temporal objects), which the psyche also works to comprehend. As he maintains, “To *comprehend* [*Begreifen*] means [*heißt*], for intellectual reflection, to recognize the series of *mediations* [*Vermittlungen*] between a phenomenon [*Erscheinung*] and another being [*Dasein*] with which it is connected, to recognize [*erkennen*] what is called the course [*Gang*] of nature, i.e. in accordance with the laws and relationships of the understanding, for example, causality, grounds, etc.” (*EPG* § 406 Remark). Indeed, the epistemic project of the psyche overlays what the psyche itself *does* to comprehend something onto *what* it comprehends, an identification of subjective activity and objectivity. Thus, already, we can foresee how everything Hegel (and us following him) says about psychological mind will implicate both how mind works and what it strives to understand.

Though Hegel’s proposal that the psyche can and should be analyzed by abstracting from both the form and the content of its psychological objects seems *prima facie* odd and untenable, it is important to recognize how the section on psychology (and the idea of mind as a psychological intelligence itself) has emerged in the *Philosophy of Mind*, arising only after the mind interrogates its own subjective powers and capacities in isolation, i.e. abstracted from the world, the more it treats its own capacities as distinct epistemic objects.
necessary advent of “Psychology” has been demonstrated. For Hegel, the psyche is not some sort of “natural” state of mind. On the contrary, mind must become psychological, taking its own subjective activity as both itself and a distinct object of knowledge—unifying the self-relation of the soul and the other-relatedness of consciousness. Yet by contrast, the psyche must reduce for itself (in its epistemic investigations) the significance of its natural corporeality (i.e. its body) as well as its consciousness of itself as a thinking thing, as an epistemic object existing in the world external to mind. It is not that these are completely untrue or mistaken theories of mind, but they are inherently limited, incomplete conceptions of mind—what Hegel sometimes calls “one-sided” (einseitig) conceptions—which do not exhaust its full significance.

What psychological mind explicitly aims to comprehend is its own general psychological activities, for it has come to understand its own mental activities as shaping what it understands of itself.28 “This, however,” Hegel clarifies, “is not an arbitrary abstraction. Mind itself is this elevation above nature and natural determinacy [i.e. the soul], and above the involvement with an external object [i.e. consciousness], i.e. above the material element in general; this is what its concept has turned out to be” (EPG § 440 Remark).29 Accordingly, the psyche “sets out only


29 The fact that psychology emerges as a form of mind subsequent to and developed from the soul and consciousness means for Hegel that the psyche is their “truth” [Wahrheit] or their necessary conceptual consequence. Put differently, the soul and consciousness are nascent, undeveloped forms of what is completed and made explicit in the psyche. “The mind [Geist] has determined itself into the truth of soul and of
from its own being and is in relationship only with its own determinations,” receiving from the outside, from the object, neither a specific content nor an objective form (EPG § 440).

Therefore, the material nature of language (e.g. the physical process of vocalization or the movements of the hand to signify a letter) is not the main issue for psychology; language itself is already conceived as a product of idealizing materiality, not a material thing or really a thing at all in an ontological sense. Instead, we will see that language is generated and understood as a psychological phenomenon first and foremost because it addresses the problem raised previously by mind understanding itself solely anthropologically—namely, how language signifies the interiority and idealizing activities of mind better than the figure or other movements of the body.30

30 Interestingly, there is relatively little published or translated into English on language as it features in Hegel's anthropology. For instance, Catherine Malabou in The Future of Hegel begins her analysis with Hegel's anthropology, but she fails to mention the role of language here, even though the final parts of her book argue for the importance of language in Hegel's philosophy. Likewise, while Andreja Novakovic [“Hegel's Anthropology” in The Oxford Handbook of Hegel, ed. Dean Moyar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 407-423] points out the role of a process of individuation at work in the anthropology, language is again a missing link in this examination, including Hegel's acknowledged relation between habit and the development of language. However, exceptions to this lacuna include John McCumber, “Hegel on Habit,” Owl of Minerva 21, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 155-165; John Russon, Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), Ch. 5; Elisa Magri’s “The Place of Habit in Hegel’s Psychology” in Hegel's Psychological Psychology, ed. Susanne Herrmann-Sinai and Lucia Ziglioli (New York: Routledge, 2016), 74-90; and Thomas A. Lewis, “Speaking of Habits: The Role of Language in Moving from Habit to Freedom,” Owl of Minerva 39, no. 1/2 (Fall/Spring 2007/2008), 25-53. These essays investigate the importance of language in enabling mind to overcome its habitual activities and become free through self-expressive acts. See also Jay Lampert, “Speed,
Of course, Hegel’s psychological focus leads him to largely overlook the materiality of language, offhandedly relegating such an investigation to anthropologists. Julia Kristeva, for one, criticizes this omission, and Hegel opens himself up to legitimate criticisms for not analyzing in greater depth the materiality of language, how it imposes on the use of language, and its effects on bodies. So while I agree with Hegel that comprehending the psychological conception of language is paramount for understanding how language enables subjective freedom of thought, I also think there is an important account of language that he overlooks here—namely, how linguistic utterances (whether through vocal tone, intonation, emphasis, etc.) can have direct, visceral effects on bodies, which would imply that essential for characterizing the (limited) freedom of bodies with respect to each other is a proper understanding of how to overcome these linguistic effects as they appear to impact the soul from the outside.

31 See EPG § 459 Remark: “Language here comes into consideration only in the specific determinacy of being the product of the intelligence for manifesting its representations in an external element. If we were to deal with language in a concrete way, we would have to revert to the anthropological, more precisely the psychophysiological standpoint (§ 401) for the material of language (the lexical element), and to anticipate the standpoint of the intellect for the form (grammar).”


33 Hegel’s anthropology, in its detailed accounts of mental illnesses and anthropological relations between body and soul, seems to recognize such impacts of language, particularly for the education of children. See EPG § 396 Addition. But he stops short of engaging in questions of the bodily source and effects of language, restricting himself to language as a vocal sign of mind. What is missing is how language affects, through the medium of intersubjective interactions, both the figure of the body and our subjective feelings. Thus, gestures and rhetoric fall outside of language proper (e.g. Hegel’s provides no account of “sign language”), and no investigation into the power of gesture and rhetorical techniques to overcome the limitations of external impacts on the body and soul is performed. Yet he does engage with this topic in greater detail in his discussions of music and poetry in his lectures on art. See A II. There, Hegel differentiates certain forms of music and poetry according to how they affect the inner feelings of the audience.
Such is the first important determination of psychological mind, its unifying of self-relatedness and object-oriented analysis through the process of abstraction. Second, the necessary advent of psychology, the need of mind to understand itself psychologically, clarifies the goal of mind. The Philosophy of Mind examines mind initially as an anthropological phenomenon—as a soul (Seele) naturally emergent and seeking to understand itself as a natural being inhabiting an organism’s body and unifying its varied movements. The soul is “the substance, the absolute foundation of all the particularizing and individualizing of mind” (EPG § 389). Yet mind discovers, by encountering the conceptual limit of the soul, that it cannot understand itself completely as a mere natural organism. The mind recognizes that it does not merely exist as a given or as a brute fact, but as something that changes depending on what it experiences and cognizes.

Thus, mind begins to understand itself as consciousness (Bewusstsein), which grasps and understands other things as objects of knowledge. It objectifies the world. In other words, mind comes to understand itself as explicitly epistemological, taking natural phenomena as epistemic objects, including itself—the being (Sein) that is aware (bewusst) of itself. “Consciousness constitutes the stage of the mind’s reflection or relationship [Verhältnisses], of mind as appearance,” as appearing for itself as an “I” directed towards experiencing and understanding an object, “an independent object,” “as external to” consciousness itself (EPG § 413).

Moreover, by examining how it is conscious of external objects, it comes to recognize itself not merely as conscious but self-conscious, not merely consciousness of an external, independently existing thing, but of consciousness itself experiencing the thing. A consciousness of consciousness of something external. This sets the stage for the emergence of psychology,
where mind takes itself explicitly both as that which seeks to understand objects and as an object of knowledge—a psyche. And the psyche, unlike consciousness or self-consciousness, knows its epistemic object as rational, that is, as both the subject and object of knowledge, as “the simple identity of the subjectivity of the concept with its objectivity and universality” (EPG § 438). For its object is the very subjective process of grasping itself. Its aim is to demonstrate the independence of its object (i.e. subjective mind) from reliance on what the external world gives to it, whether its natural body or external objects presented for its consciousness.

Thus, psychological mind goes further than mere consciousness or self-consciousness by recognizing how its own activity, including its deployment of language, holds all its experiences and thoughts together, uniting them in one mind, one unified activity of Geist. And because language is not a given, but must be developed by mind, this entails that language qua linguistic signs lies within the domain of philosophical psychology. The goal of psychological mind, to put it somewhat differently, is to demonstrate for itself how it knows itself freely and how its own subjective activity of knowing the world is likewise free. For Hegel, psychology makes apparent the internal, conceptual telos of mind: freedom.

All mind has to do now is to realize this concept of its freedom [Freiheit], i.e. sublate [aufzuheben] the form of immediacy [Unmittelbarkeit] with which it once more begins. The content that is elevated [erhoben] to intuitions [Anschauungen] is its sensations [Empfindungen]; similarly it is its intuitions that are transformed into representations [Vorstellungen], and its representations that are transformed again into thoughts [Gedanken], etc.” (EPG § 440 Remark).

As we will see, a specific form of psychological mind introduces the linguistic sign as a specific tool to elevate the content given or found by our senses into a “freer” form, an epistemic object not merely sensed (e.g. touched, seen, heard) but generated as specific content by mind itself.

To be clear, it is not as if the psyche has no content to unpack and understand, but that its
new focus is the contents of *itself* as activity and movement, not of some outside or some external world, nor even itself conceived as an externally existing *thing* that thinks (a *res cogitans*). “Its intuitions” are no longer understood as merely sensations provoked in the soul through the body from the outside, nor are they external objects impinging against a self. Rather, mind now approaches intuitions as *its own* insofar as they are always already informed by the mind's active process of cognition.

For while I, as a *consciousness*, can now observe the teal color of my copy of the *Science of Logic* and relate it to the colors of other books around me, I become *psychological* when I turn my intellectual focus on my own intellectual capacity to *intuit* (i.e. to find presented *for me*, for my intellectual consideration) the book and its colors in the first place. The psyche qua psychological turns back from an object to comprehend its own epistemic capacities and activities. So instead of asking, “What am I now seeing?” or even “Are the colors in my mind or in the object?” the psyche asks, “What does intuition entail, how does it work, and what relation between knowing subject and epistemic object does it presuppose?”

Thus, the conceptual progression of forms of mind from anthropology through phenomenology to psychology is a progression of increasing individuation and a making explicit of how mind acts as an individual cognizing itself and the external world in one and the same activity. “I, the subject of consciousness, is thinking; the progressive logical determination of the object is *what is identical in subject and object*, their absolute interconnection, that in virtue of which the object is the subject’s own” (*EPG* § 415). The psyche understands what it cognizes as necessary belonging to itself, as both subjective and objective, and not merely as issuing from outside or from an objective world external to the mind.
Hence, the psychological subject of knowledge, I, recognizes that knowing the world through its encounter with objects is equally a coming to understand itself, its own modes of knowing the world, and its own epistemic activities. For consciousness, a computer screen is not merely an external object, but insofar as I consider my own capacity to understand it, the screen becomes for me something formed and shaped by my own subjective process of thinking. In other words, if I abstract from attempting to understand the computer itself and focus on what I am doing psychologically when I experience the screen, I realize that the screen appears for me, as an object for me, because I focus on it, attend to it, and actively involve my own powers of thought to understand it. The screen is not so much my epistemic object as is my process of knowing it; this psychological process is therefore not strictly objective or subjective, but both. As an individual psyche, mind is individuated as both a subject and object of knowledge, which knows itself as individual both as a cognizing subject and a rational world (of the inner mind). The world appears for the psyche as rational (vernünftig) because the psyche uses its powers of reason to understand and conceptualize itself as a rational world of psychological activities and objects. This is precisely what psychology is. “Therefore, it possesses the confidence that in the world it will find its own self, that the world must be friendly to it, that, just as Adam said of Eve that she was flesh of his flesh, so mind has to seek in the world reason of its own reason” (EPG §

34 We should not equate Hegel’s use of Vernunft with Kant’s or even Fichte’s, for Hegel’s sense of reason (unlike Kant’s and Fichte’s) does not bear directly on what kinds of objects are being cognized (e.g. whether objects of experience or objects beyond all possible experience). For Hegel, “reason” indicates, in its most general sense, the formal identity of a concept with the object conceptualized. Thought thinking itself is the most obvious example, though he expresses the nature of reason in a number of different ways, which all approach this identity from different angles. For our purposes, this is perhaps the most useful example: “Reason is the truth that is in and for itself, and this is the simple identity of the subjectivity of the concept with its objectivity and universality. The universality of reason, therefore, signifies the object, which in consciousness qua consciousness was only given, but is now itself universal, permeating and encompassing the I. Equally it signifies the pure I, the pure form overarching the object and encompassing it within itself” (EPG § 438).
In the section on “Psychology,” Hegel differentiates the term “intelligence” (Intelligenz) from “will” (Willen) based on the way the mind understands itself, its epistemic objects, and how it seeks to know those objects. Both intelligence and will are, according to Hegel, psychological forms of mind, but the intelligence treats its epistemic objects theoretically (theoretisch), from within its “inner” mental activities, whereas the will influences and works on the “outer,” external world directly, practically (praktische). With the caveat, to reiterate, that the psyche understands all its objects of knowledge, whether inner or outer, as informed by its subjective cognition and thus as both subjective and objective. Though this theoretical/practical distinction is important for Hegel, it has less significance for us in tracing the development of his philosophy of language. Indeed, Hegel asserts that the main products of theoretical and practical mind are the “word” [Wort] and “enjoyment” [Genuss], respectively (EPG § 444). Our focus is obviously the former.

Linguistic signs are dealt with exclusively in the sections analyzing the “theoretical” intelligence, which generates, uses, and understands linguistic signs, so it is more pressing to note the import of this term than Hegel’s philosophy of will. Most important is how the intelligence begins to know, on what basis and with what presuppositions the intelligence first begins to understand and conceptualize its own mode of knowing.

The intelligence finds itself determined [bestimmt]; this is its semblance [Schein] from which in its immediacy it sets out; but as knowledge [Wissen], intelligence consists in positing what is found as its own. Its activity deals with the empty form of finding reason, and its aim is that its concept should be for the intelligence, i.e. to be reason for itself, whereby the content also becomes rational for the intelligence. This activity [Tätigkeit] is cognition [Erkennen]” (EPG § 445).

If the goal of the intelligence—or rather, of mind in general—is freedom, then the intelligence’s
proximate end is to free itself from the givenness of what it initially merely finds. This presents a problem that the intelligence must address.

The intelligence seeks explicitly to comprehend its own psychological nature, but it first discovers its mental capacities or faculties (or what Hegel calls “forms” of mind). That is, mind first finds that it has certain capacities, which it utilizes to cognize itself, as if its capacity for intuition, representation, and thinking were just lying there in the mind waiting to be discovered. It is as if the psyche proclaimed to itself, “Oh wow, I just discovered that I can represent objects to myself in my own mental space. In my mind, I can imagine a building that I saw yesterday, but I can imagine it as bright blue in color instead of the dull gray I saw. But I’m not quite sure how or why I have this ability.” Thus, though the intelligence understands its objects of knowledge (i.e. its mental capacities) as the same subjective capacities it uses to understand, it still finds these capacities as if they were given to it from the outside—from nature or from some unknown benevolent or malevolent power. Hegel’s main point is simply this: if the intelligence first finds itself and its powers and capacities determined, this entails simply that it has not determined itself. The mind is thus not free; or at least, it has not demonstrated it truly is free.

Accordingly, Hegel conceptualizes this initial stage of the intelligence as a sort of woven “fabric” comprised of the various powers and capacities by which it experiences the world.

[A]s intelligence mind finds itself determined in this way, is its somber weaving [dumpfes Weben] within itself, in which it is fabric-like [stoffartig] and has the whole material [Stoff] of its knowledge. Owing to the immediacy in which the mind thus initially occurs, it here takes only the simple form of an individual and ordinary subjective mind (EPG § 446).

The intelligence, in its initial form as an intuiting intelligence, understands itself as a found material, something like a cloth composed of threads woven together by its intuiting activity. The
threads are the intuitions it has had, for instance, of a skyscraper at dawn, a ruddy mailbox at
dusk, or a deep, partially filled pothole in a thunderstorm. These fibers compose the material
fabric, the stuff comprising mind’s past experiences and accrued knowledge. Presumably, though
Hegel does not pursue this analogy further, a hand using the sewing needle would be the
activated capacity for intuition, its power of intuition. Thus, the intelligence’s object of
knowledge is not merely sensation (Empfandung), nor particular feelings or particular felt, heard,
or seen things, but its own capacity or “faculty” of sensation, the mind’s own activity that
conceptualizes sensations as discrete objects of conscious knowledge. In this way, the
intelligence unites the non-conscious, immediate sensations of the anthropological soul and the
object-oriented directedness of phenomenological consciousness.

A crucial factor according to Hegel is that the intelligence finds its intuitive capacity as if it
was bestowed on the intelligence from beyond, for this entails that the intuitive intelligence is
determined “externally.” If I find something lying on the ground, I discover it, even if I was the
one who placed it there and forgot. Perhaps my discovery even surprises or shocks me. This is
the sense of finden Hegel wishes to convey when describing the initial stage of the intelligence.
Yet if the intelligence is determined “externally” instead of “internally” (i.e. based on something
prompting or restricting the intelligence from the outside, from somewhere unknown), this
entails that the merely intuited intelligence is constrained or unfree (unfrei or gezwungen). It is
as if the mind in this initial stage of intelligence discovers it has certain capacities but does not
understand from whence they came. They have been merely found (gefunden); they are given
(geben) to mind.

Thus, the intelligence aims to shake loose this givenness, its initially discovered
capacities, in an effort to gain its freedom from externality and the mere givenness of its psychological capacities. Its aim is to demonstrate its own free individuality.\textsuperscript{35} The linguistic sign, as we are to now see, is a tool designed precisely for this end—for the intelligence to demonstrate (if only to itself and for itself) that it can \textit{create} not only what lies around it in the world but also the significance external things possess for the mind, and how it acts to shape \textit{and understand} external objects that initially appeared foisted upon it from outside.

The sign in general and the linguistic sign in particular are conceptual tools the intelligence uses to overcome the givenness and found aspect of its psychological capacities. In sum, the linguistic sign must demonstrate the capacity of mind to generate or create (and not merely find) its own capacities, to create itself and its psychological objects of knowledge. I will first explain how Hegel invokes the sign as a solution to this problem for psychological mind, thereby preparing for his more particular analysis of the linguistic sign in the subsequent section.

\section*{2.4 The Sign: A Unity of Intuition and Representation}

The process of the sign is an \textit{Aufhebung}.
- Jacques Derrida\textsuperscript{36}

In so far as knowledge is encumbered with its initial determinacy, is at first only \textit{abstract} or \textit{formal}, the goal [\textit{Ziel}] of mind is to \textit{produce} [\textit{hervorzubringen}] objective fulfillment [\textit{Erfüllung}], and thus at the same time the freedom of its knowledge (\textit{EPG} \S 442).

Hegel conceptualizes the sign (\textit{Zeichen}) in his analysis of the imagination (\textit{Einbildungskraft}), a

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  \item \textsuperscript{35} This is a further development of the process of individuation outlined in Andreja Novakovic, “Hegel’s Anthropology.” Unlike anthropological mind, psychological mind knows itself as an individual distinct from (though active within) the world seeking to understand its own mental capabilities to know itself and the world. Thus, while it constitutes a rather abstract conception of the I, the psyche still understands the bounds and dimensions of its individuality more clearly than does the soul, which finds itself still submerged in the surrounding stuff (in the German sense of \textit{Stoff}) of the world and attempts to distinguish itself from this other stuff.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} “The Pit and the Pyramid,” 88.
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particular form intelligence takes when it forms (bilden) images (Bilder). “The sign is some immediate intuition, which represents a wholly different content than it has for itself;—the pyramid into which an alien soul [fremde Seele] is transferred and preserved” (EPG § 458 Remark). Though in appearance rather straightforward, I want to use this sentence to highlight and connect several different features of the sign, which Hegel delineates in this and other sections, thereby giving as clear a picture as I can of how the concept of the sign functions for the intelligence. Again, we must always bear in mind the aim of the intelligence and the overarching reason behind the invocation of the sign: to free itself from its initially given or found determinacy.

First, the sign is an intuition, Anschauung, a term connoting a subjective viewpoint or opinion concerning something. A first take or an initial glimpse. In fact, Hegel uses the same term, Anschauung, to signify both the power, faculty, or “form” of mind and what is intuited, an intuition, thus emphasizing the unity of subject and object in the psychological understanding of intuition. The intelligence intuits an object outside itself, outside the mind, thereby conceiving of the object as an intuition, and it does so using its capacity of intuition. This homonymous relation between the object cognized and the mental faculty used to cognize it is also present in English: we intuit an intuition using our faculty of intuition. It nearly holds for the two other main forms of intelligence: representation (Vorstellung) and thinking (Denken), where we represent (vornehmen) a representation to ourselves and think (denken) a thought (Denken). Even in psychological terminology, subjective activity and its object of thought converge.

For a comprehensive account of Hegel’s philosophy of imagination, including how it evolved from his early to his later works, see Jennifer Ann Bates, Hegel’s Theory of Imagination (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004). My analysis here overlaps with Bates’ Chapter 5, and I will note as we proceed how my interpretation differs.
Yet the sign is no ordinary intuition, but one united with a mental representation, which serves as the “soul” of the intuition. The outer, sensible side (e.g. we can see, hear, and touch it), the intuition, conceals an inner soul, what Hegel calls the sign’s meaning (Bedeutung).

In this unity [of the sign], stemming from intelligence, of an independent representation [selbstständiger Vorstellung] and an intuition, the matter [Materie] of the intuition is of course initially something received, something immediate or given (e.g. the color of the cockade, etc.). But in this identity the intuition does not count as positive and itself, but as representing something else. It is an image that has received into itself as its soul an independent representation of the intelligence, its meaning [Bedeutung]. This intuition is the sign (EPG § 458).

The sign is thus a complex entity, similar to the way Ferdinand de Saussure almost a century later characterizes the sign. “The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image.”38 Though Saussure departs from Hegel’s terminology in an important way—for Hegel, a meaning is not a “concept” (Begriff), but a representation (Vorstellung)—he sides with Hegel in arguing that the intuitive part of the sign (in contrast to the representational meaning) is not strictly a discrete material or physical thing, something separable from how the psyche experiences it. Rather, the sound-image is for Saussure intuitable and thus psychologically knowable because mind is already at work when it conceives an intuition as part of a sign.

The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it ‘material,’ it is only in that sense and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract.39

Like Saussure, Hegel labels the intuitive side of the sign an “image” (Bild), where an image is something already “formed” (gebildet) insofar as it affects the psyche.

39 Ibid.
A bare materiality, e.g. an individual, discrete noise, remains what it is regardless of whether it is heard or produced by a voice, yet if a sound is taken as constitutive of a sign, as a sound-image, it cannot be separated from the “psychological imprint of the sound.” A bare materiality, unlike a sign, has no soul. In Hegel’s terms, the “immediate intuition” of the sign (Saussure’s “sound-image”) has already been “idealized;” that is, it is already understood by the psyche not as a mere sound but as the intuitive side of a sign, which signifies a meaning or an “independent representation.” The signifying intuition, according to Hegel, thus attains “an existence that carries weight [gilt] in the realm of representation” (EPG § 459). Otherwise, the psyche would not view the intuition as part of a sign, as signifying a meaning different from the content of the intuition itself. What constitutes the significance of a sign here is its particular impact on the psyche, i.e. that an intuition represents a meaning for the psyche, for its self-understanding. Therefore, both sides of the sign are psychological, one an intuition and the other

40 In what follows, I use the terms “meaning” and “representational meaning” interchangeably. For Hegel, it is clear that a sign’s meaning is necessarily representational. This of course implicates Hegel’s theory of representation or Vorstellung, which is quite complex. But let us restrict ourselves to his psychological conception of Vorstellung to make Hegel’s conception of meaning clear. When Hegel distinguishes intuition from representation, he claims that the distinction is one of making explicit the presentational aspect in the latter (i.e. the fact that I am presenting some content to myself), whereas in intuition I focus more on its objective features. “But that the object has the character of what is mine is present in intuition only in itself and is first posited in representation. In intuition, the objecthood of the content predominates. Only when I make the reflexion that it is I who has the intuition, only then do I occupy the standpoint of representation” (EPG § 449 Addition). So the fact that a sign’s meaning is representational entails that I recognize that I am presenting for myself some content. Now, Hegel’s uses of “object” (Objekt) and “content” (Inhalt) should all be taken in a very broad sense, for their meanings are determined only by their contrasting terms: subject (Subjekt) and form (Form). We should not think that an “object” strictly means a thing like a boot or an ocean, nor that a “content” is necessarily sensory, imaginary, felt, etc. An object is simply what a thinking subject thinks and cognizes, while a content is whatever has been formed in some way. Thus, an “independent” representational meaning has some specific “content” (e.g. a feeling, attitude, drive, or other state of mind) that is both significant for me (i.e. formed by my cognitive activities according to my particular aims and intentions) and can be cognized by me as an “object” of knowledge with different content than the intuitive content it is paired with. For instance, I can create a sign where the intuitive content is “-----” and its representational meaning is a feeling of tranquility. Both sides of the sign have content, but their contents are quite distinct. More will be said on Hegel’s conception of representation below.
a representational meaning.

But we should avoid getting ahead of ourselves, for we need to explain what Hegel means by “image,” “representation,” and the important difference he sees between the content of a signifying intuition and that of a signified meaning. This is not so apparent as might be assumed and examining these terms will make clear how vocal signs aufhebt material experienced and cognized by intelligence.41

An image for Hegel is a representation, though the German Vorstellung literally expresses not a re-presentation, but a mere presentation or positioning (Stellung) before (vor) mind. Unlike an intuition, an image is not simply found, but produced by the intelligence through its capacity for recollection (Erinnerung). The intelligence recollects by re-presenting an image for itself, for its own contemplation and understanding.

Intelligence, in first recollecting the intuition, puts the content of feeling in its inwardness (Innerlichkeit), in its own space and its own time. In this way the content is (aa) an image, liberated from its initial immediacy and abstract individuality in contrast to other things, as received into the universality of the I in general” (EPG § 452).

So the content of what I initial “feel” as external to myself (e.g. this tree bark, that glossy book cover) is transformed through recollection into an internal content, where it is isolated and abstracted from its external context in relation to other things and becomes the content of a discrete “image,” a piece of mental content belonging to me.

So an initial encounter with a thing, perhaps a wooden table, becomes an intuitive experience once it has been focused on or attended to (i.e. once it becomes the object of subjective attention, Aufmerksamkeit) and only if the intuited mind understands that its

41 Concerning Hegel’s philosophy of sound and voice, I largely follow Jim Vernon’s interpretation in Hegel’s Philosophy of Language (London: Continuum, 2007), 61-64.
subjective, intuitive activity is somehow involved in shaping the content it experiences. This requires an act of idealization, the production of an ideality, which is for Hegel “the negation of the real, but the real is also stored up, virtually retained, although it does not exist” (EPG § 403 Remark). Representation, unlike mere intuition, makes this idealization explicit by maintaining, on the one hand, the virtual presence of a host of various intuitions that, on the other, a single individual, an I, can recollect and make present for itself. I may not be experiencing the sounds of Niagara Falls at the present moment, but because I have formerly experienced the roar of the crashing water, I can recall and place that intuition before me in my own mental space and time, in my own headspace so to speak.

Every individual is an infinite treasury of sensation-determinations, representations, information, thoughts, etc.; yet I am for all that an entirely simple entity,—a cavern without determinations, in which all this is stored up, without existing. It is only when I recall one representation, that I bring it out of that interior to existence, before consciousness” (ibid.).

So the very process of recollection makes the idealization of my intuitive experiences explicit simply from the fact that if I choose I can bring the content of a single experience back to conscious attention. As Vernon puts it, “ideality, then, is the general name for the abstracting activity of the formal, universal ‘I’.”

42 Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 61. Jennifer Ann Bates also emphasizes this point concerning the universality of the ‘I’ in Hegel’s Theory of Imagination (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), 81. Bates also analyzes Hegel’s earlier conception of imagination within subjective mind (or spirit), which provides useful historical context for the evolution of Hegel’s thinking about the imagination and the sign. However, both Bates and Vernon contend, erroneously in my view, that the sign is inherently communicative and that this is shown in Hegel’s analysis of the intelligence’s understanding of the sign. Yet Hegel makes no such claim. In fact, nowhere in the sections on the intelligence and on the sign in particular is any community, any notion of communication, or the need for intersubjective coordination and agreement invoked. On the contrary, my contention is that language only comes to serve this role for “objective mind,” not subjective mind (and a fortiori psychological intelligence). For subjective mind, the goal seems apparent: individual, subjective freedom as freedom from determination by the external world. Subjective mind creates signs, I contend, because the form of pictorial representations are still derived from outside the subject whereas signs bear the distinctive mark of subjectivity in themselves. While communication through signs is—I agree with Bates and Vernon—implicit in Hegel’s
Images are for Hegel not little mental pictures in the mind or brain, but rather tools of selection and sorting of more concrete images. They are organizational and recognitive tools. Images highlight certain facets of formerly experienced intuitions (because they are *idealized* into the I) to make future intuitive content recognizable and sortable. To be clear, Hegel is not endorsing a position analogous to John Locke’s theory of the association of ideas and the formation of signs. On the contrary, Jim Vernon insightfully compares Hegel’s theory of images to Husserl’s conception of “meaning intentions,” where “images are formal, intentional schemas for determining objects within intuitive fields through abstracting attention.” Images, whether more or less abstract, are selectors, and Vernon’s reading secures even greater justification if we remember that it is the content of *feeling* (*Gefühls*) that is internalized to become the content of an image. They are means for the intelligence, based on its own subjective intentions, feelings, mood, aims, etc., to relate and organize the images it has developed from stored, intuitive content, as well as means to recognize new intuitive content it encounters and attends to.

Thus, an image is an idealized intuition, which in being placed before the intelligence, in its “own [mental] space and time,” is made explicit. A logical consequence of this representational activity of the intelligence is that “the image no longer has the complete determinacy that the intuition has, and is willful or contingent, in general isolated from the external place, the time, and the immediate context in which the intuition stood” (*EPG* § 452).

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philosophy of subjective mind and eventually produces the need for a mind that takes itself as objective, as fashioning and constructing an objective world (in part through language), this only becomes apparent once the limitations of subjective mind and its understanding of signs are revealed at the culmination of the philosophy of subjective mind. We will deal with “objective mind” and its communicative understanding of language in Part II. Vernon, *Hegel's Philosophy of Language*, 52. I agree with Vernon’s interpretative suggestion, which seems confirmed when Hegel identifies the utilization and relating of images with subjective intentions and “moods” in *EPG* § 455 Addition.
While the intelligence can recall the content of previous intuitions, those intuitions in being represented to the intelligence are not as clear and determinate as they appeared when the I intuited them. We could say that intuitions become corrupted by the abstract individuality of the I, and so when they are presented back to the I consciously, many of these details (e.g. the specific play of colors and sounds at Niagara Falls) become fuzzy and indiscernible.

Accordingly, a second consequence of this activity is the capacity to create increasingly general and abstract representations, ones that elide more and more specific features of the original intuition to form what Hegel calls a “universal [allgemeine] representation, which forms the connection between” two or more images (EPG § 456). Therefore, the intelligence can manufacture increasingly abstract and general representations by selecting out certain features of different images by which it compares and contrasts them, each of which contains certain features and determinations derived from the original intuition. For instance, I can abstract from all the trees I have seen to form an abstract representation of a tree, an abstract “image” of a tree, and this enables me to compare and contrast the particular images of an oak and a pine, which I have recollected from my previous intuitive experiences. Interestingly, this capacity for representation allows for a recognition of things as belonging to a type or as “subsumption of the individual representations under a universal representation” based on how certain features are retained in an abstracted image and applied to new intuitive content (ibid.).

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44 See Vernon, Hegel's Philosophy of Language, 50-54.
45 Thus, we see the important difference between Hegel's notions of a representation (Vorstellung) and a concept (Begriff), where the latter unlike the former is divorced from all reliance on intuitive content. As abstract as a representation may be, it is originally derived from our intuitive experiences, from the content of our intuitions. In common English, we are perhaps used to using “concept” and “idea” interchangeably with “general representation,” but it is paramount for Hegel to distinguish between these notions for they implicate different capacities and modes of mind. Hegel addresses this explicitly in EPG § 456 Addition.
The acts of recollection also have consequences for the structure of the I itself, which does not remain what it was formerly as a merely intuiting intelligence.

To conceive intelligence as this nocturnal pit [nächtlichen Schacht] in which is stored a world of infinitely many images and representations, yet without being in consciousness, is on the one hand the universal requirement to conceive the concept as concrete, as we conceive e.g. the seed as affirmatively containing, in virtual possibility, all the determinacies that come into existence only in the development of the tree […] Hence intelligence is to be conceived, on the other hand, as this unconscious pit [bewußtlose Schacht], i.e. as the existing universal in which what is diverse is not yet posited as discrete. And in fact this in-itself is the first form of universality that presents itself in representation” (EPG § 453 Remark).

The intelligence shows (for itself) that it has two aspects, one that covers and hides the other, an active power that houses a virtual storage pit containing a diversity of images. The intelligence intuit objects outside itself, but it also demonstrates it is the underlying power over these intuitions insofar as it can recollect them internally (i.e. mentally) and contemplate them as representations within itself. I can recall a representation of Niagara Falls even though many of the details of that intuitive experience are lost to me, and this shows that I have power over this representation, namely the power to recall it in my mind. Of course, this power of the I comes at the expense of the context of the original intuition as well as the immediate sensuous clarity and resplendence it possesses. So recollection instigates a new, internal division of the I: on the one hand, an active power for idealizing intuitions and recalling images; on the other, a conscious-less (bewußtlose) storage pit of images.

However, the capacity for recollection is not the same as that of imagination (Einbildungskraft, literally the crafting or forming of an image). If recollection relies on a storehouse of images I have accrued due to my past intuitive experiences, imagination is an active capacity to mix and match pieces and parts of my stored images. To be sure, imagination
like recollection requires the capacity for storing intuitions and thereby transforming them into mental images. But imagination makes explicit what the intelligence can now do with its images. Namely, it can transform them into new intuitions; it can create new, external content for intuitive experiences and not simply representations internal to the mind. What this shows is that the intelligence can translate its mental content into mental content possessing the form of external objects, i.e. objects of intuitive experience. In Hegel’s terms, imagination can bestow being (Sein) on an image such that it becomes an intuitable object external to the psyche. To clarify, he recapitulates the conceptual moves leading up to the creation of signs:

As reason, intelligence starts by appropriating what is immediately found within itself […], i.e. by determining it as a universal; correspondingly its activity as reason (§ 438) is, from the present point on, to determine as a being what within it has been perfected to concrete self-intuition, i.e. to make itself into being, into the thing [Sache]. When active in this determination, it is self-expressing [sich äußern], intuition-producing: (γγ) sign-making fantasy” (EPG § 457).

For instance, if I demonstrate my capacity for recollection when I can recall “in my mind’s eye” an African lion that I saw at the Atlanta zoo many years ago, the capacity for imagination is shown in the creation of the mythological image of the Sphinx with its head of human, body of a lion, tail of a serpent, and wings of a bird. True, the parts of the Sphinx have been previously intuited and stored as images, “but,” Hegel maintains, “in the subject, in which it is stored up, the image has only the individuality in which the determinations of its content are linked together; its immediate concretion, by contrast, i.e. the initially only spatial and temporal concretion, which it has as a unit in intuition, is dissolved” (EPG § 455). The unity of the I is now what holds images and representations together; they no longer possess the immediate unity they had in intuition. Rather, the unity of the content I intuited (a vision and odor of this lion) is dissolved, and its parts can be rearranged and recomposed with parts of other images I possess.
The only remaining unity is the unity of the I, that which recalls images and stores them virtually, in its “own space and its own time.” Thus, “the content reproduced, belonging as it does the the self-identical unity of intelligence and sent out from its universal pit, has a universal representation for the associating relation of the images” (ibid.). The imagination makes explicit the capacity of the intelligence, of the I, to create both new images composed of parts of stored images as well as new intuitions that possess existence external to the mind.

To be clear, Hegel is not claiming that the intelligence can now fabricate a new lion or Sphinx out of thin air, simply by the power of the mind. Rather, the intelligence can create new intuitions that signify a subjective representation for the intelligence, meaning that the intelligence now has the power to create external intuitions that possess a hidden significance for itself, a significance not immediately apparent from the intuition itself. So signs possess the outward form of an intuition, but bear a subjective significance for the intelligence, which the intelligence itself has assigned to it. Hence, I could produce a new intuition—for instance, ☼⁞—and link it (in my mind) with an internally stored representation of a lion. I have then produced a sign: an intuition that possesses a representational meaning that is radically different than the content of the intuition itself.46

The creation of signs explicitly unites both sides together such that an intuition qua sign now possesses a representational meaning it did not formerly possess, and it possesses this subjective meaning only insofar as the intelligence bestows it. At the cost of losing the intuition’s

46 However, signification and the creation of signs does not imply they are translatable between individuals. Signification does not imply a shared system of meaningful signs. This creation only demonstrates the capacity of the psyche to transform the content of intuition into signifying objects, if only significant for itself and not for others.
immediate clarity and specificity when it is stored as an image, the newly created intuition attains a meaning from the intelligence. The intuition becomes an externally existent signifier bearing the form of intuition and the content of subjective representation. Thus, the creation of a sign is an additional idealization of an intuition—a subjectively created intuition that signifies a representational meaning for the intelligence. This ideality has come full circle to occupy a material position outside the mind but in such a way that it now possesses an entirely new significance. Such a creation demonstrates the capacity of the intelligence to unite an intuition with a mental representation, or put differently, the capacity of an intuition to signify a subjective, representational meaning.

We should already be able to recognize how the creation of signs demonstrates a power of the intelligence to abstract itself away from its concrete, intuitive experiences as well as from its bodily sensations. A sign possesses meaning or significance because of the activity of the intelligence and not “in itself,” apart from the active intelligence that affixes a representational meaning to it. If this view of the sign approaches a version of subjective idealism—a view of the world as existent only insofar as it is subjectively experienced and cognized—this is not so far off. At least not at this juncture.

However, Hegel’s position does not collapse into subjective idealism. First of all, it should be apparent that the content of intuition remains as material for the intelligence to idealize and recombine; thus, the intelligence cannot completely jettison its dependence on an external world that provides material to first be intuited and then fashioned into subjective images and signs. My semiotic creations still have their origin in my immediate, intuitive experiences. Even if the immediate unity of the content I intuit is shown to be decomposable and recomposable, this
does not mean that the material given to or found by the intelligence, the *stuff* from the “outside” as it were, can be eliminated. The intuited content must be retained in an idealized form in order to be shaped into new intuitions that signify something different *for* the intelligence. Secondly, it should also be apparent that the intelligence now seeks to externalize and express itself through signs that exist independently of itself. This does not mean it seeks to communicate with others at this point; rather, the psyche seeks to demonstrate for itself that the outside world is idealizable and re-composable according to its own subjective aims. Indeed, the act of creating a sign is for Hegel an externalization of the I itself, of the mind, of subjectivity, a fashioning of the mind into an external *thing*. This need to create new signifying intuitions *outside the mind* undermines a key premise of any subjective idealism.

We can now clearly see why Derrida calls the sign an *Aufhebung*. The sign is an intuition that is significant for the intelligence not merely as an immediate intuition, but as a signifier of a subjective, representational meaning. Yet as we just saw, an image is also an *Aufhebung* of an intuition, where the latter becomes unmoored from the place it was originally experienced (though it is also retained in this stored, idealized form). An image is an idealization of an intuition, where an intuition is canceled but retained in a different imagistic form (“inside” the intelligence). A sign would then be a double *Aufhebung*, for both intuition and representation would attain their significance for the intelligence by being united into a single, signifying entity.

47 See Vernon, *Hegel's Philosophy of Language*, 57, where he encounters the same specter of subjective idealism for the subjective imagination. However, to overcome this problem, Vernon posits the existence of a community of minds who share an understanding of signs, which makes the connection between intuition and representation in the sign “objective” or intersubjectively determined. Again, though Hegel eventually demonstrates the requirement for an intersubjective community of language users, he does not do so in his philosophy of subjective mind. Here, it *remains* a problem, only addressed by the forms of objective mind. But already, Hegel lays the foundation for dissolving the cloud of subjective idealism by showing how the intelligence creates signs outside itself.
Before moving on to Hegel’s discussion of linguistic signs in particular, it is important to note the distinction he draws between signs and symbols as this bears on his account of linguistic signs. Both signs and symbols are for Hegel two-sided entities constituted by an internal relation between an intuition and a representational meaning. Both are intuitions understood by the intelligence based not on their immediate sensory qualities but by what representations they provoke and are paired with for the I. Yet Hegel maintains that “the sign is different from the symbol, from an intuition whose own determinacy is, in its essence and concept, more or less the content which it expresses as symbol; in the sign as such, by contrast, the intuition’s own content and the content of which it is a sign, have nothing to do with each other” (EPG § 458 Remark).

Hegel therefore distinguishes sign and symbol based on how their two sides, intuition and meaning, relate. The symbol wears its representational significance more or less on its sleeve, on its surface, where from the content of a symbolizing intuition one can more or less immediately grasp the meaning it symbolizes. For instance, consider as a symbol a common road sign with a squiggly arrow pointing up indicating a curvy road ahead. Or perhaps another showing the outline of a person beside a wall where pieces of the wall seem to be falling towards the person from above, which warns of falling rocks or ice. These symbols (and many similar road signs) display an image, abstracted from many concrete, situational details, which indicates a potential danger (i.e. its meaning) by presenting an image that bears noticeable resemblance to the dangerous situation itself. Certainly, part of the subjective creation of signs and symbols entails that they can be misunderstood, but the intention of creating a symbol is to make as obvious a connection as possible between the content of the symbolizing intuition and its symbolized
The intuitive side of the symbol somewhat reflects or pictorially represents the concrete situation it indicates, and it is crucial in understanding a symbol that the content of the intuition itself is taken as significant only because it symbolizes a different, symbolized meaning for the person who observes it.

By contrast, the sign characterizes an intuition “which represents a wholly different [ganz anderen] content from the content that [the intuition] has for itself” (EPG § 458 Remark). The content of the sign qua intuition is significantly different than the representational content of what that intuition signifies. For instance, the term “hat” bears no resemblance to a thing I wear on my head, just as a stop light bears no resemblance to the action of pressing a foot down on a peddle or halting a moving vehicle. The sign unites a maximum of difference between intuition and meaning, whereas the symbol maintains a relative resemblance between the two.

Thus, the difference between sign and symbol is for Hegel one of degree and not in kind, of a “more or less” resemblance between the content of an intuition and the content of its representational meaning. It is as if the symbol revealed its soul too readily, on its face instead of hidden under the surface of a pyramid, like the sign, which conceals its soul, its significance, beneath the “external” surface of intuition and within the “internal” realm of representation. As Hegel puts it, “In signifying therefore intelligence displays a freer willfulness and mastery in the use of intuition than in symbolizing” (EPG § 458 Remark). The creation of signs, more than the

48 See Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 126-127, for his discussion of the contingency of linguistic interpretation. Of course, this contingency and the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpretation persists throughout the use of all signs and symbols. Hegel seems to first raise this possibility when he later discusses how two people unite their language in contracts and agreements of exchange, and the consequent possibility of unintentional wrong. See GPR §§ 79, 84-86. We will return to this issue when we analyze potential interpretive agreement and disagreement, mutual understanding and misunderstanding, in Part II.
creation of symbols, reveals the great power of idealization possessed and enacted by the I on the things it aims to understand.

At this point, we should return to the reason for Hegel’s invocation of signs and the need for the intelligence not just to understand intuitions as signifying but to make signifying intuitions. As we have seen, the intelligence creates signs to solve a particular problem: the givenness of intuitive content. If the intelligence initially finds the content it intuits as from the outside, from beyond the I and its subjective activity, then this finding or givenness of intuitive content serves as an obstacle to the intelligence's free knowledge—that is, a knowledge of things generated from the intelligence itself, not given from the world external to the subject. Whereas in the anthropology the human body signified its inner soul, now in the psychological intelligence, any intuition whatsoever (and not merely the body) can serve as a signifier of an inner soul. A raised hand can signify a command to halt, even though this gesture bears little resemblance to such a command. Thus, the sign, or more specifically the creation of signs, achieves this end of overcoming the givenness of intuitive content by showing how the intelligence can understand an intuition anew as signifying a representation that the intelligence itself has bestowed on the intuition. This creation—inseparable from the intelligent understanding of the created intuition as signifier—demonstrates the intelligence’s capacity to create new unities, where the content of created intuitions (e.g. a human-made stop light) represents or signifies a different meaningful content for the intelligence. The significance of signs lies not in their intuitive content but the meaning that intelligence unites with it and thus with the subjectivity externalized in the sign itself—a new power of self-determination.
2.5 Linguistic Signs: Naming Sounds

The irreducible privilege of the name is the keystone of the Hegelian philosophy of language.
-Jacques Derrida

Once Hegel introduces the sign as an *Aufhebung* performed by the intelligence of the originally encountered content of intuition, why then the need for linguistic signs? What makes the linguistic sign unique? What differentiates the linguistic sign from other kinds of signs—in particular, what makes the linguistic sign the sign *par excellence* such that it performs in the best way the function of the sign [giving intuitions “an existence that carries weight in the realm of representation” (EPG § 459)]? Relatedly, why is a language system, a system of linguistic signs, necessary to solve the problem of the givenness of intuitive content and so free the intelligence from its initial “foundness”?

Admittedly, the uniqueness of the linguistic sign is a difficult question to answer and one that Hegel does not address fully. One would hope that he would clearly carve out a specific place for the linguistic sign and a linguistic sign system amidst the vast plurality of potential and actual signs, yet given his incomplete account, it requires explaining more precisely than Hegel himself does how the creation of linguistic signs is directly connected with the need of the intelligence to make itself into an intuitable thing in the world. In fact, Hegel’s failure to distinguish rigorously between linguistic signs (and the linguistic systems they form) and other kinds of (often non-systematized) signs would seem one of the main reasons commentators erroneously conflate Hegel’s philosophy of language with his theory of linguistic signs. So we

49 “The Pit and the Pyramid,” 96.
50 Derrida in “The Pit and the Pyramid” verges on this error multiple times, and it is not apparent to me whether or not he finally conflates the two. For a clearer identification of Hegel’s philosophy of language with his theory of
must flesh out the brief, undeveloped reasons he provides for this distinction and his prioritization of the linguistic sign. There appear to be three related reasons, though as we will see these reasons are insufficient for differentiating linguistic and non-linguistic signs.

First, Hegel argues for the conceptual importance of signs that exist temporally, in *time*, where emitting sounds is given priority as a means for linking a new intuition to a representational meaning. For Hegel, signs that are initially spatial (*Räumliches*) make explicit the structure of the intelligence, of the I—namely, of their creator—once they are given a temporal existence, thereby indicating the self-negating and transformative nature of the I more than a sign that exists spatially.

The intuition, which in its immediacy is initially something given and spatial, acquires, in so far as it is used as a sign, the essential determination of occurring only as sublated [*aufgehobene*]. Intelligence is this intrinsic negativity [*Negativität*]; thus the more appropriate shape of the intuition that is a sign is a reality in *time*—a disappearance of the reality as soon as it is, and in its further external psychical determinacy, a *positedness* [*Gesetztsein*] by the intelligence, emerging from its own (anthropological) naturalness,—the *sound* [*Ton*], the fulfilled expression [*Äußerung*] of self-announcing inwardness (EPG § 459).

Utterances possess conceptual priority over spatial signs because they indicate more directly the fact that the temporal sign is a product of the subjective intelligence.

Now, it is unclear why Hegel believes signs initially (*zunächst*) exist only (or primarily) spatially, for he is clear that the intelligence creates signs in externality, outside itself to be intuited in space *and* time. Signs cannot have merely spatial existence if they can be intuited, as

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Hegel well knows. Despite this error, his point seems to be that signs that possess temporary existence as sounds issuing from the human voice and signifying representational meanings make explicit the nature of the I, both its anthropological existence (with a human voice) and its “negativity”—in other words, its idealizing activities of image and sign production.

“Sound,” as Hegel maintains in the anthropology, “is the temporal positedness of corporeality, the movement, the vibration of a body within itself, a trembling, a mechanical tremor in which the body […] moves only its parts, posits its inner spatiality temporally, thus sublates its indifferent asunderness and by this sublation lets its pure inwardness emerge, but immediately restores itself from the superficial alteration it has undergone from the mechanical tremor” (EPG § 401 Addition). This distinction between space and time is first raised in the Philosophy of Nature, and the trembling nature of the body in vocalization for Hegel lends it significance for the sign-making intelligence.

When an individual vocalizes, they express or “externalize” (äußern) themselves, issuing signs, by making their body (i.e. the vocal cords) vibrate. This internal vibration of the body to express one’s mind, one’s intelligence, is for Hegel paramount. In the Philosophy of Nature, he maintains that the voice of an organism “displays its self-movement as a free vibration within itself” (EPN § 351). Unlike vibration, spatial dislocation or migration requires a relation between two different things. Thus, the voice is for Hegel a self-Aufhebung, where the speaker’s body is at once “negated” (producing internal movement) and preserved or maintained by the body’s homeostasis.

Even further in the case of deliberate or conscious utterances (as opposed to crying out in pain), this internal vibration directly links the creation of the sign and the physical vibration of
the body. So in issuing a vocal sign (unlike, for instance, moving the hand to produce a mark or a script), the intelligence links the conscious and deliberate creation of a sign with the body’s internal vibration and the animal’s “freedom of self-movement” (ibid.). Once again, the intelligence unites the anthropological body and the consciousness of outer objects. Thus, according to Hegel, vocalization shows the I moving only in relation to itself. And remember that the goal of the intelligence is to become free from what it merely finds given from outside itself, so such vibration only in relation to self appears a significant achievement.

Presumably, though Hegel does not make this explicit, he sees a potential in the case of writing for the reader to forget or overlook the fact that an intelligent human had to move their body in such a way as to produce it, since written signs can be separated both spatially and temporally from the subject who inscribes them. For instance, we could come across marks on a wall and wonder if they were carved by intelligent creatures or merely geological erosion. If we carved them, we would need to remember that event to recognize the carving as signs and not random scratches. Unless we have other means for deciphering whether or not they were deliberately created signs (i.e. recognition that the marks are constituents in an already-created sign system, whether presently in use or not), the marks themselves do not indicate their origin in an intelligent subject.

51 A problem Hegel does not address is the fact that often the listener need not be present with the speaker, which seems to undermine the connection between the body and the sign. This could be the case even if the speaker and the listener were one and the same subject—for instance, if one speaks in a vacuum. But this does not qualify as speech in Hegel’s terms. Furthermore, communication technology seems to further problematize Hegel’s differentiation between speech and writing. For instance, if the voice is recorded on a vinyl record or computer hard drive or server, it seems there exists the same potential for forgetting the corporeal origin of the sign as in the case of writing or written texts, particularly if a computer convincingly simulates the sound of a human voice. Derrida (“The Pit and the Pyramid,” 105-108) raises this issue in a slightly different way, problematizing the connection between (the technology of) writing and the primordial “presence” Hegel sees in the act of speech.
Moreover, writing requires an external element—e.g. inscribable surfaces like paper, writing utensils, computer machinery—whereas speech requires only the body and air, which is one of the body's natural constituents. This is why Hegel calls spoken language (Tonsprache) the original language (ursprünglichen)—not in an historical sense, but conceptually for the mind attempting to free itself from the givenness of intuitive content. What matters for the *intelligence* it that it creates signs using its own voice, which directly links its body and the overcoming of intuition performed by creating the sign.

Accordingly for Hegel, the vocalization of signs mirrors the nature of the intelligence, of the I, as a (self-)negating *power* or a power of self-*Aufhebung* (a negating that also preserves what is negated). Indeed, there are several levels of “negation” at work here. As we just mentioned, the voice is an internal bodily vibration or trembling—for Hegel a self-negation or a negation of the apparent stasis of the body to reveal the body’s truth: internal and external movement. Even more abstractly, however, time is for Hegel a negation of space, where (to put it much more briefly than Hegel) temporal moments negate each other (shown in an interminable series of present “nows” replacing each other) and negate the “indifference” that different spatial points possess in regard to each other. To put it differently, a spatial “point” (i.e. a spatial location) can exist simultaneously with a different spatial point two meters away, whereas a temporal point (i.e. a temporal moment) cannot coexist with any other temporal moment except virtually (e.g. in histories or memories). One “now” cannot coexist with another “now”.

52 Though Hegel’s psychological account of signs and his differentiation between spoken and written signs is not historical, he does seem to agree with Herder (among others) that spoken signs precede written language. Compare *EPG* § 459 Remark with Herder, “Essay on the Origin of Language,” Section 3.

53 See *EPN* §§ 201-202.
Though to be clear, this indicates nothing about things that exist or endure in space and time, but only about the abstract concepts of space and time themselves. In Hegel’s terms, spatial locations “are posited in the sphere of self-externality, and negativity, in so doing, appears as indifferent to the inert juxtaposition [Nebeneinander] of space. Negativity, thus posited for itself, is time” (EPN § 257). Time, in itself, is a negation of itself—a self-negation of temporal moments or of “nows” that supersede and replace each other—and the concept of time is also a negation of the concept of space insofar as temporal moments “negate” each other because they cannot co-exist and must replace each other.54

Furthermore and more importantly, the actual creation of signs in space and time “negates” the given content of intuition by replacing it with a created sign that can now be intuited by the intelligence itself. Given intuitive content is supplanted by subjective signifying inventions. When I coin and say the word “leanmur” and assign to it a meaning of a small primate who often rests by leaning against trees, I have “filled” with my own creation the outer space and time of intuition. I have made the vibrations of the air signify. Moreover, this movement is also heard by myself, such that the movement of the body characterizes both the production of a sign and the comprehension of its meaning.

Hence, speech, in all these ways, is in itself the product of self-negation—namely, of the

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intelligence. The temporal characteristic of speech (i.e. the fact that, like a temporal “now,” it disappears or dissipates after it appears) demonstrates how the vocalization of signs negates both space (in which written signs are inscribed) and the stasis of the body (to reveal its self-comprehending movement), while preserving the internally dynamic unity of the speaker. As Jim Vernon claims, vocal sounds as signs negate/sublate space twice. First, sound negates space by transferring the abstracted mental images or ideas of external objects into sound, and again by erasing itself as negation/sublation of space in that very negation/sublation […] Vocalizations, then, are both the natural (cf. Anthropology) and the ideal (cf. Aesthetics) expressions through which the inner states are intuited externally."

Hence, it seems that Hegel wishes to maintain that vocalized linguistic signs, unlike many others, are directly connected with the voice and that this gives them priority (at least for the psyche) over other types of signs. That said, nothing about the fact that linguistic signs may be issued from vibrations in the body distinguish them from other vocalized signs, so more is necessary to support the particular esteem Hegel gives to linguistic signs.

The fact that, as Hegel claims, linguistic signs are more determinate and systematizable than other signs provides a second reason for distinguishing and esteeming them over others, though this reason too seems insufficient to account for their uniqueness.

Sound [Ton] articulating itself further for determinate representations, speech [Rede], and its system, language [Sprache], give to sensation, intuitions, representations a second, higher reality than their immediate one, in general an existence that carries weight in the realm of representation” (EPG § 459).

The system (System) of language is, of course, not the same kind of system Hegel aims to produce—a systematic science of philosophy (der Philosophischen Wissenschaften)—though

55 Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 63.
unfortunately, he does not clarify his use of this term in reference to language. Neither does he clearly justify why spoken language, unlike other sets of signs, should be understood as sound “articulating itself further for determinate representations [bestimmten Vorstellungen].” Why would the representational meanings signified by speech be more “articulated” than those of non-linguistic cries or utterances? Or perhaps speech is simply defined by Hegel as the most “articulated” system of utterances the voice can produce?

Perhaps though, these questions somewhat miss Hegel’s point. Again, we have not yet gotten to the point in the Encyclopedia where a community of language speakers is necessary. So we should avoid any appeal, implicit or explicit, to an already constituted system of language shared and formed by a linguistic community, such as “natural” languages like English and German. Doing so would warp Hegel’s view to make it fit into what we already presume language to be, presenting a thoroughly deflationary view of his theory of language. Put bluntly, we do not yet know what a vocalized linguistic sign is, such that it would be distinguishable from other vocalized signs. At this stage in the Encyclopedia, it seems likely that speech (Rede) for Hegel simply includes all deliberately vocalized signs produced and related to each other by the intelligence, be they recognizable terms like “name” or “image” or nonsense like “pluportable.”

56 Again, on this point, I depart from many otherwise perspicacious readings of Hegel’s philosophy of language, such as those presented by Cook (“Leibniz and Hegel on Language”), McCumber (The Company of Words), Vernon (Hegel’s Philosophy of Language), Bates (Hegel’s Theory of Imagination), and Surber (“Hegel’s Philosophy of Language: The Unwritten Volume” in A Companion to Hegel, eds. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2011), 243-261). Certainly, I agree with these commentators that Hegel believes language is fleshed out and determined through its use within a community, yet this is not at issue for the subjective intelligence. Crucially, to characterize his view of language in the dialectical manner he presents it, what matters is the systematic location of his analysis of the intelligence and linguistic signs, which prefigures his consideration of language as a tool for intersubjective communication and social organization. We must not jump ahead and appeal to subsequent forms of mind, and the individual and communal facets of language cannot be conflated if we are to approach Hegel’s view in earnest. This is why I analyze the nature of a linguistic community in Part II, only once the problem with the intelligence’s conception of language has been exposed.
On this matter, I agree with Jim Vernon when he claims that

because words are simply defined as articulated tones synthesized with a meaning, the range of ‘words’ within the lexicon would include not just nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs but multi-word expressions with one idea content, prefixes and suffixes that signify new meanings for the words to which they [are] attached, etc.”

I would only add that the extension of Worten needs to be even broader to include any spoken utterance that signifies, articulated in relation to other spoken signs, be they part of actual “natural” languages or not.

Thus, we can only presume that linguistic signs are relatively unique because the intelligence organizes and systematizes them (i.e. “articulates” them systematically in relation to other signs), relating their intuitive and representational sides to each other such that a “system” of language (i.e. an organized collection of linguistic signs) is produced. However, the precise bounds of what counts as a linguistic sign as opposed to a non-linguistic sign is not thereby determined. Hegel fails to explicitly clarify this distinction. Yet whatever signs are deliberately vocalized would presumably make them of the same type (i.e. vocal) and therefore systematizable. This systematization would make the signs included in such a system “determinate” based on their respective differences from each other, much as Saussure argued. At this point, Hegel avoids strictly limiting the extension of the term “word” (Wort) to a commonsensical understanding, opening the possibility that linguistic sign systems are

57 Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 64.
58 See Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, 117-118: “The conceptual side of value [of a linguistic sign] is made up solely of relations and differences with respect to the other terms of language, and the same can be said of its material side. The important thing in the word is not the sound alone but the phonic differences that make it possible to distinguish this word from all others, for differences carry signification.” The systematization of signs becomes explicit when the intelligence exercises its power of memory, where linguistic signs are serialized and organized based on the contingent desires of the subjective intelligence. See the section on mechanical memory below.
comprised of any and all spoken utterances that possess meaning (i.e. that signify a mental representation different from what the intuition includes in itself).

The third and final reason Hegel provides for distinguishing linguistic signs from non-linguistic signs is the relation between linguistic signs and names. After a long remark on language (EPG § 459 Remark) in which the term “name” (Name) is first introduced, Hegel then defines “names” as the primary product of the sign-making intelligence. “The name, as the connection [Verknüpfung] between the intuition produced by intelligence and its meaning, is initially an individual transient [vorübergehende] production, and the connection of the inner representation with the external intuition is itself external” (EPG § 460). He thus seems to recast signs produced by the intelligence as names, introducing a strange terminological difference that appears initially to have little substance. So why introduce the concept of the name if it is defined near identically to the sign?

The name is important for Hegel to mark the conceptual transition from sign-making imagination to a new capacity or form of the intelligence: memory. In the subsequent section on memory, Hegel will go on to argue that the subjective intelligence develops a new understanding of names—from seeing them merely as “external” or contingent connections (i.e. signs) between intuition and meaning to necessary, binding ones, all for the intelligence who, in committing names to memory, universalizes them (i.e. makes the connection between intuition and meaning permanent). Notice that the memorization of names does not form of new barrier, obstacle, or restriction for mind because names have been created by mind (and not the natural world); their memorization is an internalization of mind’s own products, such that they constitute a new tool by which mind determines and creates its own mental content. Crucial then to Hegel’s account is
that signs undergo a dialectical development according to the mind’s relationship to and progressive understanding of them, becoming names.

Key to noticing this dialectical distinction between sign and name is how Hegel speaks of them, how the former is merely defined whereas the latter is introduced as being initially the same kind of connection as the sign.\(^\text{59}\) Introducing the sign as the intelligence first understands it, he claims, “the sign is some immediate intuition, which represents a wholly different content than it has for itself” (EPG § 458 Remark). Yet he introduces names as products only initially understood in the same way—“the name, as the connection between the intuition produced by the intelligence and its meaning, is initially \([zunächst]\) an individual transient production” (EPG § 460). Implied (and subsequently argued) is the fact that the intelligence as memory will develop an importantly different understanding of the name, differentiating it clearly from the sign, as a connection not merely between an intuition and a representation but as “one [united] representation” in which the intuition itself is memorized and becomes representational. The name becomes a representational unity of two representations. So while Derrida goes a bit too far in claiming that “the irreducible privilege of the name is the keystone of the Hegelian philosophy

\(^{59}\) In all the insightful expositions of these sections of Hegel’s philosophy of mind, I have not encountered anyone who explicitly emphasizes this difference. Vernon (Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 74-76) rightly emphasizes the development of mind through the production and memorizing of names, but he does not clearly distinguish the name from the sign. Moreover, he couches the development of mind and “linguistic competency” in terms of interactions between individuals who use language and communicate with each other, which again I believe to be an error that prematurely invokes a community of speakers. Likewise, John McCumber (The Company of Words, 223-238) fails to clearly distinguish signs and names, though McCumber commits an additional error by categorically differentiating representational names (produced by imagination) from “names as such” (produced by memory) instead of seeing the latter (as Vernon does, correctly in my view) as a dialectical development of the former. McCumber too invokes a community of speakers and the history of languages to draw this distinction, which introduces additional problems concerning the relation between “representational names” and “names as such,” between names developed socially and historically (i.e. representational) and those produced by isolated individuals (i.e. those empty of determinate meanings)—problems not hitherto present in Hegel’s own analysis since the latter is not at issue at this stage of his Encyclopedia. McCumber is therefore forced to speculate that the two kinds of names are “homonymous,” which Hegel never asserts or even implies.
of language,” he is right that Hegel bestows greater significance on the name than the sign, particularly because it allows for articulating the former's dialectical activity.

Before moving on to analyze Hegel’s discussion of the psychological production of names and their significance for the memorizing intelligence, it is important to recognize that the three reasons provided for differentiating linguistic signs from non-linguistic signs (largely only implied by Hegel) are insufficient to categorize the former as a qualitatively distinct kind of sign, at least without a further elaboration of the role of articulation in distinguishing signs or a more precise account of how exactly linguistic signs are the “more perfect” (or most perfect?) method by which the subjective mind is signified. Nowhere does Hegel justify or even clearly assert a strict distinction between the two, and though he certainly mentions linguistic signs in his lectures as paradigmatic cases of signs in general, there is little textual evidence to suggest any rigid distinction between the two in these sections of the Encyclopedia. Linguistic signs appear set apart as consciously created signs articulated by the intelligence into a “system,” whether according to differences between their intuitive appearances or their respective, representational meanings.

Recognizing this lack is crucial for understanding how Hegel goes awry in his remark to EPG § 459 and fumbles his discussion of written languages. In this remark, which is infamous for its assertion of a conceptual hierarchy of written languages, he criticizes written Chinese and

60 See EPG § 457 Addition.
61 It could perhaps be argued that Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics provide a more convincing argument for their distinction, where poetry is defended as the highest art not only for its formal characteristics, but also for its varieties of contents and “way of imagining things.” See LA, pp. 971-1006. According to Hegel, language poetically used, particular in poems or what we might call poetic 'wholes', claims a great resource in various facets and intricacies of social languages. But no such evidence can be marshaled to support the claim that the subjective intelligence, the psyche, would have the same capacities to distinguish a particular linguistic variation of signs.
other non-alphabetical scripts for failing to recognize the importance of the alphabetical word and its function as a basic sign or semiological unit. On this account, Hegel’s criticism of a particular socially determined language like Chinese is hastily equated with a criticism of a particular culture (Bildung), and his very limited knowledge of Chinese leads him to identify Chinese writing as a hieroglyphic script. “A hieroglyphic written language would require a philosophy as stationary [statarische] as is the culture of the Chinese overall” (EPG § 459 Remark). Apart from the Eurocentric flavor of this comment as well as Hegel’s general failure to understand logographic languages, his main error lies in even broaching the topic at this point in the Encyclopedia.

If I am correct that Hegel provides insufficient or at least undeveloped resources (e.g. “articulation” and “perfection”) in these sections for distinguishing linguistic from non-linguistic signs, it should be even more apparent that a discussion of such socially and historically

62 Hegel’s criticism of the Chinese spoken language for its words being too polysemous is altogether odd and seems to contradict what he says in the preface to the Science of Logic, where he esteems the polysemy of certain German terms, which his philosophy makes ample use of (see Part III). “The imperfection of the Chinese spoken language is well-known; a mass of its words have several utterly different meanings, as many as ten, or even twenty, so that, in speaking, the distinction is made noticeable merely by stress and intensity, by speaking more softly or crying out” (EPG § 459 Remark). Likewise, his criticism of hieroglyphic written languages (which includes Chinese) amounts to claiming that despite their emphasis on correct “accentuation,” such written languages lack the “articulation” and “objective determinacy” present in alphabetic writing. “Owing to hieroglyphic written language the Chinese spoken language lacks the objective determinacy that is gained in articulation from alphabetic writing” (ibid.). Such articulation requires “genuine names” that signify “simple [non-decomposable] representations,” which he finds lacking in hieroglyphic writing, which prioritizes combining representations instead of simple names. Yet he then goes on to claim that “habit makes [alphabetic writing] a hieroglyphic script for us,” and given his esteem for habit in the transition between our initial “natural” being into a “spiritual” being able to mold itself habitually and display its freedom (EPG § 410), it is altogether unclear how Hegel can maintain both that alphabetic writing becomes hieroglyphic for us through habitual use and that “hieroglyphic reading is for itself a deaf reading and a dumb writing.” I am not sure how to account for Hegel’s seemingly contradictory views here.

63 For an excellent, critical analysis of Hegel’s treatment of Egypt and hieroglyphic languages, which points out some hypocrisies of Hegel’s rather static treatments of non-European cultures and languages, see Jay Lampert, “Hegel and Ancient Egypt: History and Becoming,” International Philosophical Quarterly 35, no. 1 (March 1995), 45-58.
determined languages like Chinese, Egyptian, English, or German is, at least at this point, completely out of place. In the “Psychology,” the final section of “Subjective Mind,” analyses of particular cultural and social groups as well as the languages employed therein are not at issue. For his focus in this part of the system is the individual intelligence and how its psychological capacities (i.e. intuition, representation, thinking) allow the mind to free itself from how it merely finds itself. This section of the Philosophy of Mind intends to trace the dialectical development of an individual psyche and its creation and deployment of signs. This development, as I have shown, is inextricably tied to the movements of its body, how the body expresses the inner movements of mind, and this conceptual relation to the body is why the intelligence, in its efforts to become a free subject, prioritizes speech over written language—the proximity of the former both to the body and to self-negation. Questions of social and culturally-shaped languages become important only later in grasping why the use of language is necessary for Hegel in social groups.

What leads Hegel to hastily denigrate Chinese languages is something of a mystery, for it is unmotivated by the sections at issue and produces logical inconsistencies to which the rest of

64 This is not to forgive the gaps in Hegel’s account of the languages of various cultures, nations, and states, but it is to point out that such an analysis belongs within the context of his treatments of social groupings, ethical life, and collective uses of language. He returns to analogous versions of this hierarchy where it seems more appropriate (if no less problematic for its particular content) in his philosophy of the state and world history. See LPH, Vol. 3. To be sure, Hegel’s interjection in the “Psychology” of a cultural criticism of China opens the door for commentators to misconstrue his discussion of linguistic signs as invoking in some way an intersubjective community and culture, which I believe his discussion otherwise avoids to crucial effect.

65 This interpretative emphasis should at least suggest why a reading like Derrida’s in “The Pit and the Pyramid” is mistaken, for he conflates Hegel’s accounts of the sign, the linguistic sign, and language in general and reduces them all to the treatment of signs in Hegel’s psychology. The shortcomings with such a view with become more and more apparent as we analyze other uses and understandings of language in Parts II and III, which are importantly different, more complex, and less formal than the account of signs given here in the psychology. Indeed, those subsequent accounts reveal explicitly what is problematic about the understanding of language proffered by the psyche (i.e. its individual creation and the goal of verbally creating linguistic signs).
the text does not succumb. While Derrida is suspicious that Hegel’s criticism of Chinese indicates something problematic about Hegel’s entire account of signs and language, I am more circumspect in drawing such a conclusion. I readily admit that this remark is both out of place and insufficiently critical given Hegel’s own demand that philosophical truth be demonstrated “in its developed and unfolded truth” (PG § 76). Such a demonstration is lacking. In fact, if Hegel had understood written Chinese as linguists do now, as a logographic system, it would have provided him an opportunity to interrogate the relation between logograms and phonograms, or the difference between signifiers of words as opposed to alphabetical signifiers of sounds. Nonetheless, this blunder does not, in my eyes, undermine his previous discussion of the sign, nor his subsequent discussion of names.

Hence, instead of wading into the details of this unmotivated and problematic hierarchization of different scripts and written languages, I think it more important to show how his subsequent discussion of the memorizing intelligence—or simply, “memory” (Gedächtnis) as Hegel calls it—is more important for understanding the intelligence’s creation, understanding, and use of language (in the form of linguistic signs). In particular, if language, as I have argued, is raised by the intelligence or psyche to address the problem of merely finding the content of its intuition, its own subjective, mental capacities and content given to it from the outside, and thusly of the constraints such a gefundene nature of intuitive, recollected, and imaginative content imposes on its subjective freedom, then it is the memorization of signs that demonstrates

66 See note 62. For instance, Derrida points out that how Hegel exposes two “non-productive” contradictions, that is, logical contradictions that cannot simply be overcome if he is to maintain a hierarchy of alphabetical and hieroglyphic writing systems. See “The Pit and the Pyramid,” 102-104.
67 See “The Pit and the Pyramid,” 96-105.
a new capacity to overcome the found nature of such content. Memory forms the final form of “representation” and the final section in Hegel’s philosophy of subjective spirit where language is directly analyzed.

Now, we are to trace Hegel’s account of how the memorization of signs transforms them for the psyche into “names” (Namens) and further liberates the internally stored, intellectual content of mind from what it finds provided by its intuitive experiences—a furthering of its aim to become independent and free from an external world pushing it contents on a thinking subject from the outside. As I will now argue, Hegel’s account of memory shows that when mind produces signs and then memorizes them as names, it makes explicit its capacity to become a mechanical thing, realizing its aim to unite in itself a subject (“I”) and the objectivity of the external world (“being” or Sein) in turn recasting the “external” world as a constitutive part of mind itself. Interestingly, gaining independence from the external world entails not merely that the intelligence subject transforms intuitive objects into meaningful signs but also that its own subjectivity becomes an “external world” for itself. Mind becomes free by externalizing itself from itself, overcoming its initially posited distinction between its inner intelligence and an external world. By memorizing names mechanically, the intelligence overcomes the externality of the world from itself by transforming itself into a mechanical object. The memorization of linguistic signs therefore reveals new liberatory significance of language for mind.

2.6 Names and The Mechanism of Memory

It is in names that we think (EPG § 462 Remark).

If the imaginative creation of signs demonstrates not only the capacity of a subject to bestow representational meaning on intuitable objects but also its ability to create linguistic signs that
mean (bedeuten) something completely different than how they immediately appear (e.g. the
difference between the word “wrench” and the meaning it represents), why then is there a need
for us to follow Hegel into a discussion of how memory treats signs? Why does the imaginative
understanding of linguistic signs fall short for demonstrating the freedom of the subjective
intelligence? In short, why does our analysis of Hegel’s psychological account of language not
end with the imaginative creation and manipulation of signs?

The fundamental issue at stake is again the freedom of the subjective intelligence. The
phenomenon of language is not raised by Hegel ad hoc, or rather as an important topic that must
be addressed simply because his predecessors and peers deem it worthy of philosophical
investigation. On the contrary, linguistic signs appear in Hegel’s Encyclopedia as a
phenomenon created and used by the subjective intelligence for a specific aim. The goal of
fabricating signs and articulating linguistic signs is to free the psyche from an external world that
it finds itself submerged within.

At the opening of his section on memory in the Philosophy of Mind, Hegel provides a
summary of the development of the intelligence’s capacities for intuition, representation, and
finally to (imageless) thinking, and this overview highlights why the memorization of signs (into
names) is crucial to achieving the goal of subjective freedom.

But the mind is only with itself [bei sich] as unity of subjectivity and objectivity; and here
in memory [Gedächtnis], after the mind is initially in intuition so external that it finds its
determinations, and in representation recollects this find [dieses Gefundene] into itself

68 Though of course, as we have noted, Hegel’s views on language are influen-
ced by Herder’s naturalistic conception of the origin of language while he shares Fichte’s view of the goal of the ego (and Geist generally) as freedom. Jere Surber’s insightful essay on Fichte’s linguistic views is, on the contrary, oriented towards explaining Fichte’s essay as a response to an external metacritique of Kant’s philosophy and his own. See Surber, Language and German Idealism: Fichte’s Linguistic Philosophy (Amherst: Prometheus, 1996), “Interpretive Essay.” My tactic is rather to attempt to explain Hegel’s writings on language from within their systematic context.
and makes \textit{mach}t it its own, as memory it makes itself external within itself, so that what is its own presents itself as something that is found. One of the two moments of thinking, \textit{objectivity}, is here posited [\textit{gesetzt}] within the intelligence as a quality of intelligence itself (\textit{EPG} § 463 Remark).

This summary concerning the objectification of mind will guide our interpretation of his general account of memory, his particular understanding of the memorization of names, and the latter’s significance for showing how the act of memorization opens both a new self-understanding for the intelligence as well as a new comprehension of language and its liberatory function.

According to Hegel, two features of the imagination prevent the psyche and its creation of linguistic signs from demonstrating its own subjective freedom. First, the imagination is still burdened with content it has merely \textit{found} within its intuitive experiences, which forms the intuitive side of the sign (i.e. the signifier).\footnote{Jennifer Bates provides a different interpretation, arguing that the conceptual limitations of given, intuitive content is indicative of symbols but not signs. See \textit{Hegel's Theory of Imagination}, 90-93. Bates interprets the difference between sign and symbol as grounded on repeating the process of symbolization. This repetition eventually serves to form a sign as a “universal,” but “conventional” relation between signifier and signified, which takes on a communicative function within groups of persons. Repeat the construction of the symbol enough, Bates claims, and we create a sign (92). Yet Hegel in the \textit{Encyclopedia} never indicates the need for repetition to construct the sign. Nor does he raise the prospect that signs, as the intelligence creates them, are \textit{conventional}, nor social or communicative. Hegel only mentions that “in the sign as such, by contrast [to the symbol], the intuition's own content and the content of which it is a sign, have nothing to do with each other [\textit{einander nichts an}]] (\textit{EPG} § 458 Remark). At stake in Hegel’s discussion of imagination and memory is \textit{subjective} freedom, which he often equates with “formal” freedom, freedom \textit{from} the givenness of an external world—and not a freedom \textit{for} communicating with others to collectively shape social circumstances. For the imagination, the sign is more a matter of abstraction \textit{from} contexts than repetition \textit{within} different contexts. So I find no grounds for strictly distinguishing symbol from sign as a difference in \textit{kind} based on repetition. In fact, Hegel explicitly posits the difference as one of “more or less” correspondence between intuition and representation: “the sign is different from the symbol, from an intuition whose \textit{own} determinacy is, in its essence and concept, more or less the content which it expresses as symbol” (ibid.). Nevertheless, Bates emphasizes, as I do, the \textit{found} (\textit{gefundene}) nature of the content of images and the need of the intelligence to overcome this mere \textit{finding} and internalization of mental content by freely creating signs.}
For Hegel, images are recognitive markers, or, as Vernon contends, “meaning-intentions” in Husserl’s sense, which allow the categorization and organization of our intuitive experiences based on the images we form and our subjective intentions to achieve some end using these images. As with Husserl, there is no such thing as intuition simpliciter, only an intuiting activity directed by the desires and aims of active subjects. We must not forget that for Hegel the intelligence, like all forms of mind, is a movement. Images thus enable recognition of intuitive content as of such and such a type, structured according to the intelligence’s particular aims.

Yet because images are derived from intuitions by abstracting from many of their concrete particularities, so are signs. As Hegel claims, “in this unity [of the sign], stemming from intelligence, of an independent representation and an intuition, the matter [Materie] of the intuition is of course initially something received, something immediate or given” (EPG § 458). In its deployment of stored images, the intelligence is still bound by the content provided from the outside, from the objective world it intuits, even if those images are subsequently used as parts of a sign. Essentially, imagination is still constrained by the content it originally intuits as beyond itself and thus as a limit to its own subjective activity.

Second, imaginative creativity still relies on a strict mental separation between subjectivity and objectivity, particularly as it concerns where signs are understood to be produced. The sign-making imagination externalizes or expresses (ausdrücken) an intuition outside of itself, in the external world, even though that intuition now signifies a representational meaning for the intelligence, inside the psyche's headspace, as it were. The psyche draws a mental distinction between the existential locations of one side of the sign (i.e. the signifier)—

the external world as a created thing—and the other (i.e. the signified)—in its mental “space”.

The two-sided structure of the sign reflects the divided structure of the psyche itself insofar as the latter is internally divided between its body and mind, or more specifically, between external bodily expressions and internal, psychological capacities, activities, and mental content. Accordingly, Hegel can utilize the same geistig determinations (e.g. soul, sensation) to describe the structure of the sign. “When the intelligence has designated something, then it has finished with the content of intuition and has given the sensory material an alien meaning as its soul” (EPG § 457 Addition). The psyche sees itself reflected in its own imaginative creations, in part objective and intuitable and in part subjective and representational.

Thus, the psyche is not only burdened with an intuitive content merely found or given to it from the outside, but it also requires an outside, an external world, within which it expresses signs. By creating signs, it has not fully objectified itself—that is, the psyche does not yet understand itself as an objective space and time wherein signs are housed. Put differently, the intelligence cannot express its full self through linguistic signs; something always remains inner, inexpressible, as it must if we are to maintain a distinction between inner and outer. Signs are created in an objective space and time outside the psyche upon which the latter depends for its self-expression. So the intelligence has not yet overcome the problem with which we began Part I: inexpressibility, or the inability to say what I and only I mean. We still founder on Jean Hyppolite’s questions: “How can language […] be simultaneously that of which one speaks and the one who speaks? How can it realize within itself this unity of self and being?”

As should now be clear, the psyche itself is not strictly the object of the imagination, but

71 Logic and Existence, 21.
rather only the subject that transforms what it finds in the objective world, bestows on it subjective meaning, and then expels it back into the objective world. Subject and object are still distinct for the imagination, and because the subject depends on the objective world for content to form signs it has not yet achieved a unity between its intelligent subjectivity and the objective world such that it would become free from the latter's givenness. Thus, the sign has not overcome the limitations sets up by the psyche itself over and against its own free action.

Memory (Gedächtnis) for Hegel addresses these two limitations of the imagination. It does so generally by memorizing signs and transforming them into names. Initially, as we saw, Hegel equates “name” and “sign” since in both “the connection of the inner representation with the external intuition is itself external” (EPG § 460). But conceptually, a name is not only a sign created by the imagination but a sign memorized by the psyche. “The recollection of this externality [i.e. the sign, the external connection between intuition and representation] is memory” (ibid.). The sign is produced by externalization (or expression) and the name by internalization (or memorization). The question we must address then is how the act of memorization transforms signs into names and how this act overcomes the limitations of the givenness of the objective world and the need of the psyche for an outside in which to express.

Let us clarify the meanings of the terms “subjective” and “objective” as they operate here, since it is crucial to grasp Hegel’s esteem for memory, the subject/object relation at work in memory, and how he sees the processes of memory overcoming the conceptual limitations of imaginative creation. Interestingly, memorizing names can be understood both as a subjective activity—an individual activity, an inwardization of signs created and expressed by the individual—but also as a bizarre objectification of mind insofar as memorization makes the
psyche into a theoretical container or *space* of names.

Allow me to be more specific. In the subjective sense, memorizing signs and transforming them into names enables the psyche to restrict itself to relating, associating, and organizing “things” that exist only inside itself, internal to and constitutive of its psychological domain (what Hegel calls the “realm of representation”). The intelligence, the I, walls itself up within its own subjectivity since what it has memorized was created by its own active imagination. As Hegel claims, memory just is “the recollection of this externality,” that is, the sign (*EPG* § 460), and “intelligence, as memory, runs through the same activities of recollection regarding the intuition of the word, that intelligence, as representation in general, runs through regarding the first immediate intuition” (*EPG* § 461). But this time, memory, unlike mere recollection, internalizes not an immediate intuition but a sign it previously created and expressed. It internalizes an already signifying intuition and makes it representational, representing a similarly internal (and representational) meaning. Thus, what memory shows is that the signifier itself, a created intuition like “poochy,” can itself, in being memorized, become a *representation* and no longer a signifying intuition. Everything, both sides of the sign, are now representational, “so that the content, or meaning, and the sign are identified, are one representation” (*EPG* § 461).

For example, “given the name lion [*Löwe*], we need neither the intuition of such an animal, nor even its image; the name, when we *understand* [*verstehen*] it, is the simple image-less [*bildlose*] representation” (*EPG* § 462 Remark). Names, unlike mere signs, are understood by the psyche as internalized, not externally expressed—collected (by memorization) in the internal mental space of the psyche instead of produced in objective space and time. Names are
thus not \textit{expressions} (\textit{Ausdrücke}) in Hegel’s specific understanding of the term. Nor interestingly does he align his use of the term “name” with more orthodox understandings of names as appellations, titles, or even acts of “calling.”\footnote{For a rather unorthodox conception of naming as a “calling” or “calling out” and the connection of naming to responding, mourning, and death, see Jacques Derrida \textit{The Animal That Therefore I Am}, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 18-21. Derrida certainly recognizes the importance of names in Hegel’s philosophy of language, going so far as to claim that “the irreducible privilege of the name is the keystone of the Hegelian philosophy of language” (“The Pit and the Pyramid,” 96). However, we cannot help but be suspicious that Derrida misunderstands Hegel’s conception of names by defining names in Hegel simply as specific kinds of linguistic signs—in particular, spoken words. This suspicion seems validated when Derrida fails to note that names are not strictly \textit{signs} for Hegel, but memorized representations. Thus, the following claim of Derrida’s seems incorrect: “The word, and the name, which with its categorem is the word par excellence, function in this linguistics as the simple, irreducible and complete element that bears the unity of sound and sense in the voice” (ibid.). Names are not spoken, they are memorized, and both sides of the name are representational. In fact, as we are soon to see, memorizing names for Hegel ends up doing precisely the opposite of what Derrida maintains: voiding names of any sense, becoming senseless (\textit{sinnlose}).} They are rather memorized objects, taken into the mental space and time in which the psyche need only manipulate its own internal content to arrange and order the names it has memorized.

Yet at the same time, in the objective sense, the psyche’s \textit{objects} of knowledge (i.e. names) have become internal, “subjectivized,” such that it has transformed for itself (i.e. in its own understanding of the relation between subject and object of knowing) its own subjectivity into an \textit{objective} realm. An objective realm of \textit{representation}. As should be clear at this point, on Hegel’s view, the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity is both \textit{ontological} and \textit{epistemological}, such that it relies in part on how I \textit{think} and \textit{conceive} the difference. Knowing is both a subjective (epistemological) activity, but also (an ontological) something that exists and can be examined.\footnote{In the introduction to the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, Hegel summarizes this complex relation of epistemological and ontological dimensions of mind both in terms of a subject/object relation and a relation between knowledge and truth, concluding that we need not import our own criteria to judge whether or not our knowledge of an object corresponds to the essence or true nature of the object: “If we designate \textit{knowledge} [\textit{Wissen}] as the concept [\textit{Begriff}], but the essence or the \textit{true} as what exists, or the \textit{object}, then the examination consists in seeing whether the concept corresponds to the object. But if we call the \textit{essence} or in-itself of the \textit{object the concept}, and on the other hand understand by the \textit{object} the concept itself as \textit{object}, viz. as it exists \textit{for an other}, then the...
whether that be the physical body, an individual mind, or an intersubjective spirit infused within a social group—of course, directly impacts a subject's understanding of itself (of its mind, its Geist) and the objective world. In the particular case of memory, the activity of memorizing and contemplating names recasts the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, such that they now overlap in the mental “headspace” of the memorizing intelligence.

Thus, “memory” in Hegel designates not merely as a subjective capacity of mind, but an ability to make the mind itself into a space, domain, or “realm” of things.74 Moreover, the memorization of signs and transformation of them into names defines what a name is for the psyche. “The name is thus the thing [Sache], as the thing is available and carries weight [Gültigkeit] in the realm of representation [im Reiche der Vorstellung]” (PG § 462). Acts of memorization undertaken by the psyche transform both its understanding of its powers and its real contents—it becomes filled with internalized names—and its internal, nominal objects of knowledge are subsequently entirely representational, “without intuition and image.” As Jim Vernon claims, “the developments of memory must be understood as progressively, and radically, altering the subjective, formal ‘I’.”75

For Hegel, memorizing is an internalization of an externality, a making of what the psyche experiences as outside itself into part of itself. When signs, of which a part is intuitive

74 See EPG § 463: “This supreme recollection of representing is the supreme self-externalization of intelligence, in which it posits itself as the being, as the universal space of names as such, i.e. of senseless [sinnloser] words.”
75 Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 73.
and derives its content from intuition, are memorized, their intuitive content becomes representational just like their meanings. Signs become “names” in Hegel’s sense by internalizing both sides, signifiers and signified meanings, making both represent each other. This means that names, unlike mere signs, are entirely representational, two-sided entities, such that the content that was previously found intuitively and synthesized with a meaning (to create a sign) is now transformed into a representation of representational meaning. The name, though internally divided, is nonetheless entirely representational. Here is how Hegel puts it:

Intelligence takes the connection, which the sign is, into its possession, and by this recollection elevates the individual connection to a universal, i.e. permanent, connection, in which name and meaning are for it objectively combined [verbunden], and makes the intuition, which the name initially is, into a representation, so that the content, or meaning, and the sign are identified, are one representation, and the representing in its inwardness is concrete, with the content as its reality: the memory that retains [ behaltende] names” (EPG § 461).

Instead of an intuition and a representation being synthesized into a single, two-sided sign, the name is an internal unity of representations.76 This is why memory has only to do with representations and no longer any intuitive content. A “name” unlike a mere sign is representational through and through, a two-sided representation united based on the psyche’s own subjective intentions and activities. This new nominal unity makes the connection between

76 Hegel often contrasts a synthesis of different things—which he sees as an external, contingent conjoining of two inessentially related things or words, as in the case of the propositional judgment “The cat is black”—with a unity of difference, where the link reveals the essence of the things united, such as in Hegel’s “speculative propositions” (discussed in depth in Part III) like “The actual is the rational.” For Hegel’s account of this contrast as it relates to methods of analysis, synthesis, and speculative unity, see EL §§ 227-232. It is not incidental that in the logic his account of the difference between analysis and synthesis, on the one hand, and speculative unity, on the other, is directly related to the latter's overcoming of “the simple finding and givenness of its content” present in methods of analysis and synthesis (EL § 232). The key to this distinction are the respective relations between what is united—are the two things externally, contingently, arbitrarily, or incidentally related (e.g. in “The building is three stories tall”) or are they internally, essentially, or universally related (as in speculative propositions like “Minds know themselves”)? The transition from imagination to memory traces a similar transition as that between synthetic and speculative methods, or between synthetic judgments and speculative propositions.
internalized representations, between signifier and signified, in Hegel’s terms, *objective* and *universal* instead of merely *subjective* and *individual*.

Few commentators note this conceptual difference between sign and name. For instance, Daniel Cook sees no difference between sign and name, leading him to confuse Hegel’s use of “name” with more typical usage, such as when Cook suggests that “we name an object.” Hegel neither says nor implies any such thing in the *Encyclopedia*. On the contrary, he claims that the name *becomes* “the thing [Sache], as the thing is available and carries weight in the realm of representation” (*EPG* § 462). There is no thing or object that is named; the name is the thing, or “subject matter” as *Sache* is sometimes translated. What has become important for the intelligence is the representational meaning of its memorized names, for the objects of memory are merely representational *Sachen*. For his part, John McCumber attempts to get at this difference by distinguishing different kinds of names: “names as such” and “representational names.” But following Jim Vernon, I find this distinction unmotivated by the text, which leads McCumber to introduce the idea of non-representational names. Yet since McCumber’s argument bears directly on what Hegel calls “mechanical memory,” we will return to it below, along with Vernon’s criticism, when we turn to mechanical memory. For now, it is sufficient to note Hegel’s unorthodox usage of the term “name,” which does not designate an appellation or title like “Daniel” or “Empire State Building,” but simply a sign that has been memorized. This is why he can use the example of “lion” as a name (*EPG* § 462 Remark), in a use quite different from a more orthodox understanding of what qualifies as a name (the word “lion” being more

78 See McCumber, *The Company of Words*, 229-238.
79 Ibid., 234.
commonly understood as a common noun).

Thus, when I memorize signs that I have created, such as “floober,” “sickers,” and “wunning,” I treat them as objects of knowledge filling the space of my mind. Since I first created and then memorized it, “floober” and its meaning (e.g. the act of someone sticking out their leg to prevent a fall) is both part of me, part of the contents of my mind, but also a thing distinct from me insofar as it, as a particular name, is distinguishable from me, from the I itself—from the mental activities that represent and arrange it within series of names. Thus, as Hegel claims,

the name, as existence [Existenz] of the content within the intelligence, is the externality [Äußerlichkeit] of intelligence itself within itself; and the recollection of the name as the intuition produced by intelligence is at the same time the self-externalization [Entäußerung] in which intelligence posits itself inside [innerhalb] itself (ibid.).

Memorizing names makes the subjective intelligence into the psyche's own object, but in a particular way: a “nominal” space filled with internalized names. The memorizing mind has made itself into an “external” object.

This is an easily confused but crucial moment for the intelligence’s development and its understanding of the power of language. For the psyche achieves by memorizing signs an objectification of itself, of its internal mental space, by exerting its subjective power over the signs it has created. “The association of the particular names lies in the meaning of the determinations of the sensing, representing, or thinking intelligence; the intelligence traverses series of these determinations within itself as it senses, etc. (EPG § 462). The meaning of names is dictated by the individual, subjective intelligence, and language—or more specifically here, the internalization of linguistic signs—has become the means for demonstrating that the meaningful relations between signs simply constitutes the content of mind. So when
experiencing the world, the intelligence simply interprets its sensations in terms of the names it has memorized, relating that external content solely in terms of its internalized names retained within its own mental space.

Nonetheless, the intelligence must still draw a conceptual distinction between the capacities of the intelligence or I itself and its internal, nominal contents. Put differently, there is a difference between the I as the activated capacity to arrange and organize names and the names themselves. Names remain in a strict sense distinct from the intelligence itself seen as a (universalizing) power of mind, even if they are its (particular) contents. “In so far as the interconnection of names lies in the meaning, the connection of the meaning with their being as names is still a synthesis; and in this its externality the intelligence has not simply returned into itself” (EPG § 463). Subject and object of knowledge have not become united for the memorizing intelligence because of this separation between the mental activity of the I and the content it possesses and arranges. This constitutes a limit on the freedom of the intelligence—of what it can do, how it can understand itself, and how it can shape the conditions for its own actions—insofar as the contents of its mind are distinct from its own activities and powers. Required to overcome this limit is “the sublation [Aufheben] of that distinction between meaning and name” (ibid.)—in other words, a deeper understanding of what names are and how they, in themselves, are indistinct from the acts of linking meanings to names. Put differently, the I must see its own power at work in the structure of the name itself. This requires a more precise recognition of the representational nature of names.

What Hegel calls “mechanical memory” makes explicit the representational nature of the name. The name is no longer, like the sign, an intuitable object, but one representation united
with another—constituting a representational name-meaning unity. This fusion is why Hegel claims the “individual connection” of the sign becomes, in the memorized name, “a universal, i.e. permanent, connection, in which name and meaning are for it objectively combined” (EPG § 461). As intuitable, the sign is an individual linkage between intuition and meaning, but as memorized, the name is a fixed representational relation among other memorized names. Even further, the internalization that memory undertakes reveals the intelligence itself as the connection between representational name and representational meaning, such that it now understands itself both as a power of memorization and a container of nominal connections.

But intelligence is the universal; the simple truth of its particular self-externalizations, and the appropriation that it carries out, is the sublation [Aufheben] of that distinction between meaning and name. This supreme recollection of representing is the supreme self-externalization of intelligence, in which it posits itself as the being [Sein], as the universal space of names as such [Namen als solcher], i.e. of senseless words [sinnloser Worte] (EPG § 463).

The intelligence is the series of connections between non-sensory, representational names, while at the same time acting as the power of internalizing and serializing names. Hegel continues,

Ego [Ich], which is this abstract being, is, as subjectivity, at the same time the power over the various names, the empty bond [Band] which establishes within itself series of them and keeps them in stable order. So far as they just are, and intelligence within itself is here itself this being of theirs, intelligence is this power as entirely abstract subjectivity” (ibid.).

The inner mental space of the intelligence becomes filled with series of names, representational bonds established between internalized names. Thus, “as mechanical memory, intelligence is at once that external objectivity itself and the meaning” (EPG § 464), for the significance names have in relation to others are established by the intelligence itself. But why exactly does Hegel call memory at this stage “mechanical,” a mere mechanism of memorization, and why does the “external” connection between name and meaning in the psyche make memory mechanical?
“Mechanism” is a logical category expounded in the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia Logic*, but it also found here, as a mental capacity of the intelligent mind, as well as in the *Philosophy of Nature* in his analyses of classical, mechanistic physics and various natural processes. In the logical sense, “as a unity of distinct [terms],” for Hegel,

[mechanism] is *something-composite*; it is an aggregate, and its operation upon another remains an external relation. This is *formal mechanism* [*formeller Mechanismus*].—In this relation and dependence the objects remain equally independent; they offer resistance, and are *external* [*äußerlich*] to each other” (*EL* § 195).

The parts of the mechanism function together to form a larger whole, but even in their functioning together, they are only contingently connected such that they could be replaced by other parts to fulfill similar functions. Much as an assembly line worker could be replaced by another to perform the same task in relation to the whole mechanical assemblage.

80 Despite their significant differences, both Thomas Hobbes and Rene Descartes defend mechanistic conceptions of the universe, the former extending it further than the former by applying it to the functioning of mind. See for instance *English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839), Part Second, Third, and Fourth. Strikingly, Hegel’s view of names hews quite close to Hobbes’, who argues that names (which are neither simply expressed “signs”) function to spur an individual’s memory. For Hobbes, “a name is a word taken at pleasure to serve for a mark, which may raise in our mind a thought like to some thought we had before, and which being pronounced to others, may be to them a sign of what thought the speaker had, or had not before in his mind” (16). Like Hegel, Hobbes claims that signs are “arbitrary” connections (16) determined by neither signifier nor signified, and he also distinguishes names from “signs” based on the fact that the latter must be expressed through actual speech (in Hegel’s terms, the “self-externalization” of spoken signs). Names “though standing singly by themselves, are marks, because they serve to recall our own thoughts to mind” (15). This resonates with Hegel’s understanding of the relation of names and thoughts, positioning them in close conceptual proximity. “It is in names that we think” (*EPG* § 462 Remark). So for both Hobbes and Hegel, names serve, whether or not we use them to communicate with others, to instigate thoughts and associate mental representations, if only to ourselves. It is important to see that despite the fact that Hegel criticizes the inadequacy of the concept of “mechanism” and the mistaken idea that the mind possesses a fundamental “mechanical” or “mechanistic” nature, he nonetheless argues that “mechanical memory” fulfills a necessary (though insufficient) function as mind. Both Hobbes and Hegel recognize the significance of names for individual memory, memory that in its final form for Hegel becomes explicitly *mechanical*—a system of disparate parts linked in a process to produce an end or product distinct in kind and function from the parts. The whole “mechanism” is an interlocking and functioning of parts, even though what the whole produces (or the whole that is produced) seems to exist separately from the process of its production. It is as if the “whole” of a mechanical process existed *alongside* the parts of the process instead of as the overarching unity of the process and its constituents. For an interesting investigation of the role of mechanism in Hegel’s political philosophy, in which it serves an analogous role as “mechanical memory” does in the psychology, see Nathan Ross, *On Mechanism in Hegel’s Social and Political Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2008).
Notably, in his remark to this section in the *Encyclopædia Logic*, Hegel anticipates the notion of mechanical memory in the *Philosophy of Mind*, remarking how the memorization of words can make them into externally related units analogous to parts of a mechanism:

Just as pressure and impact are mechanical relationships, so we have mechanical knowledge, too: we know things by rote [*auswendig*], inasmuch as the words remain without sense [*Sinn*] for us and are external to sense [*Sinne*], representation [*Vorstellen*], and thought [*Denken*]; the words are in like manner external to themselves: they form a senseless sequence [*sinnlose Aufeinanderfolge*] (*EL* § 195 Remark).

Mechanical memory accordingly has a more concrete sense than the general concept of mechanism since it instantiates the conceptual features of mechanism within the embodied, active intelligence. In the concept of mechanism generally, “in this relation and dependence the objects [that form parts of the mechanism] remain equally independent; they offer resistance, and are external to each other” (*EL* § 195). “External” means, in this sentence, an inessential or unnecessary relation between objects, such that something can act as a mechanistic part without being essentially related to the other parts of the mechanism. Just as a conveyor belt is inessentially related to a kiln even if they participate as parts of the same industrial mechanism.

So in the specific case of memory, the “objects” that form the whole mechanism are specified further as names, not just as mechanistic parts. The whole mechanism that unites its parts is conceptually *external* to and distinct from the nature of the parts themselves (considered as discrete objects), just as the mechanical memory that internalizes and serialized names is a mind externally relating its own contents. Put differently, mechanical memorization is an internalization that links and organizes separate, discrete names, which are unrelated except for the fact that they are all related *by* the intelligence.

Summarizing the conceptual progression from the capacity of intuition to self-
externalization of mechanical memory, Hegel claims,

The mind is only with itself [bei sich] as unity of subjectivity and objectivity; and here in memory, after the mind is initially in intuition so external that it finds its determinations, and in representation recollects this find [dieses Gefundene] into itself and makes it its own, as memory it makes itself external within itself, so that what is its own presents itself as something that is found. One of the two moments of thinking, objectivity, is here posited within intelligence as a quality of intelligence itself” (EPG § 463 Remark).

Whereas the psyche understood the content it intuited as external to itself, found in the outside, objective world, now as an activity of mechanical memorization it experiences its own internal, nominal content as external, found content—sequences of inherently unrelated names. Mind has transformed itself into a sort of objective space where names as discrete units are related and sequenced.

We can experience this bizarre internal externality of mind in cases when someone’s name seems to pop into our mind out of nowhere, so to speak. Suppose that last week a person introduced themselves to me and gave me their name, but that now I cannot recall it. I cannot remember the name by recalling the intuition or image (i.e. abstracted markers) of a person—their height, hair color, habitual gestures, gait, etc. But then, suppose also that upon further reflection, perhaps by listing out the names of people I met in the past week, I recall this person's name: Petunia. I experience the name “Petunia” as a name I have memorized and internalized, but also as externally connected to other names I know simply by the fact that they have all been memorized by me. For Hegel, this occurs when we memorize “by heart” (Hegel’s word: auswendig) a poem or speech we are to recite.

If a memory is properly mechanical, we attach no sense (Sinn) to the words—they are merely names related to other memorized names. In this case, the synthesis of names with meanings is overcome (“sublated”) by being submitted to mechanical ordering by the
intelligence, demonstrating its power over the names it has memorized. “But intelligence is the universal; the simple truth of its particular self-externalizations, and the appropriation that it carries out, is the sublation of that distinction between meaning and name” (EPG § 463). The names no longer signify something outside the intelligence, for instance, names of people we met at the same time, coworkers, friends from the same city, or students who attended our alma mater. For mechanical memory, nothing about the names themselves, say “Petunia,” “Fei,” or “Husan,” indicates how they should be related in our mind. For the point of mechanical memory (i.e. its aim) is to demonstrate the subjective power of the psyche to form its own idiosyncratic arrangement of names and not to rely on intuitive experiences, representations of persons, or any other “outside” objective content to which the names refer. This is important because it demonstrates the power of the mind to relate internalized content—names—within “a meaningless sequence” (EL § 195). Thus, for mechanical memory, the mind is the connection formed between these names as well as the real power to link them. Language as mechanical memory sees it—i.e. as the imaginative production of signs and their memorization as names—serves to free mind from representational content given from the outside world.

This conception of mechanical memory and the understanding of names by memory brings us to an interpretive disagreement between John McCumber and Jim Vernon over how we are to understand Hegel’s contention that mechanical memory “posits itself as the being, as the universal space of names as such, i.e. of senseless words [sinnloser Worte]” (EPG § 463). Everything hinges on how we understand Hegel’s use of sinnloser, and it seems to us that both interpretations are wanting.

McCumber contends that for Hegel “names as such” are a specific kind of meaningless
sign or word, different in kind from “representational names,” which signify discrete meanings and mental representations that have been cultivated within a linguistic community. ⁸¹ Representational names gain traction and intersubjective weight according to their use in various social discourses, whereas “names as such,” according to McCumber, “do not have the representational meaning which signs present.” ⁸² If names become *sinnlos*, McCumber interprets this to mean that names become *meaningless*, articulated sounds stripped of any representational significance. Names as such are a “kind of senseless individuality,” which “retain in this the same intuitional content as the representational names from which they come; and it would appear that, as is the case with such names, this content is disregarded by the Intelligence, which posits names as such as simple.” ⁸³ Whatever meanings that were previously assigned to words are “disregarded” after they have been mechanically internalized, such that the subjective intelligence can now manipulate and order them however it chooses. Thus, “in presenting what they present, names as such operate as do signs; but they do not have the representational meaning which signs present.” ⁸⁴ After the memorization of these empty, “disappearing” words (disappearing because they are meaningless sounds), what then occurs is a “dialectical” process whereby philosophers like Hegel employ and redefine empty “names as such” in their writings (which, according to McCumber, are “‘homonymous’ with the names of representational language”). ⁸⁵ These philosophical interventions into the realm of “representational language” progressively enrich, through the strategic, speculative use of homonymous “names as such”

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⁸¹ McCumber makes this argument in *The Company of Words*, 229-238.
⁸² McCumber, *The Company of Words*, 234.
⁸³ Ibid.
⁸⁴ Ibid.
⁸⁵ Ibid.
Jim Vernon disputes McCumber’s reading, arguing that “names as such” do not designate a special kind of meaningless name or sign since “names without meanings would simply be sounds, and names that receive new meanings are formed in a manner identical to any name (i.e. a unification of *Bedeutung* and *Ton*). As such, the very idea of a *meaningless* name is a contradiction in terms, and there is no more ‘objective’ manner of acquiring words.”86 On the contrary, Vernon argues “the memorized words must be posited as lacking any relations to each other,” but not as possessing no meaning since that would degrade them from signs to non-signifying sounds.87 Memorizing names for Vernon thus allows a subject “to test the validity of subjective ideas against those of others through an objectively inter-subjective medium,” which “develops from purely subjective associations of sound and meaning through to the memorization of the generally articulated signs used by the community.”88 For Vernon, mechanical memory unites subject and object by filling the subject with objective content (i.e. names) at the same time as it strips from mind anything “subjectively or culturally particular” and opens the possibility for truly “objective” thinking.89 This leads Vernon to a subsequent analysis of the way Hegel’s *Logic* provides a template for an Hegelian universal grammar, where the empty relations between names are filled in by logically deduced grammatical structures.

While both authors offer insightful readings on many aspects of Hegel’s account of mechanical memory, my interpretation differs from both in significant ways. I find Hegel’s use

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86 Vernon, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Language*, 77.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 76.
89 Ibid., 79.
of the term *sinnlos* ambiguous, and he does not consistently distinguish *Sinn* from *Bedeutung*.  
So what exactly does it mean for mechanically memorized names to be *sinnlose*?

Memorized names are devoid of *sense* in two senses of the term: they are not *sensory* (*sinnlich*) since they are comprised of a dual-sided representation (in the name, as Hegel claims, both intuition and representation are welded into “one representation”); and they have no *sensible* (i.e. *semantic*) relations to other memorized names. Both McCumber and Vernon seem to agree on the latter fact—mechanical memorization makes names into isolated, discrete units, “external” to each other. The only sense they have is that they are all collected and internalized by the mind. Yet the former sense of *sinnlos* is misunderstood by both in their effort to attribute to Hegel’s conception of the intelligence an underlying reliance on a community of others outside the intelligence. To reiterate what we have already maintained, Hegel never appeals in his analysis of the intelligence, including mechanical memory, to a community or social body within which linguistic signs must be vetted, tested, and made into modes of communication.

The invocation of others or a social community thus confuses the expressed aim of the intelligence as Hegel sees it: “formal freedom” (*EPG* §442). “Subjective mind is productive; but its productions are formal” (*EPG* §444). For words to become senseless once they are memorized is thus to say both that their content is no longer tied to any intuition and that they

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90 For instance, this (previously quoted) passage in Hegel’s introduction of mechanical memory appears to conflate “meaning” and “sense.” “But intelligence is the universal; the simple truth of its particular self-externalizations, and the appropriation that it carries out, is the sublation of that distinction between meaning and name. This supreme recollection of representing is the supreme self-externalization of intelligence, in which it posits itself as the *being*, as the universal space of names as such, i.e. of senseless words” (*EPG* §463). Also relevant is this passage from the *Encyclopedia Logic*: “Our knowledge is said to be mechanical or by rote, when the words have no meaning for us, but continue external to sense, conception, thought; and when, being similarly external to each other, they form a meaningless sequence” (*EL* §195). “External to sense” and “meaningless” appear to signify the same thing.
now “represent” only the power of the subjective intelligence.

So while McCumber and Vernon are right to stress the separation of mechanically memorized names from the content given by intuitive experiences (where signs become non-sensory names), the failure to appreciate what these memorized sounds (Töne) come to represent leads them both to erroneous interpretations.

I agree with Vernon that “names as such” do not designate a special sort of name. Furthermore, little textual evidence can be provided for McCumber’s suggestion that names as such and representational names are simply homonymous, nor that they are dialectically integrated by speculative philosophers. On the contrary, mechanically memorized names are names, but names that are no longer sensory, i.e. do not possess intuitive content. Moreover, in so far as the names themselves become inner representations, the intelligence itself becomes the meaning and sole significance these internalized names possess. Hegel makes clear that the memorized name cannot be a name without “something else, the meaning of the representing intelligence, in order to be the thing, the true objectivity” (EPG § 464). Thus, as Vernon rightly claims, memorizing names makes them “completely external to each other,” becoming discrete representational units. That they are all stored in the intelligence is the only “meaningful” relation they stand in to one another qua names, so the psyche becomes the “empty bond” linking them.

However, I disagree with Vernon’s interpretation of Hegel’s claim that mind, in the transition from mechanical memory to thinking, “has no meaning [Bedeutung] any more” (EPG § 464), and at root of this divergence is a different grasp of the goal of the psyche. For Vernon,

91 Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 77.
Hegel’s psychology dictates that “a medium is required that allows the exchange of formal ideas between subjects. Minds must have a way of expressing their ideas to other intuiting subjects for the purpose of confirmation.” Thus, the aim of mechanical memory is to enable a shared venue for communication and the expression of linguistic signs understandable by all members of a community. “In other words, while language is (meant to be) objectively of the other, the senses and relations expressed within it – in both form and content – are contingently subjective. Thus, the memorized words must be posited as lacking any relation to each other.” What is crucial on Vernon’s account is that mechanical memory strips the meanings of words of their subjective contingency such that their semantic content can then be determined objectively through ongoing intersubjective dialogue structured by universal grammatical forms (which Vernon develops out of Hegel’s subjective logic).

While this account seems plausible prima facie, I want to pose a different interpretation by foregrounding Hegel’s own expression of the aim of subjective intelligence: the production of “objective fulfillment [die objektive Erfüllung], thus at the same time producing the freedom of its knowledge” (EPG § 442). That is, the goal of the psyche is to make itself into an objective realm, a space in which it no longer receives content or form from the outside, but from its own subjective activities.

But the mind is only in its right mind as unity of subjectivity and objectivity; and here in memory, after the mind is initially in intuition so external that it finds its determinations, and in representation recollects this find into itself and makes it its own, as memory it makes itself external within itself, so that what is its own presents itself as something that is found. One of the two moments of thinking, objectivity, is here posited within intelligence as a quality of intelligence itself (EPG § 463 Remark).

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92 Ibid., 58.
93 Ibid., 77.
In other words, the aim of memory is to make the mental space and time of the intelligence into a free realm independent of the outside world. Thus, the intelligence aims, if it can be put this way, at the formation of a psychosphere—an arena where the psyche both creates things and cognizes them as its objects of knowledge. Mechanical memory satisfies this criterion by internalizing names, which does not yet presuppose engagement or communication with other subjects. The subject finds only itself, its own external “objectivity,” in the names it contemplates.

If my interpretation of mechanical memory rings disturbingly of subjective idealism, where the mind encounters nothing that is not mind, this is not far off. If mechanical memory unites subject and object, it is a formal subject, an abstracted I, filled with formal objects—“names as such” that it relates, sequences, and organizes. An expansive ego for a narrowly circumscribed world; gone is the significance of rich, given intuitive content. This kind of freedom is subjective and formal because the objective fulfillment accomplished is limited only to a narrowly circumscribed mental space of memorized names. Seen in a negative light, this is a limit of subjective idealism, a mind encountering only itself ad infinitum.

However, Hegel also sees in this formal objective fulfillment an importantly positive dimension as well. Mechanical memory demonstrates the capacity of mind to make itself into an objective space, even if this space is too individual and too narrowly inscribed. The goal, again, is to overcome the given and found content of intuition, and memory has achieved this feat—only at the expense of shrinking to senseless names the domain of its epistemic objects.

Notice that nowhere in my account of Hegel’s psychology do I appeal to other minds, for Hegel himself makes no such appeal. Vernon’s (and Jennifer Bates’)

94 See Bates, Hegel’s Theory of Imagination, ch. 5.
of minds should, at the very least, make their accounts suspect since they import a presupposition of many interacting minds into the psychology, which Hegel never mentions. Not only does he conclude the phenomenology section of the Philosophy of Mind by equating reason with the I, with the subjective individual, in the very next section as the beginning of the psychology, he claims, “Mind, therefore, sets out only from its own being [seinem eigenen Sein] and is in relationship only with its own determinations [seinem eigenen Bestimmungen]” (EPG § 440). Throughout the psychology, what is at issue is the I, the efforts of the I to create an objective realm for itself, through both the creation of signs and their subsequent memorization. Hegel’s invocation of other individuals in his previous analysis of self-consciousness in the “Phenomenology” section should not lead us astray; that account demonstrates that our self-awareness as conscious beings requires a “life and death struggle” but it implicates language in no way (EPG § 432). The necessity of encountering and struggling with others to recognize our own self-consciousness does not lead straight away to a full-blown intersubjective community, but to an awareness of ourselves as universal, self-aware egos.95

The universality of reason, therefore, signifies the object, which in consciousness qua consciousness was only given, but is now itself universal, permeating and encompassing the I. Equally it signifies the pure I, the pure form overarching the object and

95 The importance I place on pinpointing how precisely intersubjectivity emerges in Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind (i.e. that it does not involve language) does not prevent me from agreeing with Marina F. Bykova’s account of the “positive account of intersubjectivity” that Hegel formulates in the “Phenomenology” section in terms of a “struggle for recognition.” See Bykova, “The “Struggle for Recognition” and the Thematization of Intersubjectivity” in Essays on Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjectivity Spirit, ed. David S. Stern (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 139-154. For a good account of the normative role of mutual recognition, see also Robert R. Williams, “Freedom as Correlation: Recognition and Self-Actualization in Hegel’s Philosophy of Spirit” in Essays on Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjectivity Spirit, 155-179. Williams rightly criticizes Robert Pippin’s historicist and constructivist account of normativity in Hegel, arguing for the centrality of freedom as the goal of spirit, which sets the normative standard for successful mutual recognition between persons. I too emphasize the significance of freedom in my reading of Hegel and find this aim structures Hegel’s accounts not only of intersubjectivity but of language as well.
encompassing it within itself (EPG § 438).\(^96\)

Presupposing the need for intersubjective \textit{communication} is unjustified, skips ahead in Hegel’s rather meticulous conceptual derivation of language, and overlooks the necessity to \textit{justify} the relation between an individual subject’s engagement with language and how it functions intersubjectively.

Moreover, on my interpretation, mechanical memory explicitly achieves the aim of objective fulfillment, whereas the introduction of this mode of mind seems underdetermined or unjustified on Vernon’s reading. For Vernon, mechanical memory is supposed to empty out the I, purge it of its entrenched habits of understanding what words mean such that it can then begin to construct “a universal grammar,” where grammatical “relations would be universal to any and all linguistic minds.”\(^97\) Yet this emptying-out is only required if one presupposes that communicating with other minds is \textit{necessary} for freedom, something the psychology itself \textit{does not show}. Whereas Hegel’s discussion of self-consciousness demonstrates the necessity of others in recognizing ourselves as self-conscious, it does not show the necessity for \textit{communicating} with others in language. That recognition is demonstrated by a risking of one’s life in a struggle to the death. But an individual psyche need not assume the necessity of communicating with others to ensure its subjective freedom, for it can individually grasp the internal/external relations operative within its psychological understanding of language, where language arises as a set of

\(^{96}\) An analogous move occurs in the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, where self-consciousness leads not immediately to spirit (\textit{Geist}), but to reason (\textit{Vernunft}). See PG § 231: “In grasping the thought that the \textit{single} individual consciousness is \textit{in itself} absolute essence, consciousness has returned to itself.”

\(^{97}\) Vernon, \textit{Hegel’s Philosophy of Language}, 77.
signs created by the imagination.  

Furthermore, in his lectures on the *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel identifies the negativity of the linguistic sign with the intelligence itself: “the genuine, concrete negativity of the linguistic sign is the *intelligence*, since through intelligence the sign is changed from something *external* to something *internal* and is *preserved* in this recast form. Words thus become a reality animated by thought” (*EPG* § 462 Addition). The intelligence need not contrast and distinguish itself from other subjects to recognize its own negativity and the analogous structure of the signs it creates. Hence, in contrast to Vernon’s interpretation, I find that it is “objective spirit,” which is chronicled at length in the *Philosophy of Right*, that actually demonstrates the necessity of communicating with others in particular ways.**99** What universality is at work in the psychology is, as Hegel claims, the “infinite universality” of the I and not the intersubjectivity of a linguistic community (*EPG* § 438).

Therefore, the significance of mechanical memory lies, I maintain, in how the objectification of mind as a mere container of names enables the mind to dispense with the need for meaning (*Bedeutung*) altogether—specifically, the need of a distinction between signifier and representational meaning. If thinking mind, which conceptually arises after mechanical memory,  

98 Saussure, like many linguists, presupposes a linguistic community and the situatedness of individuals using language within such a community. He thus begins from the presupposition that language must be a *complete system*, or at least he constructs his theory of linguistics from the God’s eye perspective of a completed linguistic system. “For language is not complete in any speaker; it exists perfectly only within a collectivity” (14). He then goes on to describe such a perfected system. Sign systems are then described straightaway as actually intersubjectively determined (in the French “*langue*”), and individuals play only a role in *expressing* linguistic signs in their individual utterances (i.e. the French “*parole*”). Consequently, such a linguistics fails to interrogate the capacity of an individual subject to create new signs for themselves, even if philosophers, artists, and others fabricate linguistic signs and even partial sign systems quite often. The *reception* of such signs by others is not here at issue. Crucially overlooked are thus the *creative* aspects of sign creation performed by individual subjects (or the ability of *parole* to influence *langue*). The importance of this subjective, creative capacity seems to me to justify why Hegel raises the topic of poetry and poetic language in his discussion of the psyche.  

99 Part II below fleshes out and defends this claim.
“has no meaning any more, i.e. the subjective is no longer something different from its objectivity,” this is because the linkages between memorized names just is the mind itself. Semiotic meaning arose from the distinction between the two sides of the sign, intuitive and representational. But for mechanical memory, meaning is not something other than the mind that arranges significant relations between names. Mind is the bond between names. Representational mind has thus been overcome by recognizing that in arranging and sequencing names both sides of which were representational, nothing is being “represented” to mind any longer. There is nothing to “represent” to mind except mind itself. So it is not, as McCumber believes, that memorized names are no longer representational or meaningful nor that, as Vernon contends, the subjectivity of meaning can only be overcome through the development of universal forms of grammar. On the contrary, the senseless “meaning” names now possess is simply the thinking mind itself, without distinction between signifier and signified.

Understanding the conceptual significance of memorizing names allows us now to grasp Hegel’s conception of subjective thought, or thinking (Denken). Intelligent thought for Hegel is not a re-presentation of what subjects find or experience intuitively. Rather,

its product, the thought, is the thing; simple identity of the subjective and objective. It knows that what is thought, is; and that what is, only is in so far as it is a thought […] the thinking of intelligence is having thoughts; they serve as the content and object of intelligence (EPG § 465).

When we experience the world as individual thinkers, we use the names we have memorized to interpret and understand those experiences, traversing the series of those names as our thinking proceeds by relating, contrasting, and comparing different names. We grasp the significance of every experience through the names we have mechanically memorized, for “in the name it cognizes the thing” (EPG § 465). Thus, mechanical memory demonstrates a freedom heretofore
unknown by mind: the capacity to determine its own objects of knowledge for itself. The freedom to think for oneself. So without the need to appeal to other subjects or linguistic communication, we can come to full terms with the appearance and multi-layered conceptual significance of linguistic signs for the subjective intelligence.

2.7 Conclusion: The Limits of Intelligence and its Conception of Language

If a work signifies itself, this implies that there is no ‘outside’ of the work, that the work acts as its own referent: it presents what it interprets at the same moment it interprets it, forming one and the same manifestation.

-Catherine Malabou

If language arises for the subjective intelligence, the psyche, as its creation to address the problem of the givenness of intuitive content, this conception of language as a whole is still limited and, in our terms, problematic. We have seen how linguistic signs appear in the psychology as imaginative creations that are then memorized to demonstrate the capacity of the intelligence to make itself the meaningful relations between its objective content. But equally paramount to understanding how language, as it arises in Hegel’s philosophical psychology, aids the achievement of subjective freedom is also to recognize the formality of this liberty and the conceptual limitations characteristic of the intelligence as a whole.

On the one hand, the subjective intelligence can organize names it has memorized in whatever fashion it chooses since the particular meanings assigned to names was dictated by itself. This is a kind of formal, subjective freedom with its attendant ability to freely generate and arrange its internalized content, which it has made meaningful for itself. Language, in this limited form, thus arises as a tool to demonstrate one’s individual freedom from the givenness of

the world and the givenness of intuitive content. The linguistic sign serves this function.

In particular, memory addresses two of the main problems the subjective intelligence first encounters in its intuiting activity: the found (gefunde) aspect of intuitive content and the found nature of mental capacities of intuition and representation. Remember that the content I intuit is given to me, in the sense that I do not consciously determine whether what I see, when walking through woods, is a bluish hue, a shiny candy wrapper, or the trunk of a black spruce tree. I do not freely create the content of my intuitions. In an important sense, I find myself confronted with intuitions and intuitive content, even though of course I must actively attend to the content to bring it into focus.101

Moreover, the capacity for intuition is a power the merely intuiting mind finds given to it, as if from the outside, perhaps from some natural, evolutionary process or a divine, beneficent power. Why can I see, hear, touch, and taste this chanterelle mushroom? One might be tempted to appeal to a biologically determined evolutionary process that made human animals capable of this, and certainly, this might be accurate in a biological sense. But regardless, this capacity is for the individual intelligence (i.e. in the intelligence's understanding) bestowed from the outside, from a process or power that the psyche qua individual does not possess. From a evolutionary biological perspective, the individual only has this capacity as it exists as a link in an evolutionary chain, which randomizes and disseminates powers and capacities to individuals, species, genera, etc., which are then selected for reproductively.

Yet memory, in Hegel’s specific psychological sense, demonstrates the capacity of the

101 The role of attention and attentiveness for intuition is discussed by Hegel in EPG § 448, where mind “both fixes on the object and detaches it from itself (EPG § 445 Addition).
psyche to transform itself—through its own activity—into a mental (geistig) space by populating that space with names it has previously expressed as intuitable signs. Therefore, in one sense, the power of memory is still bestowed on the psyche from the outside—how do I even have the capacity to memorize something?—but in another important sense, this power also demonstrates the capacity of mind to fill itself with the semiotic content it has freely created and therefore its capacity to substantially change itself. “As mechanical memory,” Hegel maintains, “intelligence is at once that external objectivity [of the name] itself and the meaning” (EPG § 464).

Intelligence in its imagining and memorizing activities thus reveals its capacity to explicitly transform itself, overcoming the givenness of its structure and activity which it first experiences.

Yet on the other hand, the freedom that language facilitates here is merely individual and formal. What does it mean to say that the knowledge produced by the intelligence and the freedom it possesses are only “formal”? Essentially, it means there persists a dissonance between the form and content of mind, that the form of mind is different than the mind’s content.

According to Hegel, in the modes of “subjective mind,” which includes the intelligence, the problem is that “the content does not immediately correspond to the infinite form of knowledge, so that this form is thus still not genuinely fulfilled” (EPG § 444 Addition). The form of the thinking intelligence (i.e. the final form of the subjective intelligence, of psychology) is such that the psyche only thinks itself and its own content. This indicates its “infinite form.” But the content it possesses, its internalized names, do not have the self-reflective and self-transformative aspect of the form of the I itself. In short, neither externally produced signs nor internalized names behave like minds. Just because I can create and memorize linguistic signs like “floober” and “cacantize” does not make my knowledge and manipulation of terms fully
free, but only formally so, since the content I understand freely is strictly limited to senseless names. Other content, say the content I still experience intuitively, outstrips my ability to grasp it as part and parcel of my own subjectivity. So, “in the theoretical sphere the object does become, on the one hand, subjective, but, on the other hand, a content of the object initially still remains behind outside the unity with subjectivity. And so the subjective here constitutes only a form that does not absolutely pervade the object and the object is, therefore, not something posited through and through by mind” (EPG § 444 Addition). The content that the intelligence thinks and seeks to freely know is not explicitly the mind itself, so the creation and memorization of linguistic signs has proven inadequate to truly free the mind. Instead, the intelligence has only achieved subjective satisfaction, not yet objective fulfillment.

To conclude this Part I, let us return to the problems of language with which we first began, those problems that Hegel first raises in the Encyclopedia Logic and the anthropology section of the Philosophy of Mind. Language initially arose in conjunction with the problem of meaning being general or universal (Allgemein), such that an individual cannot express what only they mean to say. Hegel maintains that “nothing can be said in language that is not universal [allgemein]” (EL § 20 Remark). When I speak and express myself or my individual views, I cannot mean (meinen) only the thoughts or beliefs that are mine (mein). Language cannot express only the individual, but necessarily invokes the general. Then, in the anthropology, Hegel proposes that Sprache is a “more perfect” means of expressing the inner soul through the outer comportments and gestures of the body. The appearance of the linguistic sign in the psychology is meant to make explicit how language functions as a great tool of self-expression (even if, for the subjective intelligence, one expresses oneself only for oneself, to make oneself
We are now in a position to see both why Hegel expresses these related problems of language in these terms and how the intelligence addresses them. The intelligence itself is, in Hegel's terms, both an individual and an infinite universal. It is an individual thinking itself. Thus, it possesses a universal form (insofar as it is self directed), but an individual content (insofar as its content is contingently based on its individual experiences, desires, and intentions), and this internal dissonance is what the intelligence has proven to be in its intuitive, representational, and thinking forms. This imbalanced conceptual structure of the intelligence, of the I, dissolves the problem of unsuccessfully attempting to say only mein, for the truth of linguistic signs is their inherent negativity. Like the I, signs are individual objects, but also like the I, upon memorization, each sign refers to the other half of itself, its meaning, making them universals as well. “Intelligence takes the connection, which the sign is, into its possession, and by this recollection elevates the individual connection to a universal” (EPG § 461). What is mine is also general, Allgemein, since the intelligence itself is an individual universality. Thus, subjective mind and its semiotic creations are at once individual and universal.

However, Hegel’s suggestion that language is a “more perfect” tool for expressing the inner mind through the outer body lies on shakier ground. As we saw, he offers only the idea that linguistic signs are more “articulated” than other sorts of signs, but he does not explain or justify this distinction between more or less articulated signs. In fact, he seems unable to justify this claim made in the anthropology. What makes a wave of my hand a less perfect expression of my mind than the utterance of “and so it goes”? The best we can say on Hegel’s behalf is that, more so than gestures, speech, given the range of our vocal modulations, can more fully articulate and
signify the fine particularities of my inner feelings and sensations. But this is tenuous and underdeveloped ground on which to establish the idea that the spoken, linguistic signs are the best or “more perfect” means of subjective expression. That said, we did see how the creation of signs serves as a conscious act that expresses the inner-workings of the mind in spoken language. Thus, in contrast to non-conscious habits and the corporeal human figure expressing the movements of the soul, the deliberate expression of signs (and the attribution of representational meaning to those signs) explicitly transforms the outer into something informed by the inner, just as the memorization of names re-collects the outer signs into the inner-workings of the subject. This is what distinguishes the intelligence from the soul, and this also accounts for why the intelligence esteems speech over writing. Speech, more than writing, is tied immediately to the body, to the voice, and thus overcomes the limitations of the soul, of non-conscious bodily habits and their (in)ability to express the soul, even while preserving the embodied individuality of the subject.102

What I would also suggest is that the overcoming (or Aufhebung) of the limitations of the soul does not find full fruition in the subjective intelligence, but rather in the linguistic, communicative practices of intersubjective collectivities—in Hegel’s terms, “objective mind.”103

102 Despite the relation of speech to the body on which Hegel places significant importance, an unresolved tension exists between his differentiation between speech and writing. This is because writing appears to involve on Hegel’s account a greater degree of articulation than speech, which would then seem to elevate writing to a higher “spiritual” significance than speech. See EPG § 459 Remark. These two factors—the proximity to the voice and greater articulation—make it difficult given Hegel’s account to gauge precisely how he justifies elevating speech above writing. Jim Vernon makes an intriguing argument for how writing is actually superior to speech for Hegel, yet to support his argument, he unduly invokes the importance of “express[ing] to others” one’s meaning, which again is not at issue for the subjective intelligence. However, he concludes his discussion with an important caveat, one I agree with: that “(subjective) speech and (generally articulated) writing reciprocally presuppose each other.” See Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 66-73 (quote from 73).

103 These practices are analyzed in Part II. “Objective mind” or “objective spirit” encompasses all manner of intersubjective relations and activities, whether everyday interactions with others, moral situations and norms, legal relationships and rules, or historical writings. This “objective” form of mind arises conceptually out of
Hegel’s examination of the intelligence makes clear that it is not linguistic expression that lies at the heart of the psyche’s understanding of language, but the overcoming of the givenness of intuitive content, that content found outside the subject. This overarching aim of the intelligence explains why his analysis of language in the psychology does not culminate with the imaginative generation of signs, but the memorization of names and overcoming of representational meaning. Hegel’s claim that language affords a “more perfect” expression of the inner in the outer does not receive full justification until he examines how language is used for communication, which in its various modes serves to determine the objective content of the world seen as an intersubjective, spiritual community. Thus, I will return to this problem once again in Part II.

We have now concluded our examination of the psyche and its creation and understanding of linguistic signs. We have seen how (linguistic) signs are imaginatively created and memorized as names in order to overcome the problem of the givenness or “found” nature of intuitive content. Yet to be clear, the conclusion of the memorizing intelligence has generated a new problem: to freely generate and think the “content” that is given to and informative of mind itself. As it stands, individual subjects who constitute themselves by creating and memorizing signs possess only formal freedom, i.e. “freedom in thought, [which] is only the concept of freedom, not the living reality of freedom itself” (PG § 200). To express the problem in terms

subjective mind because of the need to determine the conditions for a free world, not merely free subjects. For our purposes, it is in Hegel’s conception of law and a political state’s constitution where he foregrounds the objective determinacy certain social documents or Schriften bring to linguistic expression: “Laws [Gesetze] express [sprechen] the determinations of the content of objective freedom” (EPG § 538).

104 This limited, subjective manifestation of freedom is for Hegel also indicative of philosophical stoicism. Stoicism, as he presents it in the Phenomenology of Spirit, is analogous to the formally free thinking (Denken) of the intelligence in its need to overcome the limitations of merely “freedom in thought.” Stoicism, like the thinking intelligence, is not actually free because it simply retreats from the world. So though stoicism finds its immediate resolution in a different theory of knowledge—what Hegel labels “skepticism”—and the theoretical intelligence in the later Philosophy of Mind develops instead into “practical mind,” his articulation of the stoical
of language, the issue becomes how communication between subjects can mold the objective world into an actual realm of freedom—a free “objective mind”—mind making itself a world in which it can be free. The goal of language—specifically, of using language in particular ways—is now to determine both the contents of a shared, intersubjective world and the mental contents of individuals now conceived as persons with a social status. Our examination of language in Part II will analyze how Hegel conceptualizes social linguistic communication, which, in its progressive forms, serves to construct a free world within which persons think, act, and communicate freely.

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problem is strikingly applicable to the problem for intellectual Denken. “For the essence of that freedom is at first only thinking in general, the form as such [of thought], which has turned away from the independence of things and returned into itself. But since individuality in its activity should show itself to be alive, or in its thinking should grasp the living world as a system of thought, there would have to be present in thought itself a content for that individuality, in the one case a content of what is good, and in the other of what is true, in order that what is an object for consciousness should contain no other ingredient whatever except the concept which is the essence” (PG § 200). To truly become free then, the intelligence now explicitly requires a free world to think.
3 Part II: Right and the Problematic of Expression

Man is known much less by his outward appearance than by his actions. Even language is exposed to the fate of serving just as much to conceal as to reveal human thoughts (EPG § 411 Addition).

Often, even individual details of a minor occurrence, of a word, express not a subjective particularity, but an age, a people, a culture, in striking vividness and brevity (EPG § 549 Remark).

3.1 Introduction: The Medium of Expression

In Part II, language becomes something other than a tool for freely creating psychological representations; it must serve as a means, a communicative medium, for expressing and creating freedom-enabling social relationships. If Part I reveals a crucial facet of freedom, it is that an individual mind, a distinct psyche or ego, cannot become free in isolation. Strictly individual freedom is a purely abstract freedom or a freedom in form only. “Subjective mind is productive; but its productions are formal. Inwards, the theoretical mind’s production is only its ideal world and the attainment of abstract self-determination within itself” (EPG § 444). As we will see in this Part II, overcoming the problem of purely subjective, semiotic content ends up requiring certain expressive acts, where language is used to create and recognize social bonds between individual thinkers, shaping objectivity (i.e. what confronts subjects) into an existing world where members of a community can be free with and though each other.¹

¹ As should be apparent, “free” in this sentence has a different meaning than the freedom exhibited by the psyche, for the latter is purely psychological and the former is actual—that is, exhibited in actions actually performed in the world. I can fabricate any sign I wish, and this might seem like an unconstrained freedom in comparison to social freedom, which is constrained by others around me. But the psychological creation of a sign does not make the sign a means for actually becoming free in the world; it only demonstrates my abstract capacity to create signs freely and my capacity to freely interpret the contents of my own experiences. For Hegel, a richer conception of freedom is exhibited in certain kinds of social life. Though individuals can limit each other’s actions and their sphere of influence, they can also enable the achievement of each other’s aims, not to mention the fact that others’ actions can actually inform what I believe to be my own goals. Hegel’s use of Freiheit exhibits how the meaning of certain terms in his texts are not fixed once and for all, but change according to the
In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel invokes language (*Sprache*) and its function as a medium of communication to illustrate what he calls the chemical process (*chemische Prozeß*).\(^2\) The chemical process exhibits its own internal logic, one between reactive substances or compounds, the medium of their interaction, and the products they yield. It is in this examination of the logic of “chemism” (*Chemismus*) where he first references the *logical* importance of language as a medium of communication.\(^3\) This multifaceted function, insofar as it addresses problems generated by social interactions and the pursuit of freedom, is the focus of Part II.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Since this analysis comes in the logic, Hegel is discussing a particular conceptual structure, whose name he borrows from chemistry. His discussion of the natural chemical process comes in *PN* §§ 326-336. Toula Nicolacopoulos’ and George Vassilacopoulos’ article on meaningless utterances prompted my recollection of this mention of language and communication in the *Science of Logic*, and their account of language overlaps much with John McCumber’s. See “On the Systemic Meaning of Meaningless Utterances: The Place of Language in Hegel’s Speculative Philosophy,” *Cosmos and History* 1, no. 1 (2005): 17-26. Though Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos do not explore the relation between the chemical process and language, I find Hegel’s remarks on their conceptual similarity useful as a transition between the end of Part I, where the mechanical memorization of signs is analyzed, and the beginning of Part II, where the chemical dimension of communication anticipates the discussion of the social functions of language enumerated in the “Objective Mind” portion of the *Philosophy of Mind* and more fully in the *Philosophy of Right* (*GPR*). “Chemism” is, after all for Hegel, the conceptual outcome of “mechanism.” See *SL*, 725-727.

\(^3\) To be clear, Hegel does explore the social functioning of language previously in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but there, his account is largely negative (situated within the “pathway of despair” traced by the *Phenomenology*), showing the historically important, though defunct, ways language has been used to sow social bonds in antiquity, medieval, and Renaissance societies. For instance, his analysis of cultural language (*PG* §§ 508-520) is restricted to an analysis of how a language of flattery can function in a state to distinguish individuals and produce a monarch, while in his discussion of morality, language appears (*PG* §§ 652-654) only as a “language of conscience” that declares one’s own personal conviction in the face of a legal regime, thus preparing the way for a community of worship knit together by the collective expression and contemplation of its shared convictions. Hegel’s systematic and more direct and positive approach to the social functions of linguistic communication is first proffered in the “Chemism” section of the *Science of Logic*. This reference is nonetheless only preliminary and illustrative of “chemism,” and he actually explicates these suggestions in subsequent texts, primarily the *Philosophy of Right*.

\(^4\) In Part II, I will freely move between sections of the *Philosophy of Mind* and the *Philosophy of Right* since they cover similar ground in relation to the social dimensions of language. I also draw on Hegel’s earlier lectures on the philosophy of right compiled in *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science* (*LNS*) and his other *Political Writings* (*PW*). Since the *Philosophy of Right* discusses language in greatest detail, I primarily explicate arguments made in this text. I should note that the topic of language in the social and political stages of Hegel’s philosophy has attracted little attention by commentators. And indeed, none of his discussions of language in e.g. the *Philosophy of Right* are too lengthy or too detailed. Yet *Sprache* does appear in many sections and at many different stages of “right,” which has not drawn much scrutiny. I have attempted to draw together and link many
We begin here, in the discussion of “Chemism” in the Science of Logic, before exploring more substantial arguments provided largely in the Philosophy of Right. By again utilizing the problem/solution method we have employed so far, I aim to trace Hegel’s account of the socially expressive aspects of language, which his philosophical psychology does not provide. My contention, following from Part I, is this: Hegel demonstrates how the expressive character of language forms various, determinate social bonds, enables the recognition of those bonds, and thereby addresses problems that serve as obstacles to the realization of a free, objective world.

Before turning to Hegel’s analysis of chemism, we should get clear on the bridge between subjective and objective spirit, specifically the importance of the will striving to actualize its freedom in the world. Then, we will be in a position to understand how linguistic communication arises in this context to address the problem of interpersonal recognition. In Part I, the self-expression of the psyche was aimed at freeing the subjective mind from its dependence on the given form of its experiences, which it merely found in the world. The self-development of the psychological intelligence showed that the linguistic sign is crucial for enabling it to remold itself into an “objective” and “external” space by which intelligent subjects use names they have created and internalized to then interpret the contents of their experiences using their own subjective, semiological creations. But this freedom is only “formal,” a freedom to interpret one’s experiences through the subjective form of memorized names, which does not entail a freedom of action or a free will.

In Part II, the intelligence becomes an “actual free will” by first willing to fulfill its

of these appearances through my method of the problematic—language as arising to solve particular problems for Geist in its striving to be free with others. But because Hegel’s discussions are so brief, in this part more than the others I point out lingering problems with aspects of his analyses.

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particular urges and then overcoming or “sublating” the particularity of those urges in favor of willing or striving to attain its own happiness, i.e. a “universal satisfaction” of its urges (EPG § 479). Such a willing individual, who aims to be happy, in turn aims to satisfy the particular content of what would make them happy (e.g. raising children, sustaining a thriving business or a comfortable home, living a good life), effectively willing that they be able to “have the final say in deciding where its happiness lies” (ibid.). As Richard Dien Winfield puts it,

To act, the agent must choose some particular aim, yet each choice is ready to give way to some different option, ad infinitum. […] Yet the agent imagines its own predicament, simply by being aware of all its own ends and choices. The practical intelligence of the choosing will can therefore aim to fulfill its impulses in their totality, to the extent that this is possible. To do so, practical intelligence must make its aim happiness.\(^6\)

Willing the freedom to choose the particular goals that would satisfy one’s own happiness and to pursue those particular aims under the umbrella of one’s happiness amounts, for Hegel, to a willing individual becoming “aware of itself as free and will[ing] itself as this object of itself, i.e. has its essence as its determination and purpose” (EPG § 482). The actual pursuit of individual happiness entails (1) the freedom to choose the contents of that happiness and (2) the freedom to pursue the actual satisfaction of that happiness in the world. Thus,

the free will initially has these distinctions in it immediately: freedom is its inner determination and aim and it enters into relation with an external objectivity that it finds before it, an objectivity that splits up into the anthropological factor of particular needs, external things of nature which are for consciousness, and the relationship of individual wills to individual wills, which are a self-consciousness of themselves in their diversity and particularity; this aspect makes up the external material for the embodiment of the will (EPG § 483).

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These “immediate distinctions” of the free will determine the conditions under which Geist actually pursues its aims (i.e. actualize and embody its will) in the world and enacts its freedom to satisfy its own happiness. It is under these conditions, particularly the latter condition of “the relationship of individual wills to individual wills,” that language sows and make recognizable our interpersonal relations with others for the purposes of becoming actually free in the “external objectivity” of the world. Let us now turn to Hegel’s account of chemism to see the logical analogy he provides for understanding the dynamic of interpersonal linguistic communication.

A chemical process for Hegel involves a reaction between at least two “objects” according to which the differences between the objects are “negated” and subsumed within a new product.7 These different objects, if they do in fact participate in chemical reactions, are chemical substances or compounds, and the product is not a mere combination of separate and distinct things but a newly structured compound in which its components are internally bound.8 “The product is neutral, that is, a product in which the ingredients, which can no longer be called objects, have lost their tension and with it those properties which belong to them as tensed, while the capability of their former self-subsistence and tension is preserved” (SL, 729). If a chemical process occurs spontaneously—where compounds come into contact and begin of their own accord to react with each other—the separate chemical compounds or “objects” have thereby shown themselves to be not, in Hegel’s terms, “self-subsistent” but rather things in “tension”

7 For a far more comprehensive examination of Hegel’s logic of chemism as well as how that logic is exhibited in real chemical processes, see John Burbidge, Real Process: How Logic and Chemistry Combine in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
8 Chemical compounds exhibiting “strong” chemical bonds, such as ionic or covalent bonds formed by intramolecular forces, seem to best exemplify what Hegel has in mind here as the products of chemical reactions. See John Burbidge, Real Process, 83-91.
Non-spontaneous reactions require additional elements or compounds, forming a neutral reactive medium, to initiate and facilitate the chemical process. Yet in either case, if a reaction does occur, the “tension” between different compounds qua reactants is unwound and stabilized in a new product. The chemical process thus exhibits a transformation of difference: from a difference between separate compounds (e.g. hydrogen distinct from oxygen) into an internal difference within a product (e.g. H₂O or water), even while the product is capable (given certain mediating conditions) of being separated again into distinct, tensed compounds. “The process is the going back and forth, from one form to the other, while these forms still remain external to each other. […] Hence, the neutral product is something separable [trennbares]” (EL § 202).

The process of making salts—for instance, of combining hydrochloric acid (HCl) and sodium hydroxide (NaOH) to produce (→) water (H₂O) and sodium chloride (NaCl) or table salt—exemplifies Hegel’s thinking. The initially distinct and separate chemicals reveal themselves to be, in undergoing a real chemical process, latent elements of a product, instead of merely separate substances indifferent to the existence of each other.

Chemical objects “strive” to reveal their true chemical nature. In fact, striving to form a particular chemical product is their nature as chemicals. Their inherent nature as chemical reagents is thus revealed by undergoing a chemical process, such that for instance hydrochloric acid and sodium hydroxide reveal their true nature as reagents for producing salt water. As John
Burbidge puts it, “the neutral product is a unity that has negative force because it has cancelled the original differentiation of the object. This cancellation is an inherent part of its definition, for it must presuppose that differentiation if it is to be a chemical product.”

So given this sketch of “chemism,” how is the chemical process analogous to linguistic communication?

Hegel suggests that reagents in a chemical reaction “communicate” just as persons do when they speak to one another, such that both chemical and linguistic communication can be understood as a middle term in a syllogism enacted by real things. As we will see below, in the context of “right” and its first appearance as “property,” individuals communicate with each other in order to (1) exchange objects with each other and (2) recognize themselves as persons owning objects that can freely be used to satisfy their aims. In both chemical and linguistic cases, the communicative medium or “middle term” functions to produce a new community, of chemicals or of persons.

Now the middle term whereby these extremes are concluded into a unity is first the implicit nature of both, the whole concept that holds both within itself. Secondly, however, since in their concrete existence they stand confronting each other, their absolute unity is also a still formal element having an existence distinct from them—the element of communication in which they enter into external community with each other. […] In the material world water fulfills the function of this medium; in the spiritual [geistig] world, so far as the analogue of such a relation has a place there, the sign in general, and more precisely language, is to be regarded as fulfilling that function (SL, 729).

Communication, whether chemical or linguistic, functions to make explicit the implicit nature of separate, individual compounds or persons—namely, that they strive to be constituents of a community. Thus, though he provides little indication here of what such a linguistically mediated

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9 Burbidge, Real Process, 86.
10 See also PG § 653, for Hegel’s account of moral language that “emerges as the middle term, mediating between independent and acknowledged self-consciousnesses.”
community would look like or how it would operate, it is clear that Hegel believes language functions centrally in the formation of community.

Taking this metaphor seriously, language is the middle “term” that mediates interactions between different “minds” or individual thinkers. Moreover, he suggests that the linguistic sign is not only crucial for demonstrating the individual, subjective freedom of the psyche (as we saw in Part I), but also that linguistic expression mediates relationships between distinct, real individuals and thereby reveals their implicit nature—not as irreducibly individual and self-sufficient psyches but as active elements striving to “unite” and overcome their difference by communicating with each other.

Though Hegel does not go further to name the product of linguistic communication between distinct individuals, I argue throughout Part II that a unified social body, what he calls “objective mind”—that is, mind as spirit and an actualized, objective presence in the world—results. What we trace here is how language functions to produce an actual community that serves as an arena of freedom—first in its most abstract form as an “external” community of persons, a “common will” linking separate persons based on their mutual agreement; then as more determinate forms of community life: a family, a law-governed civil society, and a constitutionally-structured state, all articulated and expressed in the medium of language. In linking the conceptual progression of these forms of community, I show how Hegel conceives of language in the Philosophy of Right (and the corresponding sections of Philosophy of Mind)\textsuperscript{11} as an expressive and communicative tool for addressing problems that arise from social

\textsuperscript{11} The sections corresponding to a briefer, encyclopedic version of much of the content of the Philosophy of Right are found in “Objective Mind,” EPG §§ 483-552.
interactions, which are necessary for producing actual freedom in the world or, put differently, an actual, free world. The goal as in Part I is the production of freedom, but here it takes the new form as the production of a free, intersubjective spiritual world.\textsuperscript{12}

Though I only briefly discuss each of these modes of linguistic expression, we will be able to grasp their import: such expressions actually create, determine, or explicitize for us, as subjects and citizens of such agreements, laws, and treaties, the constructed, but nonetheless actual relations between persons, groups, and political states. Language expresses and actualizes these social relations—it makes these relations inhere and exist in the world—and enables us to recognize how such relations orient and structure our practices.

I will conclude this introduction with my own Hegelian thesis on the relation of expression and freedom, one I defend in Part II. The act of expressing something is fundamentally an externalization (Äußerung) of the mind for Hegel, and linguistic expression is one of the main ways (though not the only way) subjects act on and shape what they first encounter as external to themselves into a free world and home for themselves.\textsuperscript{13} Yet instead of subjective mind creating and memorizing signs to make itself into an “externality” so as to interpret the world through its internalized names, objective spirit aims to demonstrate its

\textsuperscript{12} The following sections (3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7) explicate arguments of the Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Right by continuing to trace the appearances ofSprache-and related terms, particularly “expression” (Ausdruck), “utterance” (Äußerung) and “declaration” (Erklärung), to account for language as a tool of social expression. We also track related terms like Vertrag (contract), Stipulation, and Schreiben (writing), as well as their derivatives. It is key to bear in mind the linguistic affinity between the terms Ausdruck (expression), äußern (externalize), and aussprechen (pronounce). We will trace how mind “others” itself through expression, pushes outside itself, and makes itself into something outer, all of which are signaled by the prefix aus- (ex-). We will also see how the externalization of mind into the objective world through linguistic expression affects the innerworkings of mind, the inner dimensions of mind and its dissemination and expansion from an individual to a social spirit.

\textsuperscript{13} It is linguistic externalization (Äußerung) that concerns us here, though of course any action likewise shapes the external world. But freedom, the ultimate telos of mind (Geist), orients Hegel’s philosophical approach to linguistic expression, and our aim is to trace this approach as faithfully and resolutely as we can. So Hegel’s account overlooks many aspects of the social use of language.
**objective** freedom and actualize its will in an external world that continues to confront the mind as something other. The external world exists *for us* as subjects insofar as we must posit an objective realm beyond ourselves in which we can pursue and realize our aims freely.

The absolute determination or, if one prefers, the absolute drive, of the free spirit (see § 21) is to make its freedom into its object – to make it objective both in the sense that it becomes the rational system of the spirit itself, and in the sense that this system becomes immediate actuality (*GPR* § 27).

Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* demonstrates that the full embodiment of our wills, the full actualization of free will in the world, requires not only other things and persons but an actual system of social institutions that structures how individuals jointly pursue their aims.¹⁴

Moreover, expressive acts also affect and determine subjects themselves by creating, structuring, and changing the very social relations that are not simply external to but also constitutive of subjects.¹⁵ Put bluntly, acts of linguistic expression affect us, our mind and spirit. Thus, while Hegel does always foreground this feature of expression, I will attempt to illuminate how each mode of linguistic expression—its own an externalization of *Geist*—involves a

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¹⁴ Hegel largely follows Fichte in maintaining (1) the necessity of others to become actually free and (2) the necessity of social and political institutions for organizing how persons recognize each other and pursue their individual aims in the context of a group. See J. G. Fichte, *Foundation of Natural Right According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Part II. Hegel even follows Fichte in analyzing contracts, civil laws, and state constitutions, though he accounts for their significance within his philosophy of right in importantly different ways than Fichte. With regard to the overall importance Hegel places on other persons for achieving individual freedom, see Kenneth Westphal, “The Basic Context and Structure of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 234-269.

¹⁵ Perhaps the act of getting married foregrounds this feature of expression most saliently. The marriage ceremony, which turns on the declarations and vows of the spouses, transforms a loving and trusting relationship into a legal one. “By means of marriage the union of the sexes becomes a legal relationship, entered into publicly, and this can be done in the state before either a religious or a secular authority” (*LNS* § 78 Remark). This recognized legal relationship not only makes new social relations possible—family is the first *actual* appearance of *Geist*—but also changes the legal status of the persons themselves. For a novel and rather schizophrenic accounting of the pivotal role of the family in Hegel, see Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1986).
corresponding internalization and internal transformation within mind and spirit—of another's will (in contract and marriage), of (civil) customs and laws, of a state constitution, and of external relations between states (through international treaties). I maintain that only by highlighting the reciprocal determination of mind and language can we grasp the true nature of \textit{Geist} as social spirit: a social activity or \textit{movement} which develops in concert with expressive acts, at once molding the external world and its own being—a world suffused with the acts and products of spirit bent on becoming free together.

\section*{3.2 Overcoming the Psychological Problem of Language}

We need not delve further into the nature of chemical processes, for the development of this illustration as it plays out in Hegel’s \textit{Philosophy of Mind} and \textit{Philosophy of Right}—the specific, social problems language is used to overcome, how these overcomings occur for mind, the social formations and institutions set up, and the new problems thereby produced—is our project here. I will occasionally return to other aspects of the relation between language and the chemical process to illuminate Hegel’s account of the social functioning of language. For now, it is important to state the problem raised by the conclusion of Part I on the subjective intelligence, which the forms and linguistic expressions of objective spirit arise to address.

We can express in two ways the problem raised by the culmination of Part I, one in terms of linguistic content and the other in terms of freedom.

Grasping its capacity to memorize names mechanically and to take names and nominal

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16 Hegel’s account of freedom of the press and freedom to express one’s opinion publicly is an exception to this internalization/externalization dynamic of linguistic expression. Accordingly, when we turn to this mode of linguistic expression, I will point out three key flaws in Hegel’s account of this freedom, which prevents him from recognizing the potential dialectical and dialogical features of public opinion.
\end{flushright}
relations as its epistemic objects and as relations of thinking (Denken) and interpreting the world, the I who has “no meaning anymore” faces a new problem: how to will and determine the content of the external world, such that its freedom (of the will) can become objective and actualized in the world. As we saw in Part I, the psyche or “I” abstracts its memorized names and its process of thinking from the outside world, such that it can use its own internalized, subjective content (as series of created signs) to grasp its experiences of the world. Through its activity of abstraction, the psyche becomes formally free (from the outside world) since it interprets the world through the medium of its memorized names. Accordingly, the linguistic content possessed by the psyche is strictly subjective, determined only by the individual psyche—its mental activities of intuiting, representing, and thinking. Bedeutung signifies the subjective meaning or significance of signs for the individual psyche, not an objective content mediated and determined by the interaction between mind(s) and world. The linguistic sign itself signifies for the psyche its own subjective power and formal freedom.

The psychological function of creating linguistic signs would not be problematic except for the fact that the world continues to confront the psyche as an external limit, a givenness external to its own sign-making activity. The psyche is still burdened by the intuitive content the world gives or that the psyche finds in the world, from outside, in order to know itself through its memorized signs. In other words, the intuitive material idealized by the psyche and made into representational signs is still given and determined by an “outside,” by the objective world, for the psyche still presupposes the existence of an outside world in which it finds the content of its
intuitions. Thus, the freedom of the psyche is inherently subjective and limited to the inner-workings of an individual mind—it remains a “formal freedom.”

Importantly, the psyche cannot simply ignore or obviate the objective world and its givenness, for the latter provides a necessary corollary to the psyche's sign-making activity. I cannot create signs without an “external” world, without a correlative, internally complex object, an objective world, standing in opposition to me. The psyche’s entire range of activity relies on presupposing an outside world that stands over and against the I. Therefore, actual freedom, if it is not to be only the limited freedom of fabricating signs for myself, requires that the world also be free—that the mind finds in the world a locale not only conducive to individual, free action, but as a free, self-determining world in which I participate as a practitioner of sorts. It must become more than merely my freedom to create and manipulate signs and, as we will see, more than the freedom to perform any action I choose. What Hegel believes this “free world” looks like—how it is organized to enable a “world spirit” (Weltgeist) to know itself as a self-determining “world” (Welt)—we will progressively uncover and interrogate.

17 Again, the external world does not vanish or fade away for subjective spirit; the former continues to confront the latter and provide given, natural things for the mind to cognize and know. It is just that the subjective intelligence understands how it can create linguistic signs by which to understand these things, such that they are interpreted through the lens of its memorized signs (i.e. names). This is why Hegel claims that “the word gives to thoughts their most worthy and genuine reality. […] Intelligence therefore, in filling itself with the word, receives into itself the nature of the thing” (EPG § 462 Addition). But given its merely formal freedom, the intelligence becomes a will when it understands the necessity for acting in the world, for satisfying its particular purposes and urges, such that individuals must step out into the world and change it, making its freedom actual instead of remaining formal.

18 As Hegel makes clear in his philosophical psychology, creating and memorizing linguistic signs does not eliminate the role of the world external to the psyche for providing sign-making materials. On the contrary, these activities reveal the necessity of an external world in which to express signs. “Language here comes into consideration only in the specific determination of being the product of intelligence for manifesting its representations in an external element” (EPG § 459 Remark). Such a need for an “outside” the intelligence or psyche is not mitigated or overcome by its subjective, formal freedom; the necessity of the outside grounds the need to transform the outside into a free world.
What is important to note here is that the mind now passes beyond its being as a subjective psyche and enters into the sphere of “right” (Recht) where it aims to produce its freedom as existing in the world. For “right is any existence [Dasein] in general which is the existence of the free will. Right is therefore in general freedom, as Idea” (GPR § 29). The psyche takes the new form of the will (Wille), and Part II traces the emergence of freedom as it actually comes to take shape as an “actuality” in the world, both as an objective product of the will (e.g. communities, social and political institutions) and subjective activity of the will (e.g. being free to live a good life and achieve one’s own personal goals). Linguistic expression plays a key role in enabling the will to become free and fashion a free world.

Overcoming the conceptual limitations of subjective freedom, of the psyche, demands the

19 In Hegel’s brief account of “thinking” (Denken) in the “Psychology,” which forms a bridge from the “theoretical” mind of psychology to the “practical” mind of the will, he remarks that thinking emerges repeatedly in his system but in slightly different forms depending on whether, e.g., the logical progression of forms of thought or the psychological activity of thinking is at issue (EPG § 467 Remark). It is at this point that Jim Vernon in Chapter 3 of Hegel’s Philosophy of Language detours into the Science of Logic to account for how the names memorized by the subjective intelligence can be organized linguistically according to the universal, grammatical forms implicit in Hegel’s subjective logic (i.e. Hegel’s accounts of the judgment and syllogism in SL). Though Vernon expertly constructs a thin, universal grammar out of Hegel’s logic by which he claims we can structure our memorized names, I think his appeal to the logic explains Hegel’s philosophy of language less than it does more fully parse the transition between theoretical and practical mind. When Hegel quickly runs through the role of forming judgments and syllogisms for the theoretical intelligence in EPG § 467, what seems to be at stake for Hegel is the thinking intelligence recognizing that by positioning names in judgments and syllogisms, it can freely determine the relations between them. In so doing, the intelligence overcomes any lingering immediacy and givenness that still clings to its mental contents (i.e. its memorized names). “In these forms [of judgment] the content appears as given; but (3) in the inference the intellect determines content from itself, by sublating that form-distinction. In the insight into necessity [of the inference], the last immediacy still adhering to formal thinking has vanished” (EPG § 467). This section leads directly into Hegel’s account of the will and then to his philosophy of objective spirit, which is where I follow him to uncover the role of language therein. I am not sure how (or if) Vernon’s account of logical grammar in Hegel intersects with my account of language in objective spirit, but I think it imperative to parse the ways language appears in the philosophy of objective spirit and Philosophy of Right in order to grasp how language is actually used to determine and recognize the relationships within an intersubjective community. I can see no other way to account for the social use of language in Hegel, for its role in sowing and making recognizable particular intersubjective relationships, than to trace how language appears in this part of his system. Accordingly, I find Vernon’s ultimate appeal to intersubjective dialogue (124-130) undermotivated by Hegel’s texts and lacking explanatory force when it comes to accounting for the actual, specific uses of language he discusses in his philosophy of objective spirit.
creation of the contents, the Stoff, of the world such that it becomes a home for “world spirit” (Weltgeist).

But the purposive activity of this will is to realize its concept, freedom, in the externally objective realm, making it a world determined by the will, so that in it the will is at home with itself, joined together with itself, the concept accordingly complete to the idea (EPG § 484).

The goal for Geist becomes creating an actual, existing domain of freedom, a locale where mind and world mutually develop each other into a dialectical unity—each opposing yet informing the other, excluding and relating negatively to each other until their relation constitutes a processual unity of subject and object. Accordingly, the Philosophy of Right traces an emergence of freedom: from an individual will into a self-producing world spirit:

It is free because it relates itself to nothing else, but, as infinite negativity, only to itself. It is utterly universal because in it all limitation and particularization of individuality is sublated, such limitation or particularization residing solely in the antithesis between the concept or subjective side and its object or content (LNS § 7).

Such a world spirit finds not only the form of subjectivity in its knowledge of the world (like the subjective intelligence) but also that the contents of the world it encounters has been shaped by its own hand. The world spirit constitutes both the form and content of freedom as actualized in the world, for it sees itself, or more specifically its own activities, in the formation of an ethical, social world in which it wills and lives.

For Hegel, achieving this end requires the transformation of psychological mind (Geist) into new forms of spirit (Geist) and new ways of using language. These new forms can be understood as supra-psychological subjectivities: “subjects” which integrate multiple, living individuals who can oppose or hinder each other but can also facilitate each other’s pursuit of freedom. Hegel’s goal is to show how subjects become free only with each other and how
language facilitates this becoming. To do so, he analyzes how the concept of an individual subject necessitates its interaction and participation with other subjects, determining social relations that not only demonstrate our reliance on others but also show how we can aid in each other's pursuits. “Morality, ethics, and the interest of the state – each of these is a distinct variety of right, because each of them gives determinate shape and existence to freedom” (GPR § 30 Remark). Each social formation is the embodiment of a particular social spirit and a certain kind of freedom existing in the world, for these relations not only condition how individuals live with each other but also enable them to act and further shape their social conditions. What appears initially as a constraint on individual freedom by others—e.g. other people are preventing me from doing what I want—becomes the very condition enabling the freedom to act on and transform the society in which they live—e.g. I join a public protest to instigate political change.

Accordingly, Hegel maintains that freedom (Freiheit) takes a different form of existence, appearing differently, for each stage of right and each form of social spirit. The concept of freedom undergoes a conceptual development as the concept of mind is broadened from the psyche to the social community, and the narrow freedom of the individual psyche (to produce signs and meaning for itself) gives way to more expansive kinds of social freedom with others. The concept of freedom becomes richer and inextricably social by our understanding the role of others in the pursuit of our individual aims, such that the term Freiheit is enriched for us as readers of Hegel. Z. A. Pelczynski puts Hegel’s project in terms of demonstrating how new shapes of mind overcome contradictions inherent in their understanding of freedom:

He treats freedom as a concept which develops dialectically, as a result of contradictions inherent in its own nature and so unfolds new features at different stages of development until the process is completed and ‘the idea of freedom’ – the full actualization of the concept – is reached in the structure of the rational modern state. The movement is from
an ‘abstract’ concept of freedom, linked to a single individual will, to a ‘concrete freedom’ actualized in a political community as a rational system of wills.\textsuperscript{20}

We will examine how communication and the expressive use of language either create or make explicit and recognizable social relations that enable persons to overcome obstacles to acting and living freely with each other.

In sum, I argue that language (\textit{Sprache}) undergoes conceptual transformations in conjunction with the concept of freedom throughout Hegel’s \textit{Philosophy of Right} and “Objective Spirit” in \textit{Philosophy of Mind} because language serves both as a subjective tool and objective medium by which and in which social bonds are either created or made recognizable (often both). In his explication of how mind becomes social, Hegel conceptualizes language in terms of how using outward expressions (\textit{Ausdrücke}), utterances (\textit{Äußerungen}), and declarations (\textit{Erklärungen}) sow social bonds or make implicit social relations explicit. Language as an expressive tool and medium enables individuals and groups to become free together in the world by either creating the “contents” of a free social world or making those contents explicit and recognizable for subjects determined by that world. For “the subject is the activity of satisfying urges, of formal rationality, namely of translating the content, which in this respect is purpose, from subjectivity into objectivity, in which the subject joins together with itself” (\textit{EPG} § 475). By either creating (in property contracts, marriage, and international treaties) or making explicit (in positive law and state constitutions) the social relations constitutive of individual subjects, linguistic expression enables individuals and groups to recognize how their own formative

activities shape the objective world and thus how subjects “join together” with and find themselves in objectivity.

Beginning as subjective spirit and first understanding itself that way, the individual psyche must produce its own content in the objective world to become a free agency in the world.²¹ Only then will Geist become social and produce what Hegel calls its “objective fulfillment, thus at the same time producing the freedom of its knowledge” (EPG § 442). Hegel shows how the various modes of expressing thought through the medium of language are necessary acts for attaining this ultimate end, which can only be achieved through the transformation of mind itself, using language, into the objective contents of the world.

Hegel then argues for the necessity of positing law (3.5), the need to express positive civil law or a legal code making explicit the customary norms ordering civil society and social relations. In his rebuttal to social contract theory, he argues that laws are not grounded on contractual agreements between citizens or between citizens and their government, on equal citizens deliberating and agreeing collectively on the laws governing their society. This would ground the formation of a society on the subjective desires and particular inclinations of individuals. So not only the existence of the state but its legitimacy would be grounded on people

²¹ Hegel does not discuss the concept of agency much in his later works, instead relegating its analysis primarily to the Phenomenology of Spirit. On the social significance and conditions of agency in Hegel, see Robert B. Pippin, “Idealism and Agency in Kant and Hegel,” The Journal of Philosophy 88, no. 10 (Oct., 1991): 532-41; and Mark Alznauer, “Hegel and the Social Conditions of Agency,” History of Philosophy Quarterly 31, no. 2 (Apr., 2014): 159-76. See also Allen Speight, Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), where he focuses on the conception of agency elaborated in Hegel’s accounts of Antigone and other literary works in the Phenomenology. But instead of thinking strictly of a rational agent in the Kantian sense, I think we would do better to conceive of agency in Hegel jointly in the chemical sense, as reagents, the instrumental sense, as medium (Mittel), and the potency sense, as power (Macht). These senses of “agency” together highlight both the social aspect of agency examined by Pippin and Alznauer and the power of agency examined by Speight.
choosing, for whatever reasons (e.g. safety, self-interest, the long con), to submit their individual wills to that of the group. But if this is the actual basis of a society, individuals can *de jure* or *by right* opt out at any time, whenever the group skews, even temporarily, from serving their own interests.\(^{22}\) Hegel agrees that laws can and should be agreed upon by everyone, but he maintains this is not the source of their legitimacy.

On the contrary, civil laws make explicit for the first time a “universal” (*allgemeiner*) will, which is always already founded on cultural norms and practices, where individuals participate in a society that allows them to meet their needs interdependently instead of by simply assenting to its rule. Making laws explicit in linguistic form is a fundamental factor in the law’s legitimacy and value for Hegel, for it allows people to *recognize* both the necessity of others for satisfying their own needs and the presupposition of norms structuring social relations, which facilitate the satisfaction of everyone's needs.\(^{23}\) According to Hegel, “only when it becomes law does what is right take on both the *form* of its universality and its true determinacy,” and most important “is the inner and essential moment, namely *cognition of the content* in its *determinate universality*” (GPR § 211 Remark). Thus,

To deny a civilized nation, or the legal profession within it, the ability to draw up a legal code would be among the greatest insults one could offer to either; for this does not

\(^{22}\) This social contract approach also presupposes that in the “state of nature” prior to grouping together in a society or state, individuals are free, rational agents. Hegel disputes this, for *education*, the formation of individuals into rational thinkers, can only occur with and through others. For a more detailed account of Hegel’s criticism, see Alan Patten, “Social Contract Theory and the Politics of Recognition in Hegel’s Political Philosophy” in *Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism: Studies in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, ed. Robert R. Williams (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 167-184.

\(^{23}\) The necessity of expressing civil laws and a civil legal code in language sets the normative conditions that language must meet to enable the freedom of citizens. In other words, language becomes socially mediated and structured according to the need of citizens to recognize the laws under which they act and so become free in their social interactions with others. Hence, the “private language” of the individual, subjective intelligence must become socially mediated through interaction with others if all individuals are to understand how their actions and aims are freely enabled by the legal code. Otherwise, language does not address this problem of mediating the mutual recognition of members of civil society and thus cannot enable their freedom in such a society.
require that a system of laws with a new content should be created, but only that the present content of the laws should be recognized in its determinate universality – i.e. grasped by means of thought (ibid.).

Expressing civil laws in language and embodying the operation of these laws in actual social institutions is how right becomes universal, as civil laws are meant to express both rights protecting everyone and the cultural norms and values underpinning social relations. Though the order that civil law provides is primarily negative—indicating the legal limits of how one person’s actions must not hinder those of others—it allows each individual to pursue their own ends while at the same time respecting others’ right to do the same.24

For Hegel, a political state (Staat) unites the civil laws that are collected in a legal code by founding them on the overarching aims of the social body as a whole. As a concrete universal, these overarching aims by definition include the particular aims of individuals and civil society groups. Actually unifying a people in practice requires that particular state institutions set down (legislate), enforce (execute), and adjudicate the legal code, the unity of which is made explicit, publicized, and known to all in the language of a state’s political constitution (3.6). The political state and its power is only legitimate, according to Hegel, if citizens recognize that public institutions and political practices are based on and responsive to their own cultural values, norms, and practices.25 So the linguistic expression of a state’s constitution allows citizens to understand how the state’s interests are their own and rooted in their own cultural values, shoring up its legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Our analysis of the

24 On the negative or restrictive quality of civil laws that protect particular individuals from each other, see GPR §§ 182-87.
25 See Kevin Thompson, “Institutional Normativity: The Positivity of Right” and David C. Durst, “The End(s) of the State in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, chs. 2 and 11.
public expression of the legal code and constitution of the state will then lead us to explain Hegel’s ambivalence over the “freedom of public communication,” the right of individual citizens to freely express their own opinions in public—and how such opinionated expressions differ from the expression of civil and state laws on Hegel’s account—as well as the unresolved problems of his view.

Part II concludes with an analysis of Hegel’s discussion of international treaties (3.7). International treaties, like contracts, express agreement between different parties, though instead of between persons, treaties express international agreement between states, each with their own internal constitutions. Language is crucial for expressing, creating, and recognizing the nature of international agreements, though it raises important issues of translation and interpretation that Hegel does not address.26

While language is invoked in passing in a few other portions of Hegel’s ethical and political writings, these topics constitute for our purposes the primarily elements of his account of the social and communicative function of language—a function, as in Part I, aimed at freedom (though this time freedom with and through others).27 Each section will be contextualized according to the problem each mode of expression functions to resolve and the new problems

26 We will see how an international version of social contract emerges in Hegel’s account of international relations despite his criticisms of social contract theory and its account of state legitimacy. The problem of contract re-emerges in international affairs, which gives credence to Jay Lampert’s view (which focuses more on Hegel’s account of colonization than international treaties) that Hegel ultimately fails to completely “sublate” and overcome private property. See Lampert, “Locke, Fichte, and Hegel on the Right to Property” in Hegel and the Tradition: Essays in Honour of H. S. Harris, eds. Michael Baur and John Russon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 42-74.

27 While I discuss many elements of Hegel’s conception of language as it functions in social environments and “objective spirit,” it is simply not possible to include them all here. For instance, we will pass over Hegel’s discussions of the interpretive work and rulings of judges, the issue of technical legal jargon, and the Romantic ironists he derides. Hopefully in subsequent work, I will be able to give these topics their due.
they either found or directly produce.

Unfolding this problematic of expression will also reveal what Hegel overlooks and the limitations of his dialectical analysis. In general, he omits—and this is significant, judged by the criteria of his own dialectical method—not only an analysis but even an acknowledgement of how using language to express agreements, laws, and treaties affects the content of language itself—the terms produced and normalized by using certain expressions; the meanings of words and phrases thereby determined or enshrined in law; and the proliferation of social discourses for expressing specific representations, norms, and abnormalities of social being. If what Hegel explicates are the effects of linguistic expression on spirit and the contents or Stoff of the world, he overlooks its necessary corollary: how language itself morphs through its varied and iterated use. He misses the opportunity to interrogate how ways of expressing thought in language and how the terms of language itself are shaped by the very fact of being expressed. Accordingly, Hegel often fails to tarry with the dialectical nature of expression itself.28

If it was not foregrounded in Part I, it should be apparent that my interpretation of Hegel's account of the expressive dimension of language will focus on the effects of language on those involved in social situations and interactions. Formerly, we traced Hegel’s examination of the effects of sign production and memorization on individual minds, considered in conceptual isolation—particularly how the mind recognizes the border between “inner” and “outer” of its

28 One could argue that Hegel explores this topic in the final sections of his Philosophy of Mind: on art, religion, philosophy. How artists, religious practitioners, and philosophers use language would then demonstrate how they work on language itself, how the nature of linguistic expression changes by its being used by these persons. However, it seems likely that any social use of language, not merely these three modes of expression privileged by Hegel, would necessarily affect language itself and how we communicate with each other. Thus, it is not sufficient to relegate the dialectical nature of linguistic expression—where expression and thought mutually inform each other—to only these three modes of expression and thought.
psyche and how to overcome the (epistemic and actual) limits erected around its subjective activity by the outside world. Now, as we examine Hegel’s view of language as mediating the formation of bonds between multiple persons, the effects language has on persons and groups—the new social relations created and made explicit by linguistic expression—moves explicitly to the fore.

3.3 Property Contracts: Expression and Recognition of Agreement

The first mention of Sprache in Hegel’s philosophy of objective spirit appears in his discussion of contracts. A property contract—through which not only individual “things” like pens, houses, and intellectual property, but also the right of ownership changes hands—is a specific, real thing through which language enables different individuals to recognize each other as persons. The language of property contracts, whether of gifting or exchanging particular things, expresses, represents, and thereby mediates a bond between two persons. As we will see, contractual language serves as a sort of middle term in a chemical-like social process that enables a new form of social freedom.

Published in 1807, the Phenomenology of Spirit does not discuss property contracts or the importance of contract law, though he does briefly discuss the role of legal personhood in the ancient Roman Empire.29 It seems that at that time Hegel believed a philosophical inquiry into the nature of social interactions, cultural norms, and political structures could be undertaken largely without broaching the topic of property contracts. Language (Sprache) arises primarily as an element of an individual’s participation within a culture (Bildung), both as producer and

29 See PG §§ 477-483.
product of a living culture, or the means for a moral subject to express their own convictions.  

By his Heidelberg lectures on “Natural Right and Political Science” (LNS) in 1817-18, Hegel begins to position the concept of contract (Vertrag) as a key element in his philosophy of “natural right,” which he recasts in the 1921 Philosophy of Right as “Abstract Right” (Abstracte Recht). His previous emphasis on the cultural use of language is displaced to his analysis of civil society and the state, and the first appearance of language (Sprache) in his analysis of “objective spirit” and the domain of right (Recht) comes in his analysis of contracts (Verträgen). In these lectures, language plays an pivotal role in contracts that are drawn up between persons, for the agreement expressed in a contract “must give itself determinate existence in a real element, as a declaration, either through signs and gestures or, most commonly, through speech, as the stipulation of the contract” (LNS § 83). Linguistic expression provides the medium for contractual agreements to attain objective existence.

When Hegel first uses Sprache in the Philosophy of Right, he identifies it with the representational aspect of contracts.

30 See in particular PG §§ 488-526, 652-654. There is much more that could be said about these sections, which enumerate different modes of cultural expression (e.g. deception, flattery, etc.), than I analyze here. On Hegel’s account of flattery, see Richard Dien Winfield, Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Rethinking in Seventeen Lectures (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 262-264. Hegel’s analyses in these sections overlap with arguments made in the later Philosophy of Right, but a more detailed treatment of language in the Phenomenology would be necessary to fully unpack its cultural role as it is described there. Here, I have chosen to trace the ways language appears in his systematic work on ethics, morality, and politics, the Philosophy of Right and the corresponding lectures. We return to the issue of language as it functions in culture (Bildung) when we discuss Hegel’s theory of education in civil society.

31 I can find no sources that analyze Hegel’s essay on natural law and incorporate a discussion of the place of language therein. A potential avenue for future inquiry would be tracing the evolution of Hegel’s treatment of language from these lectures to his 1921 Philosophy of Right.

32 This is the first use of the term if we omit a single, methodological remark Hegel makes in the introduction concerning how key terms are to be used in philosophical texts, including the Philosophy of Right itself. “In philosophical cognition, on the other hand, the chief concern is the necessity of a concept, and the route by which it has become a result [is] its proof and deduction. Thus, given that its content is necessary for itself, the second step is to look around [sich umzusehen] for what corresponds to it in our ideas [Vorstellungen] and language.
An agreement which has been reached, considered by itself [für sich] without reference to its performance, is a representation [ein Vorgestelltes], to which a particular existence [Dasein] must therefore be given in accordance with the distinctive manner in which representational thoughts [Vorstellungen] have their existence in signs (see Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, § 379f.). This is achieved by expressing the stipulation through formal gestures and other symbolic actions, and particularly by a specific declaration [Erklärung] in language [Sprache], the most appropriate medium [Element] of intellectual representation [der geistigen Vorstellung]” (GPR § 78).

This passage provides the foothold for grasping the significance of contractual language.

While much has been written on “Abstract Right,” which comprises the first third of the Philosophy of Right,33 as well as more narrowly on Hegel’s conception of contracts,34 our focus is strictly on the function of language in contracts. Here, language acts as the existent medium (or “Element” which has many of the same connotations in English) for expressing agreement between two or more parties. It is the element in which agreement actually comes to exist in the world and from which agreement between subjects can be recognized. While we cannot entirely

[Sprache]” (GPR § 2). This remark concerns how philosophy adapts representational language to its expression of conceptual development, so it relates more directly to our analysis of speculative philosophical language in Part III.

33 Several commentators have noted that “Abstract Right” contains Hegel’s critical analysis of natural law theory. For instance, see Michael Inwood, “Hegel, Plato and Greek ‘Sittlichkeit’” in The State and Civil Society, 40-54, and Seyla Benhabib, “Obligation, contract and exchange: on the significance of Hegel’s abstract right” in The State and Civil Society, 159-177. The latter undertakes an investigation of Hegel’s account of contract as a criticism of natural law theory. For an insightful analysis of the polysemous term Naturrecht and its relation to Hegel’s argument that right must be posited, see Kevin Thompson, “Institutional Normativity” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, 41-65. We can add that already in his 1802-03 article “On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, on its Place in Practical Philosophy, and its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Right,” Hegel criticizes natural law theorists who interrogate questions of law and its “natural” component unphilosophically, that is, in an unsystematic fashion that isolates the nature of law from that of logic, nature, and mind. See PW, 102-180. From the beginning, questions of right involve interrogating the transformative, dialectical nature of mind. We will return to the topic that Thompson examines, that right must be posited, when we turn to the linguistic expression of positive civil law (3.5).

avoid some involvement in debates on non-linguistic topics, I will attempt to focus my analysis through the lens of an issue underrepresented in the secondary literature—the role of linguistic expression in contracts.35

At the outset, we should ask what it means to say that language functions as the medium through which a particular representation attains existence? Looking back on our analysis of the sign-making intelligence, the production of linguistic signs allows for the expression of discrete representations and a freedom to create signs that mean whatever one chooses. The linguistic sign is a key way of creating representations, but the particular contents of these representations—what particular signs mean and how they are used—are not important. What matters for the psyche is the idealizing activity of stripping intuitions of their given content, creating new signs, and memorizing those signs. This activity is, in Hegel’s terms, formally free.

In contracts, however, special importance is granted to the existence of language outside the individual psyche. The expression or utterance of particular words and phrases articulates a particular stipulation (Stipulation) or condition to fulfill, satisfy, or conclude an agreement between different parties. The stipulation is the form through which the content of the contract exists and becomes recognizable to both parties of an agreement. “According to this determination [Bestimmung], a stipulation is indeed the form through which the content of a contract, i.e. what is concluded [abgeschlossen] in it, has its existence as something as yet only represented” (GPR § 78 Remark). Linguistic signs continue to function as representations—namely, as representing something other than their intuitable content—but their role is now to

35 An exception is Jeffrey Reid, “Objective Language and Scientific Truth in Hegel” in Hegel and Language, ed. Jere O’Neill Surber (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 95-110. However, Reid gives only passing mention to the role of language in contracts since his focus is the “objective language” of the arts and natural sciences.
express the conditions upon which an agreement is made and based.

The linguistic “stipulation” of a verbal or written contract enables, according to Hegel, both parties to agree and recognize each other as persons capable of exchanging property. Contractual language accordingly creates a “common will” (Gemeinsames des Willens), which temporarily unites the distinct and separate wills of different contracting parties. The generation of a common will reveals, perhaps most clearly, the conceptual similarity between linguistic and chemical communication, for a common will is a product yielded by using the medium of linguistic expression in a particular way.

Yet expressing the conditions of making an agreement is one thing; actually agreeing is another. Hegel is clear that language functions to express the conditions of a contractual agreement, but he is less transparent on the role of language in actually making an agreement. In other words, what remains questionable is the relation of language to the decisive act—the “speech act” we might call it following J. L. Austin—through which an agreement immediately comes to exist. Does language also participate in this act? Does language actually create, in a decisive moment, a new agreement?

Hegel confuses the matter somewhat by introducing ambiguity into his use of Stipulation. First in § 78, he specifies that language serves as the medium and “form” of an agreement

36 Of course, agreement requires both parties share enough common vocabulary to understand the language of the contract. Understanding the language of the contract such that both parties voluntarily agree to its terms sets the normative standard for how language must function in this sphere if it is to enable the freedom of persons. Otherwise, persons cannot recognize themselves as persons and therefore cannot truly embody their will in external, physical objects, which is necessary to freely pursue their ends. Hegel most often expresses the existent, linguistic aspect of contracts as an agreement (Übereinkunft) or Stipulation. See EPG §§ 493-494; GPR §§ 79, 164.
between parties—the medium through which the stipulation of a contract is expressed. He specifies that the “content [of the contract] is the decision which the will finally reaches on such matters” (GPR § 78 Remark). Language accordingly appears to be only the form through which a decision is presented and attains outward existence. But in the next section, Hegel claims, “The stipulation in a contract, on the other hand, is itself already the existence [Dasein] of my will’s decision” (GPR § 79 Remark), which implies that the decision to agree to the terms, stipulation, or conditions of a contract does not actually exist prior to assent to a contract’s conditions. Language is the existence of a decision, not merely the form of its existence. I think we must conclude that Hegel means that the decision of the will itself and its presentation in the medium of language are one and the same.38 The (speech) act through which a contract takes affect cannot be separated from the conditions expressed by the contract for its fulfillment.

More support for this interpretation can be found in Hegel’s adamancy that a contract is not “a mere promise” (GPR § 79 Remark). It is not what is sometimes called a commissive speech act. Whereas a promise suggests that “whatever I intend to give, do, or perform is expressed as something in the future,” the stipulation of a contract is already, right now, the existence of my decision—that is, only if it is truly a contract and not merely an expression of my subjective opinions or desires (e.g. to perform an act in the future).

Though it might seem dubious that Hegel does not distinguish between the stipulation of a contract (i.e. its linguistic form and content) and the act whereby a contract takes effect, it is crucial to notice the shift that has occurred in how signs function, which obscures a clear

distinction between an expressive act and the contents of a linguistic expression. Linguistic signs comprising a contractual agreement no longer represent a subjective meaning (Bedeutung) but are expressive media conditioning and enacting an intersubjective agreement (Uebereinkunft), for the decision itself occurs through the stipulation of the contract and forms its content.\(^{39}\)

Whatever “meaning” or significance the contract is believed to have must be agreed upon by the parties; otherwise, the language of the contract does not actually serve its purpose of enabling (recognition of) the exchange of property. Expressions represent the actual existence of an agreement between distinct individuals instead of the psychological presence of a “meaning,” so the representation of agreement and the existence of agreement become inseparable in contract.

Hegel fails to justify his differentiation between linguistic signs and other sorts of signs and symbols (including gestures) in terms of their expressive function. The unmotivated claim that Sprache is “the most appropriate [würdigsten] Element” for expressing the satisfaction of an agreement is backed by no justification. He merely references the sections from “Subjective Mind” that we analyzed in Part I, which as we already saw contain no convincing justification for the distinction and esteem given to linguistic signs over and above other signs or semiotic systems. Therefore, we see a similar inadequacy in Hegel’s account of linguistic expression: he merely posits a difference between linguistic signs and other sorts of signs and symbols without properly making the case for the “worthiness” (Würdigkeit) of linguistic expression.

Setting this shortcoming aside, it is important to recognize the significance of Hegel’s shift from treating language as linguistic signs representing (psychological) meaning to

\(^{39}\) Hegel does not mention the role of signing contracts, which seems to be a significant omission in his account.
expressions representing (the existence of intersubjective) agreement.\textsuperscript{40} Since the term \textit{Bedeutung} is no longer associated with language in Hegel’s \textit{Philosophy of Right}, it seems reasonable to infer that the concept of meaning in his philosophy of mind is strictly psychological, referring only to the representational side of a sign in contrast to a word or name.\textsuperscript{41} The terms he uses to capture the role of language shift from linguistic phenomena associated with the inner life of the psyche—from sign and meaning—to linguistic “things” existing or posited (\textit{gesetzt}) in the outer world—to expression, utterance, declaration, and law (\textit{Gesetz}), all of which connote an “externalization” out of and apart from the mind. Language becomes a medium of externalization. Whereas for subjective mind (in the form of mechanical memory) names were memorized to transform the internality of the mind into an “external” space, now language is produced and expressed for the purposes of shaping the actual world external to mind. Perhaps we can tentatively suggest that Hegel finds the concept of meaning too subjective or too “internal” to the subject to capture what is \textit{expressed} or externalized by language when it functions socially. For after the conclusion of “Subjective Mind,” he drops the term \textit{Bedeutung} from his discussions of language. Unfortunately, he does not explore the question of how meaning factors into his account of contractual language and other modes of social expression. So we can only surmise that Hegel’s terminological shift signals a difference in language itself and its function—from a psychological tool (for signifying meaning) to an

\textsuperscript{40} Surprisingly, I have found no commentators who note this terminological shift between Hegel’s philosophies of subjective and objective mind when it comes to the role of language.

\textsuperscript{41} This relegates the concept of meaning to a rather narrow role in a specific portion of Hegel’s systematic philosophy. Some commentators, like John Russon, might disagree with the limited role I have allotted to the concept of meaning in Hegel, and Russon undoubtedly illuminates many aspects of the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit} by utilizing this concept. See John Russon, \textit{Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology} (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004). Yet strictly focusing on its role in the \textit{Encyclopedia} and \textit{Philosophy of Right}, I feel justified in putting meaning in its place, so to speak, because of where and how the term appears therein.
intersubjective tool (for expressing mutual agreement and social commitments).

We must go a bit deeper into Hegel’s conception of contract to gauge its full significance; then we can grasp why language is important for securing agreement—contracts *between whom* and *for what end*—and more specifically, what problem this solves. The concept of contract appears early in the *Philosophy of Right*, and it emerges as a way for individuals who strive to actualize their freedom in the outer, objective world to represent agreement with each other. At this stage or “moment” in the development of *Geist*, individuals can no longer be understood merely as isolated (though still embodied) souls, consciousnesses, or psyches, but must instead be seen as individual *wills* that exist in the world, as minds that participate in the world, work to become free, and who attempt to determine the material and social conditions through which physical objects and intersubjective relations enable their freedom.42 Contracts appear when others (i.e. other *willing persons*) have shown themselves to be necessary for overcoming the limits of the subjective freedom of the psyche. Specifically, it has become necessary to represent, in language, agreements with others in order to satisfy our individual aims, to make our freedom concrete and actual as the free and unencumbered pursuit of our particular ends, whatever those might be.

The idea that an individual requires other individuals to act freely might seem counterintuitive, so let us examine why Hegel believes this to be the case.43 Our analysis of

42 For a detailed account of the relation in Hegel between the free will and its expression, see Christopher Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection: Hegel and the Logic of Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011), ch. 2.
43 Throughout his corpus, Hegel provides many arguments for the necessity of others to actualize our own freedom. Here I sketch only a brief version of these arguments as they implicate his conception of contracts in the *Philosophy of Right*. For more comprehensive accounts of the necessary sociality of freedom (and knowledge), see Z. A. Pelczynski “Political Community and Individual Freedom in Hegel’s Philosophy of State” in *The State and Civil Society*, 55-76; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Paul Franco, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University
Hegel’s account of contracts will show what contracts actually do by stipulating and enacting their conditions in language—how they enable the freedom of individuals by creating a reciprocal social relation, what Hegel calls a “common will.” Let us go back briefly in the *Philosophy of Right* to see how contracts and their expression in language arise as necessary outcomes of Hegel’s concept of the will and the latter's practice of externalizing itself.

It is multiple (at minimum two) persons (*Personen*) who, according to Hegel, agree to the stipulations of a contract and thus commit themselves to its terms—as a matter of right. He argues that a person who breaks a contract, which they have struck with another, commits a wrong according to their own conception of what is right. They have undercut their own willful acts by breaching what they have willed and agreed has already occurred. Put differently, the person who wrongs someone else wills that what they will does not actually occur—they contradict their own act of willing.\(^44\) But prior to the discussion of wrong, he clarifies his concept of the will and personhood.

The will (*Wille*), much like the intelligence or psyche, is not a particular attribute, capacity, or possession of a person. Persons for Hegel should not be conceived as internally divisible or collections of distinct powers or even strictly organisms produced by natural cycles. Rather, the will is a *mode of Geist*, a form that mind takes when acting and thinking in a certain

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\(^{44}\) Hegel examines the four forms of wrong (unintentional, deception, coercion, crime) in *GPR* §§ 82-103. Each involves some way of willing such that a person performs a particular action that contravenes what they presuppose is right in itself. “Contract, as an agreement resulting from willfulness and concerning a contingent thing, involves at the same time the positedness of the accidental will. This will is just as easily not in conformity with right, and thus produces wrong” (*EPG* § 495). Consequently, the person who commits wrong fabricates their own personal, particular right over and against what is right in itself, and Hegel shows how this position also inevitably undermines its own assumptions.
way. In fact, *Geist* first becomes “actual” when it begins to exist as an embodied willing in the world.\(^{45}\) The mind overcomes its limited sense as psyche and projects itself out into the actual world (*Wirklichkeit*) by acting (*wirkend*) in the world. In shaping the contents of the world through its actions, *Geist* qua will aims to produce its actual freedom—a freedom that exists in the world and not merely in the “inner” psyche.

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\text{[A]s will, the mind steps into actuality […] The determination of the will that is } \text{in itself} \\
\text{is to bring freedom in the formal will to existence, and therefore the purpose of the} \\
\text{formal will is to fulfill itself with its concept, i.e. to make freedom its determinacy, its} \\
\text{content, and purpose, as well as its reality (EPG § 469).}
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The will first *exists* as a person in their entirety when the will *takes possession* of a body and uses it to do the will’s bidding, and this willing, embodied *Geist* is determined in a twofold manner.\(^{46}\) Explaining first the nature of the will should allow us to then return to the importance of contractual language and what problem it addresses for the willing person.

First, willing takes shape as a person when it acts to produce a personality of its own, distinct and free from other persons and things, for “the person must give himself an external sphere of freedom” (*GPR* § 41). The will, conceived in this self-directed and self-productive way, is “universal,” for it aims to (re-)produce itself and its willful personality. It is perhaps tempting to conceive of the will (and the psyche too) either as a thing or force operative in the world or a natural capacity of human beings, which differentiates them from other species, for

\(^{45}\) Using a key Heideggerian term (which Hegel uses in a somewhat different way), we could think of this moment, the birth of the willing mind, as the conceptual appearance of *Dasein*, a being (*Sein*) situated there (*da*) in existence. Only with the appearance of the concept of the will in Hegel’s system does the mind begin to determine itself and its place in actuality; the psyche is thus an abstraction of what mind truly is, an abstraction of mind from the actual world.

\(^{46}\) For a recent account of the opening of “Abstract Right” and its position in Hegel’s system, see Philip J. Kain, *Hegel and Right: A Study of the Philosophy of Right* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018), Ch. 2.
this is how many philosophers before and after Hegel conceive of the will. Yet for Hegel, this would be a mistake, cleaving the activity of thinking from that of willing. Willing, on Hegel’s account, can be understood as a different way of thinking and determining what is thought as having direct bearing on the external world and the achievement of practical ends. As with the activity of thinking, willing is a spiritual (geistig) movement, and the conceptual transition between thinking and willing depends on grasping how willing one's own personality constitutes an objective thinking in the world. “[I]n truth, thinking is what determines itself into will and thinking remains the substance of the will, so that without thinking there can be no will” (EPG § 468 Addition). Thus, the will for Hegel is a mode of thoughtful acting on itself, of a self-productive movement that actualizes the mind in the world through its performance of specific actions. Accordingly, persons do not simply exist; the activity of willing must first produce for itself a personality.

The paradox of Hegel’s conception of the will arises from its self-referentiality, what Hegel calls the will’s “universality.” “The universality of this will which is free for itself is formal universality, i.e. the will’s self-conscious (but otherwise contentless) and simple reference to itself in its individuality [Einzelnheit]; to this extent, the subject is a person” (GPR § 35).

47 Thomas Hobbes for instance criticizes his medieval predecessors’ views of the will—“The definition of the will, given commonly by the Schools, that it is a rational appetite, is not good”—but he then proceeds to suggest a similarly problematic conception of the will as “the last appetite in deliberating” (Leviathan, Ch. VI). Hobbes thus reifies the will as a specific appetite or desire belonging to or existing within a person. Similarly, more recent debates over whether or not humans have free will run into difficulties when authors presuppose that free will, if it exists, must be either a possession of the mind or its naturally-given capacity or faculty. Presupposing that freedom of the will (or lack thereof) must be either an existent or non-existent capacity undercuts the ability of the will to ever actualize itself as a free, existing movement in the world. The will can never be actualized on such accounts, not even partially—it would not even make sense on these accounts to speak of the actualization of the will in and through objects as Hegel does. These presuppositions preclude an investigation like Hegel’s into the nature of the will itself, and from such accounts no concept of the person can emerge as the actual embodiment of the will. Persons thus remain merely given, natural things. For a well-known example, see J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” Mind, New Series, 64, no. 254 (1955): 200-212.
Conceived in this self-referential way, willing aims at taking possession of a body and producing itself as a person.

The content or aim of personality is at first general and abstract—the will initially aims only to will its own willing or, put differently, to produce its personality in the world. So willing at first appears as an individual person devoid of any particular traits (these traits must be generated).

Personality begins only at that point where the subject has not merely a consciousness of itself in general as concrete and in some way determined, but a consciousness of itself as a completely abstract ‘I’ in which all concrete limitation and validity are negated and invalidated. In the personality, therefore, there is knowledge of the self as an object [Gegenstand], but as an object raised by thought to simple infinity and hence purely identical with itself (GPR § 35 Remark).

The will, like the psyche, begins as an abstract movement, but this time Geist aims to actualize itself as a bodily movement in the world and to comprehend its own restlessness, its unyielding desire for freedom. Seen in the light of its self-referential individuality, the will first actualizes itself as a subject able to abstract itself from the world it faces. “Accordingly, in contrast with reality, it is its own negative actuality, whose reference to itself is purely abstract – the inherently individual [in sich einzelner] will of a subject” (GPR § 34).

The will is also determined in a secondary way: conceived in light of its opposition to a

48 This self-referential or “infinite” aspect of abstract personhood grounds Hegel's claim that “The commandment of right is therefore: be a person and respect others as persons” (GPR § 36). Only persons, not “things” (Sachen), possess the capacity to conceive of themselves as objects of knowledge, and this for Hegel justifies the “respect” owed to persons. However, because of the initially abstract nature of personhood, “respect” in this case is an abstract, negative right—a right “not to violate” personality and what ensues from personality. Hence there are only prohibitions of right, and the positive form of commandments of right is, in its ultimate content, based on prohibition” (GPR § 38). “Respect” for persons is then akin to leaving others alone to their own devices, as when we say, “Your co-workers deserve your respect,” or “You should respect their wishes.” For a fuller account of Hegel on the nature of persons and the respect they deserve from other persons, see Arto Laitinen, “Hegel and Respect for Persons,” in The Roots of Respect: A Historic-Philosophical Itinerary, eds. Elena Irrera and Giovanni Giorgini (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 171-186.
world that it confronts, the will becomes a particular person. “In accordance with the partibility of the will, it has in addition a content consisting of determinate ends, and as exclusive individuality [Einzelheit], it simultaneously encounters this content as an external world immediately confronting it” (GPR § 34). The will distinguishes its individual subjectivity, its infinite will, first from an external world (and then from other persons in the world), for only by distinguishing itself from an other, from an outside, can it claim to be a person, an individual will with its own particular contents. “Consequently, this sphere distinct from the will, which may constitute the sphere of its freedom, is likewise determined as immediately different and separable from it” (GPR § 41).

The external world standing opposed to the person is not an empty void but is populated both by external “things” (Sachen) and other persons. Hegel justifies the existence of things, which are different in kind than willing persons, not by appealing to common sense or empirical evidence, but by extrapolating from how a person first encounters the world as an other. The world appears outside, “external,” and opposed to the person whose efforts inevitably encounter resistance from the world as an external other. This means for Hegel that the world appears to the person as comprised of “externalities” themselves. That is, the objective world appears outside and external to the person only if this world is comprised of externalities in themselves—in themselves—i.e. things lacking a will and not conscious of themselves and therefore capable of embodying a person’s will if a person takes possession of and uses them for their own ends. Otherwise, Hegel argues, the world would not actually appear external to the person but rather as part of themselves. The world would not offer resistance to their will. Thus, things must be external even in relation to themselves: externalities in themselves.
[W]hen contrasted with the person (as distinct from the particular subject), the thing is the opposite of the substantial: it is that which, by definition [seiner Bestimmung nach], is purely external. – What is external for the free spirit […] is external in and for itself (GPR § 42 Remark).

Because things by definition do not will, Hegel concludes that “a person has the right to place his will in any thing” to accomplish their ends (GPR § 44), and these things that must be taken possession of, including the human body, allow particular wills to embody themselves (or to take and use a body) in the world.

Additionally, Hegel argues that recognizing ourselves as persons requires that other persons recognize us that way too, as willing persons, and this need for recognition by others generates the problem that contracts and their linguistic expression arise to address. We need others to see us both as individual, “infinite” wills and as existent, particular persons with particular aims and possessing particular bodies. Only in this way will others respect us as persons and allow us (and we them) to pursue our own aims freely, without impinging on another's right to possess their body. By contrast, Hegel’s earlier discussion of self-consciousness highlighted the need of self-conscious individuals to risk their lives in a struggle for mutual recognition with another, whereas persons need not only have their self-

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49 Hegel does not justify the existence of multiple things in the Philosophy of Right, for he has argued for that previously in the Science of Logic. For his argument for the necessary “repulsion” of an individual “one” from itself to make many ones, see SL, 167-169. “The one is consequently a becoming of many ones” (SL, 167). The same argument justifies why, if at least one (finite) thing exists, then multiple things must coexist in the world.

50 For an exposition of the importance of the human body and the embodiment of the will in abstract right, see Angelica Nuzzo, “Freedom in the Body: The Body as Subject of Rights and Object of Property in Hegel’s “Abstract Right”” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, 111-123. Nuzzo highlights a valuable terminological distinction based on the different ways the body is conceptualized in the Philosophy of Mind. The body (Leib) complements the soul (Seele), whereas Körper complements Geist. Hegel’s reason is that the former is a naturally given relation, whereas the latter is a relationship where Geist deliberately uses its Körper to actualize its aims. “In so far as the body is immediate existence [Dasein] it is not commensurate with the spirit; before it can be the spirit’s willing organ and soul-inspired instrument, it must first be taken possession of by the spirit” (GPR § 48). For a more detailed analysis, see Michael Wolff, Das Körper-Seele-Problem. Kommentar zu Hegel, Enzyklopädie (1830), § 389 (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1992).
consciousness recognized by others but also be recognized as embodying their wills in particular things. Only contracts (and not a battle for recognition) accomplish the latter.

The problem arises from the fact that other persons only have immediate awareness of our particularity, our particular bodies, and not the “infinite,” self-referential nature of our will. People see at first only particular bodies moving around them; they cannot immediately tell which bodies are actually willing. Of course, “infinite” here should not be misunderstood as temporally or spatially infinite, but only in the sense that the will is self-referential and self-directed—the person wills their own continued capacity to will something and they do so through their body. “In the personality, therefore, there is knowledge of the self as an object [Gegenstand], but as an object raised by thought to simple infinity and hence purely identical with itself” (GPR § 35 Remark). In relation to other persons and their bodies, we appear as particulars, opposed by the world and others in it, and our particularity—that each of us possesses a particular, existing body—grounds the ability of others to recognize us as particular individuals distinct from one another. So the problem is how to show others our “infinite” nature as willing persons and prevent them from mistaking us for things they can use for their own purposes.51 Given that others only see us as particular objects existing in the world (i.e. limited bodies), how can we get them to recognize our personhood? This for Hegel is the same as asking, how can we get others to respect our property, the existent things we will through and use to achieve our ends?

51 In the Philosophy of Right, Hegel’s argument against slavery is found mainly in GPR § 57. For a comparison between Hegel’s treatments of slavery in the Phenomenology of Spirit and Philosophy of Right, see Tony Burns, “Hegel, Identity Politics and the Problem of Slavery,” Culture, Theory and Critique 47, no. 1 (August 2006): 87-104, https://doi.org/10.1080/14735780600624084.
The linguistic expression of contractual agreement between persons is the immediate solution to this problem. The function of contractual language is to enable persons to recognize each other as persons, indeed as persons capable of embodying their will in things, thereby owning things. This requires persons not only take possession and use actual bodies but represent their personhood to each other. For the “infinite” nature of the will is not disclosed by the physical body alone or the manipulation of bodies by another. To achieve mutual recognition between persons, Hegel argues that persons must agree to exchange items of property with each other, and such an agreement must be represented and mediated by language, namely the linguistic expression of a contract. A person’s will is externalized and made recognizable to others in the linguistic expression of contract, which presupposes that both parties to the contract understand the language in which the contract of exchange is expressed.

The section prior to “Contract” is “Property,” where Hegel explains how individual persons embody their will in things and thereby own them as property. There are three ways this can be done. The most immediate and limited way is by merely “taking possession” (Besitznahme) of a thing, e.g., by grasping it with my hand. Conceiving of property in this way, a pencil becomes my property simply by my grasping it, in the “immediate physical seizure of something” (GPR § 54). Yet I always only touch part of the pencil, not its entire corporeality,

52 In the sphere of anthropology, the soul is embodied, where the soul and body form an inseparable, natural unity. But in the sphere of property (as the mind conceived as a willing person), a person does not have an immediately natural relationship to their body but must take it as an object of their property, they must own their body. For this conscious act of the person transforms the body from something naturally given into the subject of rights, which others have an obligation to respect. See Angelica Nuzzo, “Freedom in the Body” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, 111-124. For a thorough examination of the dynamic role of the body in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, see John Russon, The Self and its Body in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). Russon traces the dynamic and transformative relationship between self and body across the Phenomenology, capturing their dialectical relationship and the variety of ways self and body relate in terms of the self’s experience of the body.
and the same goes with everything I attempt to possess physically. Each possession I grasp would only be part of a thing. This conception would also entail the need to lug around with me all of my property at all times; otherwise it would immediately cease to be my property. The second, more expansive conception is that my property is determined by my “use [Gebrauch] of the thing,” which indicates, unlike physical seizure, a fundamental aspect of property—that it “exists only for my need and serves it” (GPR § 59). “Use is the realization of my need through the alteration, destruction, or consumption of the thing, whose selfless nature is thereby revealed and which thus fulfills its purpose [Bestimmung]” (GPR § 59). On this conception of property, I demonstrate that this pencil is my pencil by writing with it. Yet this would either require me using all of my property (and all useful aspects of those things) at all times, a prospect undermined by the very notion of trying to write and erase with the same pencil at the same time. And if a pencil remains mine when I lay it on a table, this too shows that use alone is insufficient to account for how my will continues to exist in the pencil after I stop using it.  

The third and most insightful way I show my ownership of something is to get rid of it—to abandon it, give it away, or destroy it altogether. In Hegel’s terms, the “alienation” (Entäußerung) of property, the externalization of property from my will demonstrates that it was mine in the first place.

In his reading of Locke, Fichte, and Hegel on property, Jay Lampert emphasizes that in reality it is the theft of property, the very fact that a thing is stolen from me, that shows something was my property in the first place. “For Hegel,” Lampert claims, “property is crying

53 In these sections on the use of property and the paradoxes it gives rise to (GPR §§ 59-64), Hegel provides implicit criticisms of “use” conceptions of property, e.g. John Locke’s. Jay Lampert explicates these criticisms and shows the numerous troubles Locke generates for himself by relying on a use-based account of property. See Lampert, “Locke, Fichte, and Hegel on the Right to Property,” 42-50.
out to be stolen.” If something cannot be stolen from me, it was not my property to begin with. Even giving a thing away or destroying it fails to show it was my property, for the former either presupposes contract (a written or verbal agreement to gift) or reverts back to property as physical seizure, while the latter undermines my personhood because, as we have seen, to be a person is to make one’s personality existent in the ownership of things, in placing my will in things external to myself.

The specific linguistic feature of a contractual agreement addresses this problem directly, the problem of alienating in the right way my property such that I recognize a thing did in fact belong to me. Equally, this is a problem of persons recognizing each other as persons, as those capable of owning property, and the words and phrases of a property contract serve as the existent representation and mediator of agreement between persons. Indeed, it is this latter aspect of contract, the mutual recognition it affords to the parties to a contract, that makes the linguistic expression of a contract so crucial. For all parties participant to a contract, all parties gifting or exchanging property by using a contract, need their agreement to be represented by language. In the case of contracts, linguistic expression makes a representation of agreement exist, bringing representations out of the psyche and into the world. Language serves as the existent,

54 Lampert, “Locke, Fichte, and Hegel on the Right to Property,” 63. In this essay, Lampert provides an astute and thorough comparison of Hegel’s conception of property in comparison to Locke’s and Fichte’s views, showing how each falls short. For Lampert, it is in the ownership of intellectual (geistig) property, like literary works or technological inventions, where property reveals its irreducibly problematic nature. For such things are necessarily available for possession and use by others and can only be demonstrated to be mine if I retain not the particular thing (Sache) in question (e.g. a philosophical treatise or new writing apparatus) but its “substance” (GPR § 69 Remark) or “the universal ways and means of reproducing such products and things (GPR § 69). Copyright thus shows that it is not the possession or use of thing, but a recognition by others that something is mine which truly makes something my property.
representational medium of agreement and mutual recognition between persons.\(^{55}\)

Hegel is clear that contracts are not merely promises to do something in the future, but rather actually represent “the decision which the will finally reach on such matters” (GPR § 78 Remark). This decision is a decision of agreement between persons to gift or exchange items of property, so even if the things do not immediately change hands once the agreement is made, the stipulated agreement, unlike a mere promise, is the “substantial element of right in a contract” (GPR § 79). The stipulation of a contract, its expression in language, is the existence of agreement between persons. The performance of handing something over to someone else is simply what Hegel calls the “external aspect” of the contract, the consequence that follows from the “substantial” or essential aspect of representing agreement between persons in a contract. “Through the stipulation, I have relinquished an item of property and my arbitrary will over it, and it has already become the property of the other party. In terms of right, I am thus immediately bound by the stipulation to perform what has been agreed” (GPR § 79).

Unfortunately, Hegel does not specify what property contracts actually look like, namely, how contractual stipulations and conditions are expressed in language. He provides no examples of a declaration (Erklärung) of agreement to gift or exchange property, no examples of property contracts themselves. This would be of great value for mapping how language changes between subjective mind and objective spirit, from the subjective creation and memorization of signs to

\(^{55}\) Hegel does not elaborate on the nature of this language of contracts, but it is clear this language must be notably different from the “language” fabricated by the subjective intelligence. It must be produced externally, as in Hegel’s anthropological discussion of signs, and it must be comprised of signs whose significance is understood by both contractual parties. Though Hegel does not indicate how both parties would come to understand the contract, it seems that cultural education (GPR § 197), which includes a theoretical education in language arts, is needed. That said, Hegel does clearly make room for the parties to misunderstand the terms of the contract, whether due to ignorance or trickery, for this circumstance yields the necessary possibility of doing “wrong” to someone (GPR §§ 82-82).
the objective deployment of linguistic expressions in contracts. Yet Hegel provides no such account. Presumably, written contracts would involve persons’ signatures indicating the signatories’ decision to agree to the terms of the contract, and spoken agreement would involve verbal consent. These utterances would also presumably rely on nouns or noun phrases, whether general or proper, to denote the external things gifted or exchanged through the contract, and it might also include the proper names of the parties to the contract.56 Perhaps, a contract of exchange could be as simple as “Pencil for pen” and a contract of gift could be as basic as “You now own this pen.” It is clear that Hegel does not regard the concept of contract as strictly legal, for laws are not necessary for property exchange and legal statutes only become necessary to order and structure civil society.57 It is also clear that what is exchanged or gifted are things in the world, separate from my personhood, so contractual language would necessarily involve denoting objects by words. Yet Hegel provides no explicit theory of denotation (though some have drawn a thin account from the opening chapter of the Phenomenology),58 nor does he

56 There is a significant body of work on the topic of names and proper names, which we cannot rehearse here. I will only point out that some, like Jacques Derrida, have emphasized certain affinities between the phenomena of property and proper names. See Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 89-90, 136-37. Hegel does not broach this topic.

57 It is tempting to read a legalistic theory of contract into Hegel’s account, but this is unsupported by the text. Thus, many readers go awry in identifying Hegel’s theory of contract with a legal theory. See Michel Rosenfeld, “Hegel and the Dialectics of Contract,” Cardozo L. Rev. 10 (1989): 1199-1269; Jay M. Feinman, “Hegel and Modern Contract Theory: A Comment on Benson and Rosenfeld,” Cardozo L. Rev. 10 (1989): 1271-74; Chad McCracken, “Hegel and the Autonomy of Contract Law,” Texas Law Review 77, no. 3 (Feb. 1999): 719-51; and David Gray Carlson, “How to Do Things with Hegel,” Texas Law Review 78, no. 6 (May 2000): 1377-97. All these equate Hegel’s concept of contract with an account of contract law, though Carlson rightly emphasizes the conceptual relation in Hegel between personality, contract, and mutual recognition. While Hegel eventually shows, according to his dialectical method, how contracts require laws to determine their rightful use and instantiate their use of civil communities, his account of contracts does not depend on a conception of law. Furthermore, it cannot if Hegel is to derive the necessity of law from the insufficiency of contracts to organize civil society.

provide a theory of names beyond what we saw already in his philosophical psychology. Anything beyond these suggestions quickly becomes unfounded speculation.

What are the effects of making and agreeing to a contract? One might suppose that one effect is that two people now own different things than they initially did. This is correct, but only part of the story. While Hegel admits that things change owners, he emphasizes that “real contracts,” i.e. contracts that exchange property, rely on the belief that the things exchanged are of equal value.\textsuperscript{59} Contracts enable a quantitative equivalence to be drawn between things of different qualities. The implicit establishment of equivalent, exchange value is, according to Hegel, an essential feature of contracts.

Since each party, in a real contract, retains the same property with which he enters the contract and which he simultaneously relinquishes, that property which remains identical as having being in itself within the contract is distinct from the external things which change owners in the course of the transaction. The former is the value, in respect of which the objects of the contracts are equal to each other, whatever qualitative external differences there may be between the things exchanged; it is their universal aspect (\textit{GPR} § 77).

In agreeing to exchange certain items of property, the consenting parties implicitly agree that the items possess equivalent value.\textsuperscript{60} Hence, by exchanging property, only the external things change.

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\textsuperscript{59} “A contract requires two acts of consent in relation to two things: for I seek both to acquire property and to relinquish it. The contract is real when each party performs the entire action, both relinquishing and acquiring property and remaining an owner of property while relinquishing it; and it is formal when only one party acquires property or relinquishes it” (\textit{GPR} § 76 Addition).

\textsuperscript{60} The value of items is set by contracts of exchange themselves, through the agreement of different persons to certain, particular exchanges of property. In short, it is the persons who exchange property who determine, mutually through their agreement, the exchange value of items. In this way, value is not determined prior to the exchange itself, but in the very agreement to the stipulations or terms of the contract. Hegel calls the value of the
hands; the essential *value* of property remains the same for both parties.

Hegel’s view of exchange value seems to raise problems for his account of contracts since he overlooks the *creation* or *bestowal* of value upon things. He does not seem able to account for how the value of a thing fluctuates over time or how something comes to have value at all. Perhaps an initial *gift* of value is required to get the whole logic of exchanging property off the ground in the first place, or perhaps Hegel should have thematized here how persons can work on and change things, thus changing their value.

Yet we must keep in mind that Hegel’s account of contract is deliberately abstract: it involves only the representation of agreement and concurrent recognition between persons, who are capable of embodying their wills in external things. The parties to the contract are important only insofar as they are persons, as they will their own willing—infinitive wills, in Hegel’s terms. *Where* and *how* the value of anything originates, just as *why* a person agrees to fix the exchange value of their property through a particular contract, is not at issue here. Rather, objects of the contract (*Vertragsgegenstände*) the “universal aspect” of the things (*GPR* § 77), and this leads to a brief discussion of money (*GPR* § 80; *LNS* § 37).

Marcel Mauss argues that even in ostensibly non-market economies, gifts function as means of social recognition, and gift-giving is largely reciprocal, much as “real contracts” are for Hegel. Though Mauss maintains that the reciprocity of giving things is underpinned by certain moral and religious norms instead of contractual obligations and the need for mutual recognition, his arguments share much with Hegel’s own view concerning how “wrong” originates from the violation of agreements made between particular persons (*GPR* § 81). See Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990), 9: “The most important feature among these spiritual mechanisms is clearly one that obliges a person to reciprocate the present that has been received. Now, the moral and religious reason for this constraint is nowhere more apparent than in Polynesia. Let us study it in greater detail, and we will plainly see what force impels one to reciprocate the thing received, and generally to enter into real contracts.”

This idea Hegel in fact addresses later in the *Philosophy of Right* in his account of the utilization of resources by members of civil society. See §§ 199-200.

“Abstract right is concerned only with the person as such, and hence also with the particular, which belongs to the existence [Dasein] and sphere of the person’s freedom. But it is concerned with the particular only in so far as it is separable and immediately different from the person—whether this separation constitutes its essential determination, or whether it receives it only by means of the subjective will” (*GPR* § 43 Remark). Accordingly, the particular contents of a person’s mind—what they need, desire, aim to achieve—is irrelevant to the overarching goal here of being recognized by others as a person and not a mere thing.
contract arises because of the need of persons to recognize each other as persons—namely as owners of property and thus as capable of willing through things. The emergence and fluctuations of value becomes explicitly of concern only when persons attempt to satisfy their particular needs and desires, which is beyond the scope of abstract right and personhood simpliciter.

The most important effect in making a contractual agreement with someone else, of drawing it up in language and agreeing to its terms, is the creation of something new—what Hegel calls a “common will.” A common will is actually generated by stipulating the terms of a contract and by both parties consenting to those stipulations. It is the unity (albeit only temporarily) of the particular wills of the persons when they agree to the terms of a contract. Hence, the creation of a common will is mediated through the stipulation of the contract, which itself represents an agreement between persons concerning a particular exchange of property. “In any relationship of immediate persons to one another, their wills are not only identical in themselves and, in a contract, posited by them as common [gemeinsam], but also particular [besonderer]” (GPR § 81). A common or joint will does not exist before the advent of a contract. Indeed, a common will is simultaneously represented and created by the language of a contract.

This notion of a common will might at first seem odd if we still conceive of a will as belonging to an individual person; in fact it is a significant achievement—the birth of a community of persons. A common will is not strictly personal, but a willing shared between persons, a joint (gemeinsam) will. It aims not to possess, manipulate, or own something in the world. Instead, it is a strange sort of “will” constituted only by agreement between persons—a
common will is founded by agreement. It is the will to agree with another and thus a will to recognize another’s personhood. A common will wills only that the stipulation of a contract be fulfilled in the performance of exchanging items of property—“so do we have in contract the difference between the common will as agreement and the particular will as performance” (GPR § 78 Addition). The successful exchange of things like pencils, chairs, houses, and books demonstrates not only that communities between persons are possible, but that they have already been formed if persons recognize each other as persons. So while much has been made of Hegel’s proposal in the Phenomenology that the concept of Geist is an ‘‘I’’ that is ‘‘We’’ and ‘‘We’’ that is ‘‘I’’,” (PG § 177), it is in his analysis of contracts in the Philosophy of Right where this concept is demonstrated insofar as it takes actual form as separate persons contracting together in a common willing.

Hegel’s theory of contract demonstrates why social freedom is a more developed form not only of individual, abstract freedom of thought (Denken) but also the individual freedom of possessing and using things. A person may believe their freedom rests in their capacity to take possession of things and use them to achieve whatever aims they choose, and a similar conception of freedom is embodied in the right to do whatever one chooses, for this entails the “doing” affects certain things in the world. But as we have seen, Hegel shows that individual possession and use of things necessitates a conception of owning a thing, of property, for simply grasping, holding, marking, or working with something at a given time does not mean the person

64 Though rather odd, the idea of a common or general will has a long history in political philosophy, emerging most prominently in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, On the Social Contract, ed. and trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987). As we saw with Hegel’s philosophy of subjective spirit, his philosophy of right integrates and systematizes features of several different social and political philosophies, including Rousseau’s.
can do so in perpetuity, nor that others will not come along and take my things. Possessing and using things requires that others allow me some leeway and are not constantly taking my things for their personal use. This in turn requires an explicit recognition by others that certain things belong to me, that I can utilize certain things to achieve my own aims. “The existence which my will thereby attains includes its ability to be recognized by others” (GPR § 51). If a thing is not able to be recognized by others as my property, it cannot be said to exist as my property. This feature of property highlights the role of others and recognition in enabling my endeavors. What I am able to use to achieve my subjective aims—for instance, a computer to type this document—is dependent on others leaving me alone and not snatching my things. Or put positively, it is dependent on others recognizing my right to use this computer to write.

Furthermore, my individual freedom for Hegel requires not merely that others recognize my property, but also that I recognize theirs such that our social status as property owners is mutually affirmed and recognized by acknowledging the existence of particular items of personal property.

This new recognition of the dependence of my freedom on others, which is mediated by the linguistic expression of contracts, means that “freedom” is not as I initially conceived. The explication of Hegel’s argument—the expression of what it entails—yields a new way of understanding what freedom is and how it can be achieved. It shows how my own personal freedom requires a mutual recognition of and respect for others' property, such that my ability to do whatever I choose with my property is recognized and enabled through my recognition that others are able to do whatever they want with theirs. Even individual freedom to own property and do what I choose is social since it depends on others recognizing my right to use certain
items to pursue my ends. Likewise, others’ freedom is dependent on my recognition of their right to own property and pursue their ends.

The function of linguistic expression in contracts is thus to represent and produce a common will. Language is the medium best suited to this end because its signs are produced externally in the world, and so are available publicly for everyone to understand, and because its signs are articulated in such a way that they signify the “variety of representations and items of knowledge” we habitually form (GPR § 197). This production enables persons to recognize each other as persons capable of owning property, and it also lays the foundation for new problems to emerge for persons aiming to become free in the world. Since a common will is represented and formed by two particular persons each willing their own particular ends and momentarily joining together in the agreement to exchange particular things, it is also possible that the parties to the contract themselves violate the agreement they have made. Hegel maintains the two persons retain their own individuality despite their agreement to exchange particular items of property. So since the linguistic expression of a contract and the performance of exchanging things are distinct acts, it is always possible that one or both parties can fail to actually perform the exchange in accord with the stipulation of the contract.

65 Aside from Hegel’s discussion in this section of “the education of the understanding in general,” which “also includes language,” he does not account for how the subjective use of language in the “Psychology” manifests in objective spirit as an intersubjective language able to signify a common will. What he does provide is the standard of success for such an utterance—the actual recognition of such a common will by the parties to a contract—without specifying how persons can actually accomplish this feat. Hence, Hegel only claims that language must be used in this way, as a means of contractual agreement, if it is to enable our freedom, but says nothing about how we go about constructing such an intersubjective language. In fact, the success of contracts in exchanging property is contingent on persons understanding the terms of the contract; it is not necessarily successful.

66 Hegel’s accounts of the categories of wrong (unintentional, deception, coercion, and crime) all implicate different ways of breaking contracts. Interestingly, he argues that punishment (if properly used by the state as a negation of the “particular will of the criminal” (GPR § 99)) has a crucial, positive role in redressing the most
Suppose I agree to a contract exchanging my computer for your television but do not actually relinquish my computer to you. For Hegel, this is always possible under contract, for the parties to the contract retain their particular wills, desires, and aims even though they temporarily agree to an exchange and the formation of a common will. In these cases, the particular wills of the persons conflict with the common will of the agreement. “Since they are immediate persons, it is purely contingent whether their particular wills are in conformity with the will which has being in itself, and which has its existence [Existenz] solely through the former” (GPR § 81). I can renege on a contract I have agreed to, ignoring or dismissing the common will of agreement in favor of my own particular desires. Perhaps I decide that after agreeing to the exchange, I would rather not give up my computer. “If the particular will for itself is different from the universal [common will], its attitude and volition are characterized by arbitrariness and contingency, and it enters into opposition to that which is right in itself; this is wrong” (GPR § 81). Parties to a contract are always capable of committing wrong against another by violating the common will, which is formed by persons agreeing to the language of a contract. Linguistic expression, the externalization effected by the language of a contract, grounds the capacity to commit wrong. Thus, Hegel says that the linguistic expression of a contract is insufficient to represent the unification of different persons in themselves, for each retains their individual, particular interests and aims even if they sometimes agree to exchange property with another.

This concludes our account of linguistic expression in Hegel’s theory of contracts. I have attempted to show the problem such expressions address—the problem of recognizing who are extreme form of wrong, crime. See Dudley Knowles, “Hegel on the Justification of Punishment” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, ch. 6.
persons—and which new problem they yield—the contingency of adhering to the common will. The next section provides an account of Hegel’s next significant discussion of Sprache and Erklärungen: declarations of marriage. As we will see, such declarations concern not just the agreement to exchange external things, but rather an agreement between persons to form an ethical bond with each other, a bond founded subjectively on mutual love and trust and enacted objectively in a marriage ceremony.

3.4 Love, Trust, and Family: Declarations of Marriage

Declarations (Erklärungen) of marriage, like contracts, express and mediate mutual recognition between persons, yet unlike in contracts persons’ wills are not united in the exchange of things qua property. Rather, the parties to the marriage mutually declare and recognize they now, together, constitute a new ethical union: a family. Property does not disappear but takes on a subsidiary role as jointly owned. Most important for Hegel is that marriage constitute an ethical relationship that persons freely enter into instead of a transient, physical relationship or an obligatory “civil requirement [bürgerliches Gebot]” (GPR § 164 Remark). The ethicality of marriage requires both a subjective disposition and an objective situation: the persons involved must each love and trust each other and they must make a “solemn declaration of consent to the ethical bond of marriage” in an actual wedding ceremony that is recognized and confirmed “by the family and community” (GPR § 164). A linguistic declaration (Erklärung) of marriage thereby serves a crucial function, mediating the inner, subjective disposition of love and trust

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67 This claim is somewhat misleading for Hegel does discuss language at some length in his analysis of morality, particularly in his long remark on forms of subjective irony, which lies between his discussion of contractual language and declarations of marriage. I hope to analyze the role of language in this section in a later work.
between persons and an outer, objective ceremony wherein a marital union is formed and recognized. Instead of a common will, a family is produced, though in both cases language appears as an actual expression, which simultaneously creates and represents objective, recognizable relations between persons.68

In an early essay on love, Hegel esteems its power to overcome a number of apparently fixed oppositions, the most important being between distinct, living individuals. “True union, or love proper, exists only between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another's eyes living beings from every point of view; in no respect is either dead for the other. This genuine love excludes all oppositions” (ETW, 304). This last sentence is somewhat misleading, or at least incomplete, for Hegel goes on to say that “in love the separate does still remain, but as something united and no longer as something separate; life senses life” (ETW, 305). Love is for Hegel a complex relationship of overcoming and maintaining separation between persons, where persons maintain some separate, individual inclinations and goals while relinquishing their own independent existence insofar as they cultivate and pursue the fulfillment of new, joint desires and aims for the couple as a whole.

The actual ways love manifests between persons can be as mundane as seeing a movie or vacationing together, giving gifts, or accompanying each other to doctor visits. But love is essentially for Hegel a relinquishing of one’s separate individuality, constituting both a loss of

68 Hegel devotes only one section in the Philosophy of Right (§ 164) to the role of language in marriage, even though it plays a pivotal role in its formation and social recognition. This brief discussion is virtually absent in his early lectures on natural right and political science, where he makes no mention of language but does distinguish marriage from a civil contract (LNS § 79). This section fleshes out Hegel’s claims in GPR § 164, links them to an early essay he wrote on love and other aspects of marriage discussed in GPR, and concludes by pointing out what his analysis overlooks.
self and a gain of participating in a new sort of joint, loving subjectivity, complete with its own inclinations and desires. Love is for Hegel a mode of feeling that enables someone to recognize the rich inner, subjective lives of others and form a union with another based not only the exchange of things but “the exchange of every thought, every variety of inner experience, for it seeks out differences and devises unifications ad infinitum; it turns to the whole manifold of nature in order to drink love out of every life” (*ETW*, 307). Love between persons accordingly requires the recognition of each other’s inner, moral subjectivity. 69

Similarly, “trust is the awareness that my interest is the other party’s own interest and duty” (*LNS* § 78 Remark), which likewise displaces the separation between myself and another. Indeed, Hegel points out in his analysis of morality (where he analyzes concepts of purposive and intentional action) that any action stemming from a person’s own moral code necessarily involves superseding their own individual subjectivity and affecting others.

While I preserve my subjectivity in implementing my ends (see § 110), in the course of thus objectifying them I at the same time supersede this subjectivity in its immediacy, and hence in its character as my individual subjectivity. […] The implementation of my end therefore has this identity of my will and the will of others within it – it has a positive reference to the will of others (*GPR* § 112).

69 Hegel’s account of moral subjectivity culminates in an analysis of the concept of the conscience, the true form of which “is the disposition to will what is good in and for itself” (*GPR* § 137). For an insightful analysis of the role of conscience in Hegel’s ethics and politics, see Shannon Hoff, *The Laws of the Spirit: A Hegelian Theory of Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014). In the *Philosophy of Right*, “the moral is not primarily defined simply as the opposite of immoral, just as right is not in an immediate sense the opposite of wrong. On the contrary, the universal point of view of the moral and the immoral alike is based on the subjectivity of the will” (*GPR* § 108). While in “Abstract Right,” the person is understood simultaneously as infinite (i.e. self-directed) and as an embodied particular (i.e. different from other persons), “Morality” “has its personality as its object; the infinite subjectivity of freedom, which now has being for itself, constitutes the principle of the moral point of view” (*GPR* § 104). The contingency of recognizing another as a person, just as it is contingent whether or not someone recognizes my own personality, becomes in the moral point of view the necessity of recognizing my own inner subjectivity as constitutive of my true freedom. In other words, the moral subject understands their own subjective purposes, actions, intentions, and conscience as good (*GPR* § 132), even if they are not recognized by others as such. The true arbiter of moral action is simply oneself, which as Hegel points out can logically lead to the “most abstruse form of evil” where “subjectivity declares itself absolute” (*GPR* § 140).
Therefore, trust must be an implicit element in contract. I must trust that once the contract is agreed to, the other party will actually perform the exchange. This mutual trust is made explicit in marriage, which is an ethical relationship that gives to love and trust an actual existence and “ethical substantiality” between two persons (GPR § 152).

Hegel finds in love and trust a linkage between natural life and ethics, in fact the roots of what he calls “ethical life” (Sittlichkeit). His accounts of love and trust demonstrate how life has implicit ethical dimensions and hence can become actually and explicitly ethical through the actions of lovers toward each other.

On the one hand, a loving couple or group is for Hegel a living unity analogous to a natural living creature since the distinct individuals involved act as members or “organs” from the perspective of the whole. “This union in love is complete; but it can remain so only as long as the separate lovers are opposed solely in the sense that one loves and the other is loved, i.e., that each separate lover is one organ in a living whole” (ETW, 308). My interest is the same as my lover's insofar as we act as lovers.

On the other hand, the lovers remain separate not merely as one part of a whole but because they each confront a world of objects and so develop particular relationships with those objects.

Yet the lovers are in connection with much that is dead; external objects belong to each of them. This means that a lover stands in relation to things opposed to him in his own eyes as objects and opposites; this is why lovers are capable of a multiplex opposition in the course of their multiplex acquisition and possession of property and rights (ETW, 308).

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70 There is relatively little written on the role of trust in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. For an exception, see Stephen Houlgate, “Right and Trust in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” Hegel Bulletin 37, no. 1 (April 2016): 104-116. However, Houlgate does not examine how trust factors into Hegel’s account of marriage, even though he rightly emphasizes the importance of citizens having trust in their social and political institutions.
My interests remain my own and my lover has different interests insofar as we remain individual persons in relation to things. If, as we saw in the previous section, someone’s property becomes embodied as the actual existence of their willing in the world, love and trust between persons retain a distinction between lovers’ bodies such that their unity is never fully complete or fulfilled. Individual property and ownership separates lovers and keeps them apart, and this enduring separation founded in contract accounts for why “marriage” (Ehe) and not simply “love” (Liebe) or “trust” (Vertrauen) is the first moment of ethical life in the Philosophy of Right.

The use of language to actualize a marriage is paramount for overcoming limitations inherent in the relationship between particular, separate persons, their respective property, and the common will formed in property contracts. Declarations of marriage are crucial for realizing the freedom implicit in ethical relationships between persons, both for declaring one’s abiding love and trust for another and for enabling the use and care of “communal property” (GPR § 170), for such declarations are based on “the free consent of the persons concerned” (GPR § 162). Marriage enables persons to overcome the strict individuality of their personhood,

71 This is not entirely accurate since Hegel maintains that children are the true fulfillment of marriage. But the development of children, their transition to adulthood, and the death of the parents signals the dissolution of the family (GPR §§ 177-78), so the unity of the marital couple considered apart from children is never completely fulfilled.

72 Few commentators examine the role of language in Hegel’s account of marriage. One exception, which situates Hegel with respect to his peers’ views on marriage, is Adrian Daub, *Uncivil Unions: The Metaphysics of Marriage in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), ch. 5. Daub rightly emphasizes the function of language for Hegel to make marriage explicit and the proximity (and difference) of marriage and contract: “Alongside the distinction between love and marriage, language reenters the picture in Hegel’s discussion of the family. Unlike the Romantics, Hegel once again assigns a contractual character to marriage, although the alchemy of marriage consists precisely in being the contract that (through love) transcends the standpoint of contract” (Daub, 205).
while communal or family property allows persons to consciously and jointly overcome the limitations of individual ownership, where persons mutually limit each other in their separate pursuits to express the existence of their wills through ownership of their property. “In this respect, their [marital] union is a self-limitation, but since they attain their substantial self-consciousness within it, it is in fact their liberation” (GPR § 162). Hegel maintains that it is in marriage and the formation of a family where property first develops “an ethical quality” and is “transformed, along with the selfishness of desire, into care and acquisition [of resources] for a communal purpose” (GPR § 170).

Hegel thus draws a fine line between contract and marriage, at once claiming marriage like contract is “based on the particular consent of the two parties” while maintaining that “this does not make [marriage] a contract properly speaking, a civil contract, because the parties do not give up only their particular right to individual objects. On the contrary, the whole immediate personality is mutually sublated and enter into union, which for this very reason comprises the essential moment of the [marital] disposition” (LNS § 79).73 If property exchange treats contracting parties as abstract persons owning things of value, marriage treats them as concrete persons with rich, inner moral subjectivities.

Furthermore, for Hegel, a ceremony is necessary in the case of marriage unlike in the exchange of property. Exchanging property does not require people to have or acknowledge any specific feelings towards each other (except a willingness to alienate their property), but

73 In GPR §§ 161 Addition, 164 Remark, and the corresponding sections of LPN, Hegel criticizes those, like Kant, who equate marriage with civil contracts. What these thinkers overlook is threefold: the absence of things exchanged in marriage (e.g. the belief that marriage serves primarily to satisfy sensual, sexual drives), the unity of feelings of love and trust between persons in marriage, and the different effects of language in each case.
marriage requires the overt expression of mutual love and trust. A couple’s “ceremonial” or “solemn” (*feierlich*) declaration of their love and trust for each other and desire to be married on that basis makes recognizable their bond to others. “It is accordingly only after this ceremony has *first taken place*, as the completion of the *substantial* [aspect of marriage] by means of the *sign* – i.e. by means of language as the most spiritual existence [*Da* *sein*] of the spiritual (see § 49) – that this bond has been ethically [*sittlich*] constituted” (*GPR* § 164). In the expression that creates a marriage, the linguistic sign mediates not just between different persons, but between a couple and the ethical substance of the community as a whole. In other words, the mediation of the linguistic sign enables the “recognition and confirmation by [both] family and community” that the marriage is a truly “*ethical* bond [*sittlichen Bande*]” (*GPR* § 164). So while a property contract can be struck solely between two persons, marriages require other members of the community to publicly recognize and confirm the *ethicality* of this relationship since the latter involves not merely joining two wills temporarily through the exchange of property but “the sharing of the whole of individual existence” (*GPR* § 163).

Language again serves as a medium of recognizing a new unity between persons, but this time an ethical *family* instead of a mere common will. “When a marriage takes place, a new *family* is constituted, and this is *self-sufficient* for itself in relation to the *kinship groups* or houses from which it originated” (*GPR* § 172). A family is not a temporary agreement based on the exchange of property but rather an abiding agreement to love and trust each other and to share ownership of *our* property. Its public, ceremonial recognition, mediated by the sign, enables the family to become a distinct member of an ethical community. Unfortunately, Hegel’s discussion of the role of language in marriage stops here, and he does not pursue how language functions
within a marriage after it has already been formed or what role it plays in the health, longevity, or dissolution of a marriage.

Marriage for Hegel is therefore founded both on a loving, trusting relationship between separate persons and a linguistic, expressive act that actualizes and makes recognizable in a ceremony the bond of love and trust between individuals. Without the ceremonial recognition of love and trust, marriage does not constitute an ethical relationship but rather little more than a contractual obligation, which Hegel identifies with “concubinage.” “The ethical aspect of marriage consists in the consciousness of this union as a substantial end, and hence in love, trust, and the sharing of the whole of individual existence [Existenz]” (GPR § 163). To be an actual, ethical relationship, marriage must overcome the limitations of contracts, “for the precise nature of marriage is to begin from the point of view of contract – i.e. that of individual personality as a self-sufficient unit – in order to supersede it [ihn aufzuheben]” (GPR § 163 Remark). Though similar to contract, without a ceremonial, linguistic expression to make recognizable to others that a marriage actually occurs and a family is created, such bonds of love, trust, and commitment cannot be explicitly recognized as founding a family. Again, what we could call a “speech act” is required to create and represent this familial will.

Yet Hegel’s characterization of the function of language in declarations of marriage falls short in two main ways. First and perhaps most significant, he fails to mention the exchange of marital vows or promises (Versprechen) to maintain bonds of love and trust, even though many commentators presuppose this linguistic performance to explain Hegel’s account. 74

a “declaration” does perhaps carry the sense of an avowal, but Hegel does not use terms that would explicitly foreground the marital vow (Versprechen, Gelübde, Schwur) nor does he specify what precisely is being declared. He seems to conflate in the Erklärung of marriage the utterances of persons’ consent to marry (e.g. “I take this person to be my husband”), the feelings underpinning that consent (e.g. vows to “love and cherish each other”), and the officiant’s proclamation that these persons are now wed to each other. He comes closest to raising marital vows in the Philosophy of Right when he notes the importance of “the ceremony [of marriage] whereby the essence of this bond is expressed and confirmed as an ethical quality exalted above the contingency of feeling [Empfindung] and particular inclination” (GPR § 164 Remark). Likewise, his lectures point out only the importance of the “disposition,” and not the linguistic expression, of persons due to be married in contrast with those merely exchanging property: “In the field of right the disposition is superfluous; it makes no difference what my disposition is when I act, whereas in marriage the disposition itself is an absolute moment” (LNS § 79 Remark). But for most part, the marital vow is absent from Hegel’s discussion.

This omission is, I think, quite significant, for vows make explicit for everyone attending the wedding ceremony the subjective “disposition,” feelings, and intentions of the parties that underlie the act of marriage, since for Hegel, I vow my entire being to another in marriage—“the sharing of the whole of individual existence [Existenz]” (GPR § 163). Marriage makes love constitutive of an ethical relationship and not merely a fleeting infatuation for another. Equating marital vows with a particular act of communication, D. C. Schindler claims,

What one communicates in the marriage vow is not some particular idea or experience,

some aspect of my self or some other possession, but rather myself as a whole person: I
give myself to the other in such a way that I henceforward relate to myself always as
belonging in a basic way to the other.\textsuperscript{75}

Though “belonging” to another is perhaps not how Hegel would put it, this characterization of
marriage is quite similar to Hegel’s own, despite the conspicuous absence in the \textit{Philosophy of
Right} of a discussion of the significance of marriage vows. If contracts are not promises, as
Hegel maintains, marriages as ethical relationships must involve a \textit{subjective} element, an avowal
to love, trust, and commit oneself to another—to the ethical bond of the family. Thus, marriage
need not only be enacted by a declaration but more specifically a commissive speech act.\textsuperscript{76}

Second and relatedly, Hegel omits any indication of what declarations of marriage would
look like—for instance, how they would differ from a person’s mere declarations of love and
trust for another.\textsuperscript{77} While he mentions the role of language in marriage ceremonies (though, as
we have seen, only very briefly), he does not offer examples of such declarations contextualized
within a marriage ceremony, nor how marriage might differ from other sorts of commitment
ceremonies. Nor again does he clearly and definitively justify why \textit{linguistic} signs (as opposed to

\textsuperscript{75} Schindler, “‘The Free Will Which Wills the Free Will,’” 108.

\textsuperscript{76} This confusion arises from Hegel’s use of \textit{Erklärung} to express both the linguistic aspect of creating a contract
\textit{(GPR § 78)} and of creating a marriage \textit{(GPR § 164)}. However, he does more often express the linguistic aspect
of contracts as a \textit{Stipulation}, which he does not use in the case of marriage. So perhaps he opens a space between
\textit{Stipulation} and \textit{Erklärung} for us to recognize the subjective and emotional dimension of the latter that is absent
in the former. On the most charitable reading of Hegel, we could understand his conflation of seemingly different
linguistic expressions within the \textit{Erklärung} of marriage as suggesting both its subjective dimension (i.e. the
expression of persons’ feelings for each other) and its objective determination (i.e. the expression of consent to
marry and an officiant’s proclamation of the existence of a newly married couple), both of which are necessary
for marriage but not for contract.

\textsuperscript{77} Hegel does argue, though rather unconvincingly, that “marriage is essentially \textit{monogamy}” \textit{(GPR § 167)} and
necessarily between a woman and a man \textit{(GPR §§ 165-66)}. However, Jim Vernon argues in “Free Love: A
Hegelian Defense of Same-Sex Marriage Right” that Hegel in his own discussions of civil society and the state
implicitly suggests the importance of expanding the institution of marriage in order to guarantee the right of all
persons to marry, no matter their sex or gender. I agree with Vernon’s argument and would add further that
certain sororities, fraternities, sisterhoods, brotherhoods, and perhaps even some gangs might satisfy the essential
features of being a family.
non-linguistic signs) supply the best mode of expressing the agreement and commitment to marry.

Despite these two deficiencies in his account, we can see how the use of language creates new familial units and enables persons to attain a new sort of freedom in the world. To be sure, families limit their members to one extent or another based on the particular ways they interact and utilize their shared property and “resources” (GPR § 164). If the limitations on particular members of the family grow to such a degree that the unity of the family is compromised, the family fractures from the inside, which the growth and maturity of children all but guarantee (GPR §§ 175-77). But families also free up persons to utilize their collective resources as well as ground the ability to bestow the family’s collective property to others by means of “a testament whereby they become” the rightful heirs to the family’s property (GPR § 179). The formation of a family likewise demonstrates the nature of Geist as such—the I that is We and the We that is I—where the familial spirit is bound both by inner, subjective feelings towards each other and outer, objective resources, “care and acquisition for a communal purpose” (GPR § 170).

In summary, linguistic, marriage declarations (Erklärungen) create families and enable them to be recognized as ethical relationships, which are grounded not in the exchange of property but in the explicit commissive to love and trust another person and the declaration itself in a marriage ceremony. Such commissives express one’s subjective feelings and attachments towards another and the commitment to maintain the ethical relationship of family with another, which together with an official declaration of marriage recognizable by others transforms individual items of property into resources for a communal purpose. Marriage ceremonies provide actual occasions for commitments of love and trust to be recognized as subjective
elements in the formation of new, objective ethical unions.

These declarations enable persons to recognize each other as members of larger, family groups, which then grounds the abilities of groups to relate themselves to each other as families, thus making possible a community of families interacting as internally complex “individuals.” “Marriage […] is one of the absolute principles on which the ethical life of a community is based; the institution of marriage is therefore included as one of the moments in the foundation of states by gods or heroes” (GPR § 167 Remark). The creation of families through marriage and its constitutive linguistic declaration thus secures the capacity of individual persons to participate in the ethical life (Sittlichkeit) of a wider community beyond the family. This wider community is both determined by relations between families and itself determines the social conditions upon which any individual and family acts. Thus, the ability to create a family with another person grounds the capacity to shape the world into a free, ethical community. In the following section on positive law, we will see how such broader social relations are determined and what new freedoms they make possible.

3.5 Positing Law: Education and Codifying Civil Rights

Hegel, like Kant and Fichte before him, discusses the nature of law at length in many of his works, and these discussions range from analyses of natural laws to social norms and legal statutes. Our narrow focus in this section is how linguistic expression factors into his analysis of positive law in his analysis of civil society in the Philosophy of Right.78 I will argue that for

78 Accordingly, we will pass over the discussions of law in the Phenomenology of Spirit, for they do not directly bear on the question of language. One of the best commentaries on this section of the Philosophy of Right is Kevin Thompson, “Institutional Normativity” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, 41-66. I largely
Hegel positing (setzen) laws in the medium of language is important because it makes explicit for all members of civil society the rights and customs that implicitly organize ethical relationships between persons and families. The linguistic expression of civil laws (Gesetze) thereby “gives right an existence [Dasein] in which it is universally recognized, known, and willed, and in which, through the mediation of this quality of being known and willed, it has validity and objective actuality” (GPR § 209). Language is thus the medium for transforming implicit customs into explicit and universally recognized and known positive, civil laws (Gesetze).

Language appears in Hegel’s analysis of civil society in two complementary sections, GPR §§ 197 and 211. First, he specifies that language is the expressive medium for making explicit the already implicit “customary rights” (Gewohnheitsrechte) of citizens in a society. The linguistic expression of such customary rights, which can also be called “civil rights” (Bürgerrechte), takes the form of a “legal code” (Gesetzbuch), wherein “principles of right [Rechtsprinzipien] in their universality, and hence in their determinacy, are apprehended [auffasst] and expressed [ausspricht]” (GPR § 211 Remark). For Hegel, the actual expression agree with Thompson’s interpretation and contribute primarily by emphasizing the linguistic aspect of positing right that is underserved in his account.

79 Despite much good work on Hegel’s discussion of civil society, very little attention has been paid to the role of language in this part of his social and political philosophy. Jim Vernon has made a significant contribution by examining Hegel’s justification for grammatical instruction and education in “dead languages” like Latin in Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 38-43, and Andrew Fiala weaves Hegel’s accounts of language and education together to provide a case for Hegel’s conception of the role of the philosopher as educator and the role of language therein. See Fiala, The Philosopher’s Voice: Philosophy, Politics, and Language in the Nineteenth Century (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), ch. 8. Yet these accounts do not investigate the role of language in Hegel’s account of civil society in the Philosophy of Right.

80 It should be noted that Gesetzbuch literally means the book of laws. In this lengthy remark, Hegel criticizes English laws insofar as the “law of the land (or common law) of England is contained […] in so-called unwritten laws (ungeschriebenen Gesetze).” He also specifies the difference between a mere “collection” (Sammlung) of laws and an actual legal code where the “principles of right” are expressed in their “generality” (Allgemeinheit)
of a legal code is crucial because it makes recognizable for all citizens the social norms that order everyone's pursuit of the satisfaction of their needs. The linguistic signs comprising this legal code must arise from the sign-making capacity of individual, subjective intelligences, but it must also be mediated by a program of education open to all, which teaches individuals the representational meaning of words used in social discourse. Thus, second, for this code to be actually recognized and known by all, citizens must be educated in general “theoretical” matters. For Hegel, this “theoretical education” includes “the education of the understanding [Verstandes] in general and also of language [specifically]” (GPR § 197). Only by expressing and publicizing the laws of society, on the one hand, and educating citizens such that they can understand those published laws, on the other, does the legal code become “known as what is right and valid” for all citizens (GPR § 211). In other words, the publication of a written legal code and a general language arts education enables citizens to see laws not as external impositions on their behavior but legitimate norms enabling the free pursuit and satisfaction of everyone’s needs and aims.

The need to posit or set forth the norms that govern groups of individuals arises in “Right as Law” in Hegel’s analysis of civil society (GPR §§ 211-214). The general problem of civil society is how to organize a social body where persons can act freely given the existence of other persons, each with their own particular wants and needs. “The concrete person who, as a

and “determinacy” (Bestimmtheit). We will explicate this remark to see why for Hegel it is important that laws be written (geschrieben), publicized, and given form and determinacy in their expression.

81 This section does not include the legislative activity of making laws, for Hegel maintains that the process of making laws, of legislating by parliamentary representatives, is presupposed by the administration of justice, by the court system. “The administration of justice is not concerned with legislation, where the laws are handed down by a higher authority; the laws are assumed to be already there.” He goes on to maintain that the law is never complete in itself; the actual process of setting down laws is an ongoing process presupposed by the administration of justice. “A perfect, fully complete code of laws is an unattainable ideal; rather it must be continually improved. There should be a code, but it is continually being added to, is continually in the making” (LNS § 109 Remark).
particular person, as a totality of needs and a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness, is his own end, is one principle of civil society” (GPR § 182). Civil society is the ethical domain of particularity, where satisfying the particular needs of each willing person and family becomes the explicit aim of society as a whole. Hegel’s vision of civil society involves a host of interdependent individuals with their own particular wills, and the successful operation and maintenance of civil society requires three “moments”: a “system of needs” where each individual, by working to satisfy their own needs, contributes to the satisfaction of others' needs; an “administration of justice” to adjudicate civil disputes over the property of individuals and families; and corporations to form groups based on “a common interest” with police to protect private property and interests (GPR § 188). The particular needs and aims of individuals must be respected and given their due in civil society, and Hegel is critical of societies, like ancient Greece, which he sees as failing to grant ethical consideration to the particularity of persons.

We have already seen that persons cannot simply do whatever they choose, for the recognition of our own personhood is dependent on our recognizing other persons as well as their right to be treated as willing persons. This recognition, as we have seen, is mediated by language. Hegel maintains that the aim of civil society is to arrange the selfish pursuits of individuals, who seek to satisfy their own wants and needs, in such a way that these pursuits

82 See GPR § 356, where Hegel maintains that the “Greek Realm” does not pay sufficient heed to the particular subjectivity (including their specific wants and needs) of all individuals in Greek society. Slavery inevitably results, according to Hegel. I will not pass judgement on whether or not Hegel is correct in this general condemnation of the ancient Greeks. For an explanation of Hegel’s arguments in relation to his attempt to reconcile individualism and a conception of the universal good, see Charlotte Baumann, “Hegel and Marx on Individuality and the Universal Good,” Hegel Bulletin 39, no. 1 (Sept. 2016): 61-81. This reconciliation directly relies on Hegel’s conception of civil society.


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mediate each other and enable the satisfaction of everyone’s particular wants and needs. “But this particular person stands essentially in relation [Beziehung] to other similar particulars, and their relation is such that each asserts itself and gains satisfaction through the others, and thus at the same time through the exclusive mediation of the form of universality, which is the second principle [of civil society]” (GPR § 182). When actualized, this “second principle” constitutes what he calls a “system of needs.”

The customary rights or norms of civil society arise, according to Hegel, as ways of mediating particular, selfish pursuits to the benefit of all. Each family has particular resources, skills, and needs, and these needs can only be satisfied if people work to develop their resources, exchange with each other if they lack resources they require, and if their property is protected from theft and illegitimate use by others.84

The selfish end in its actualization, conditioned in this way by universality, establishes a system of all-round interdependence, so that the subsistence [Subsistenz] and welfare of the individual [das Einzelnen] and his rightful existence [Dasein] are interwoven with, and grounded on, the subsistence, welfare, and right of all, and have actuality and security only in this context (GPR § 183).

With individuals interacting with one another as they each pursue their own ends, certain norms of behavior and interaction arise to allow individuals to satisfy their needs. As each individual begins to understand the means they require to satisfy their needs, they recognize that “needs and means, as existing in reality [als reelles Dasein], become a being [Sein] for others by whose needs and work their satisfaction is mutually conditioned” (GPR § 192).

In this dependence and reciprocity of work and the satisfaction of needs, subjective selfishness turns into a contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else.

84 Hegel elaborates on certain processes of work and formation that are necessary to recognize and satisfy one’s particular needs. See Kevin Thompson, “Institutional Normativity,” 53-56. See also Alan Ryan, “Hegel on work, ownership and citizenship” in The State and Civil Society, 178-196.
By a dialectical movement, the particular is mediated by the universal so that each individual, in earning, producing, and enjoying on his own account [für sich], thereby earns and produces for the enjoyment of others (GPR § 199).

While Hegel does not specify what these civil norms are, they arise in general from the interdependency formed in civil society and the need of all to mutually satisfy their individual needs. Given his general and schematic account of the system of needs, civil norms would undoubtedly include what are usually called “civil rights,” particularly respect for citizens’ personhood and their right to own property. For Hegel, it is in an interdependent civil society where everyone’s personhood is recognized, no matter who they are. Civil rights are necessary presuppositions for the successful operation of the system of needs, where “a human being counts as such because he is a human being, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc.” (GPR § 209). I need others to satisfy my needs; others need me to satisfy their needs. But these “customary rights” (Gewohnheitsrechte) would also be specific to the culture from which they arise. Perhaps this is why Hegel avoids giving examples of the norms governing civil society. Each civil society would be ordered according to their particular cultural norms of social behavior and interaction, but would also necessarily include general, civil rights.

Yet the civil system of needs allows for only a limited sort of freedom as individuals pursue and satisfy their own particular needs as long as they do not harm or thwart each other’s pursuits. Furthermore, wrong committed against one person or family is, due to the interdependence of all, a wrong against the system of needs and civil society itself.

Since property and personality have legal recognition and validity in civil society, crime is no longer an injury [Verletzung] merely to a subjective infinite [i.e. a person], but to the universal cause [Sache] whose existence [Existenz] is inherently [in sich] stable and
strong” (GPR § 218).85

The police exist, according to Hegel, to prevent such harm, particularly against personal and familial property and corporations qua groups of persons pursuing common interests.

For Hegel, language is important because right must be posited (gesetzt) or positive (positiv) to become actual, that is, to become embodied in actual rights and laws (Gesetze) that organize a society of individuals. Moreover, given the importance Hegel places on a general education of all citizens on matters of language, which again constitutes the most articulated system of signs, this seems to justify Hegel’s appeal to language when he asserts that the customary laws should be “written down and collected” (GPR § 211 Remark).86 It is not sufficient merely to describe a concept or abstract idea of what is right or to have general rules indicating the criteria a right action must meet. To be actually right for Hegel means that right must be actual, and this means they must be recognized by citizens as actually in effect. This does not mean that Hegel’s Philosophy of Right simply enumerates and explains the rights and legal codes that existed in his Prussian society. As Kevin Thompson claims, “To designate something positiv can indicate either the mere existence of something insofar as it is without a rational foundation or justification, or it can express the positedness of something as being the necessary rational embodiment of an essence or principle.”87 It is clearly the second that Hegel intends, such that “when what is right in itself is posited in its objective existence [Dasein] – i.e.

85 “In crime injury is done to civil society, to a universal. […] Since civil society, [which] has its essential being in what constitutes life and possession of property, is injured as a universal, an offense may become more important, by reason of the threat it presents to the basis, the substance of civil society, than it would be if all it amounted to was injury to the individual—e.g., theft and robbery” (LNS § 114 Remark).
86 Hegel also suggests the importance of expressing civil laws linguistically given he emphasizes the importance of expressing “the principles of right in their universality […] expressed in terms of thought” (GPR § 211 Remark) while previously maintaining that “it is in names that we think” (EPG § 462 Remark).
determined by thought for consciousness and known [bekannt] as what is right and valid – it becomes law; and through this determination, right becomes positive right in general” (GPR § 211). For as Thompson maintains, “the positivity of right is an expression of Hegel’s thesis that the normative force of such requirements, their claim that it is right that they be obeyed, is dependent on their being embodied in certain sorts of institutional arrangements.”

For rights to have legitimate force, they must be actually recognized and embodied in laws and the operations of particular social institutions, and Thompson rightly points out that the authority of law and institutional arrangements for Hegel “derives from the necessity of ensuring the rights of both producers and consumers in the system of needs and this in turn is grounded in the requirement that both sorts of pursuits be genuinely autonomous.” At root, the authority of law as well as the actuality of right is founded on freedom—namely, the freedom that laws afford to the pursuits of citizens for satisfying their needs. The legitimacy of law is inseparable from its recognition as law, which requires its explicit expression through the medium of language.

Accordingly, Hegel specifies that the linguistic expression of a legal code does not create laws ex nihilo but makes explicit the customary rights that enable citizens to pursue interdependently the satisfaction of their needs. Unlike contracts or marriages, the setting out of laws for everyone to acknowledge, recognize, and know does not immediately create new social

88 Ibid., 43.
89 Ibid., 56. Thompson illuminates how Hegel responds to an ongoing debate in his day over the source of the legitimate authority of law. The debate, according to Thompson, was split between those who argued that the authority of a positive legal code derived from its foundation in “a set of laws of reason” and thus from “a natural moral order” (46) that all rational beings could access; and those who argued that the history and historical traditions of particular societies provided the foundation for the legal code and secured its normative authority. Hegel overcomes this dilemma by foregrounding self-determination and the legitimatizing role of freedom: the authority of the legal code comes not from a natural moral order nor the contingencies of historical tradition, but from the freedom it affords its citizens in their pursuits.
relations between individuals; it codifies the norms that implicitly governed social interactions.

Hegel emphasizes the importance of producing an explicit legal code.

To deny a civilized nation, or the legal profession [dem juristischen Stande] within it, the ability to draw up a legal code would be among the greatest insults one could offer to either; for this does not require that a system of laws with a new content should be created, but only that the present content of the laws should be recognized in its determinate universality – i.e. grasped by means of thought – and subsequently applied to particular cases (GPR § 211 Remark).

The linguistic sign is the appropriate means for expressing the universal content of laws—i.e. that they apply equally to everyone in society—because, as we saw in Part I, the form of a sign is itself universal, i.e. the form of the abstract intelligence or ego that produces signs for itself. Its form coupled with a social program to educate citizens on the language used by the law makes language the appropriate medium by which to express laws. So when Hegel says that the legal code must be “apprehended and expressed [ausspricht] in terms of thought [denkend]” (GPR § 211 Remark), this is the same as saying they must be expressed in language as language is the “most appropriate medium of intellectual representation” (GPR § 78).

Expressing the civil legal code in language enables it to be seen by citizens as either a legitimate or illegitimate authority of right. Not only does the actual legal code and its embodiment in social institutions order everyone's pursuit of the satisfaction of their needs, but the public expression of the code allows for the citizenry to recognize how the code determines social interactions, such that they can then evaluate whether or not the legal code is, in fact, founded on enabling the freedom of all to satisfy their needs. This code includes laws specifying property rights, suits for damaging property, regulations of contract and marital law, and all
manner of what Hegel refuses to call “common law.” If course, this does not entail that every legal code possesses legitimate authority since the ultimate gauge of its legitimacy rests on the freedom and satisfaction it affords to all citizens.

Since the legitimacy of the legal code depends on its being recognized by all citizens as enabling their freedom, they must be able to understand the language of the legal code. This does not mean citizens are expected to comprehend all civil laws and their interpretations, but only that they be educated and taught to develop the intellectual tools for understanding the laws that govern their society in general, even if many of the details and interpretations are parsed only by lawyers. Otherwise, laws are not actual for citizens qua laws, but instead appear as external or hegemonic constraints. “For the law to have a binding force, it is necessary, in view of the right of self-consciousness [...] that the laws should be made universally known” (GPR § 215). This is particularly the case in “trials by jury,” which afford individual jury members the “moment of subjective freedom” of deciding and passing judgment publicly on the guilt or innocence of people charged with civil crimes (GPR § 228 Remark). Persons uneducated about the language of the law are ill-equipped to deliberate and decide whether or not their fellow citizens have violated or upheld the law.

90 Hegel reserves the phrase, gemeines Recht, to refer to the English legal system, whose laws he criticizes for being unwritten (even while they are still written down in legal rulings and precedents) (GPR § 211). Gemein implies a vulgarity or baseness, which is evident in uses of the English word “common” or “commoner” that signify a low social class. Hegel avoids using this term and imparting a class element to the civil legal code and instead distinguishes between the common will that is created through the language of contracts and the universal (allgemein), civil legal code that applies to all citizens. When instantiated in the nation state, the civil legal code becomes private law as opposed to the public law of the state.

91 Hegel suggests that civil society as such is ill-equipped to satisfy everyone’s needs and hence necessarily produces a significant degree of poverty. “This shows that, despite an excess of wealth, civil society is not wealthy enough – i.e. its own distinct resources are not sufficient – to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble” (GPR § 245). This suggests that civil society alone can never guarantee the freedom of all, and this insufficiency is founded on the contradiction inherent in civil society—between protecting private property and allowing persons to satisfy their needs.
Therefore, Hegel argues that all citizens in civil society must be taught how to “form representations [of objects of knowledge] and pass from one to the other in a rapid and versatile manner, to grasp complex and general relations [Beziehungen], etc.” This “theoretical” education is “the education of the understanding in general, and therefore also includes language” (GPR § 197), and we already explained in Part I how intelligence develops by abstracting from the content of intuition and creating linguistic signs in order to grasp the relations between subjective representations. Language is the medium for making statements and laws “universally known” because the linguistic sign shares the same “universal” form as the intelligence from which it is produced and as thoughts (Denken), which originate from the memorization of signs. While Hegel does not elaborate on the precise nature of this education, its importance is relatively clear. Theoretical education enables citizens to distinguish, relate, and organize the variety of mental representations they have of objects (e.g. hammers, conveyor belts, corn) by exercising the same psychological capacities involved in the manipulation and organization of linguistic signs, as we saw in Part I. It provides citizens the tools to analyze and grasp the linguistic signs that comprise the legal code, such that they can understand how that code expresses the norms governing civil society as a whole and their own particular pursuits.92

To conclude, language is the expressive medium through which rights are actualized and transformed into civil laws that are publicized for all to know. Without their publication in

92 In GPR § 228, Hegel remarks that legal jargon and terminology obstructs the ability of most citizens to understand the laws that govern their actions towards others, in turn erecting a significant obstacle for seeing the legal code as a set of rules enabling their freedom instead of hindering it. For citizens have the right to know how and in what way they have violated the law. “Even if they have the right to be physically present in court, to have a footing in it (in iudicio stare), this counts for little if they are not to be present in spirit and with their own knowledge [Wissen], and the right which they receive will remain an external fate for them.”
language, civil norms and rights remain implicit, familiar (bekannt) but not posited or set down (gesetzt) and made existent for everyone. Their publication opens them up to social recognition, legitimacy, and adjudication. Furthermore, without teaching people the meanings of linguistic signs, citizens cannot understand how their civil rights (e.g. to own property and get married) are actualized in the laws of their civil society. “But it is this very sphere of relativity – as that of education – which gives right an existence [Dasein] in which it is universally recognized, known, and willed, and in which, through the mediation of this quality of being known and willed, it has validity and objective actuality” (GPR § 209). We now turn to the twofold invocation of language in Hegel’s analysis of the state: expressing a state’s political constitution and individual “freedom of public communication” (die Freiheit der öffentlichen Mittheilung), or what is often called “free speech.”

3.6 Free Speech and the Constitution: Public Opinion and Universal Will

The political state emerges in the Philosophy of Right to unify the institutions and activities of civil society under a common interest and purpose.93 The state, on Hegel’s account, makes this overarching, unified interest and purpose known to its citizens and members, and though he does not say so explicitly, making the constitution of the state “manifest and clear to itself” seems to involve publishing a written constitutional document.94 For such a document would make the

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93 For a more detailed analysis of the role of ends and aims in Hegel’s concept of the state, see David C. Durst, “The End(s) of the State in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, 229-248.

94 Even in his early writings, Hegel stresses the importance of expressing state constitutions. For his early, detailed polemic on the German Constitution (or lack thereof), see PW, 6-101. His main complaint, reiterated repeatedly, is that constitutional theorists often fail to grasp the idea that constitutions should express the concrete universality of the state, the conceptual unification it brings to all the functions, institutions, and powers of society. The state is not a superstructure overlaid on society, but the unifying thread of relations and practices inhering in the culture, social fabric, institutional arrangement, and legal code. See GPR § 272 and Remark. He also ridicules the question, “Who is to draw up the constitution?” as “nonsensical. For it presupposes that no
state’s constitution and unity an explicit object of knowledge and aim for its citizens.95

This recognized unification of the particular interests of individuals forms not merely a “common” (gemeinsam) interest but a concrete “universal” (allgemein) one. For a common will, which is for example formed by contract, is merely posited between multiple individuals, who nevertheless each retain their own particular interests and reasons for coming together (gemeinsam) with others. I can just as well decide to trade my computer for your bicycle as not; either way, my will (or my capacity for willing) is unaffected. Whereas a concrete universal will, far from being the result of persons choosing to come together in a temporary unity and equally far from being an abstraction from individuals,

consists in the unity of objective freedom (i.e. of the universal substantial will) and subjective freedom (as the freedom of individual knowledge and of the will in its pursuit of particular ends). And in terms of its form, it therefore consists in self-determining action in accordance with laws and principles based on thought [gedachten] and hence universal [allgemeinen] (GPR § 258 Remark).96

constitution as yet exists, so that only an atomistic aggregate of individuals is present” (GPR § 273 Remark). According to Hegel, the expression of a constitution—that is, the actual production of a constitutional document—merely makes the already existing, internal constitution of the state explicit instead of creating something entirely new. This “explicitizing” function of language is thus shared by the drawing up of both legal codes and constitutional documents. Nevertheless, he does not mention language or linguistic expression in his analysis of state constitutions.

95 “But the spirit is objective and actual to itself not only as this necessity and as a realm of appearance, but also as the ideality and inner dimension of these. Thus, this substantial universality becomes its own object [Gegenstand] and end, with the result that the necessity in question similarly becomes its own object and end in the shape of freedom” (GPR § 267). Hegel’s failure to mention the linguistic expression of state constitutions is unfortunate, but as that which unifies objective expression and subjective representation into an ideal unity, the linguistic sign seems the only tool for expressing and making explicit the ideal unity of the state. Furthermore, his criticisms of England’s unwritten, common law provide further evidence that Hegel believes the constitution of the state should be written and publicized.

96 For Hegel, the state is not formed (nor is civil society) by persons agreeing or contracting together to form a society or state. This social contract view of the origins of the state is, for Hegel, “the result of superficial thinking, which envisages only a single unity of different wills. But in a contract, there are two identical wills, both of which are persons and wish to remain owners of property; the contract accordingly originates in the arbitrary will of the person – an origin which marriage also has in common with contract. But in the case of the state, this is different from the outset, for the arbitrary will of individuals is not in a position to break away from the state because the individual is already by nature a citizen of it. […] The state itself must give permission for individuals to enter or leave it, so that this does not depend on the arbitrary will of the individuals concerned; consequently, the state is not based on contract, which presupposes an arbitrary will” (GPR § 75 Addition).
Civil society has no such overarching, universal interest for individuals, at least not a positive aim—aiming towards something—only a negative one to protect citizens and prevent them from harming the pursuits of others to meet their needs. For the interest of a state to be concretely universal according to Hegel, the citizenry must not only be aware of how their own individual ends are coalesced into the state’s end, but also how they each contribute to and participate in the state’s functions—not as individuals collected under the umbrella of a state but as constitutive members of a state furthering simultaneously their own interests and the ends of the state.

Let us quote Hegel at length on this relation between the state and its citizenry:

The fact that the end of the state is both the universal interest as such and the conservation of particular interests within the universal interest as the substance of these constitutes (1) the abstract actuality or substantiality of the state. But this substantiality is (2) the necessity of the state, for it divides itself up into the conceptual differences within the state's functions; and these differences, by virtue of this substantiality, are likewise actual and fixed determinations and powers. (3) But this very substantiality is the spirit which knows and wills itself as having passed through the form of education. The state therefore knows what it wills, and knows it in its universality as something thought (GPR § 270).

We need not delve too deeply into the conceptual structure and actual operations of the state. We need only grasp the importance Hegel grants to the expression of a state’s constitution and the role of individual persons’ expressions of their political opinions. In so doing, we can gauge

Hegel says little about stateless persons, remarking only that “it is the rational destiny of human beings to live within a state, and even if no state is yet present, reason requires that one be established” (ibid.). Hegel’s rationale behind this striking claim concerning the “rational destiny” of individuals again rests on freedom; without the state, true, concrete freedom is impossible since only in the state are objective and subjective freedom united and made actual. See Alan Patten, “Social Contract Theory and the Politics of Recognition in Hegel’s Political Philosophy” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, 167-184.

97 For a comparison between Hegel’s conception of the state and John Rawls’ “well-ordered society,” see Stephen Houlgate, “Hegel, Rawls, and the Rational State” in Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism, 249-273. This article also details Hegel’s criticisms of social contract theory. For an analysis of Hegel’s concept of the state in relation to civil society and how this relates to Marx’s subsequent adaptation and criticism of Hegel’s view, see Z. A. Pelcynski, “Nation, civil society, state: Hegelian sources of the Marxian non-theory of nationality” in The State and Civil Society, 262-278. Both are insightful commentaries, though neither targets the role of language in Hegel’s account of the state.
Hegel’s view of how (self-)expressions of the state and its individual members address two related problems: making the constitution of the state known and enabling individual citizens to express their subjective opinions concerning the state.

“Constitution” is an ambiguous word in English, and this ambiguity also exists for the German Verfassung. When used in a strictly political sense, it can refer either to the internal structure or “frame” (Fassung) of a state or a document that expresses such an internal structure. A political constitution in both senses, on Hegel’s account, cannot be divorced from its foundation on the cultural values, norms, and practices of a people from which it derives and for which it unifies.

Since spirit is actual only as that which it knows itself to be, and since the state, as the spirit of a nation [Volk], is both the law which permeates all relations within it and also the customs and consciousness of all the individuals who belong to it, the constitution of a specific nation will in general depend on the nature and culture [Bildung] of its self-consciousness; it is in this self-consciousness that its subjective freedom and hence also the actuality of the constitution lie (GPR § 274).

Hence, expressions of a state’s constitution, constitutional documents, are not for Hegel purely formal legalistic documents, laying out specific rights and freedoms of citizens in addition to general legal statutes and procedures. They certainly encompass these functions for Hegel, but they also express the unity implicit in a civil society and in the normative authority of its legal code, itself a collection of customary rights and norms made explicit. Therefore, “each nation accordingly has the constitution appropriate and proper to it” (GPR § 274 Remark).

Andrew Buchwalter illuminates Hegel’s view of the cultural foundation of political constitutions by contrasting it with Jürgen Habermas’ more formal, legalistic conception. “From a Habermasian perspective, it may be countered that, in his attention to cultural considerations, Hegel has departed from the very domain of law, jettisoning the question of the norms that
citizens adopt to regular their common life for what in fact are only the cultural assumptions of a particular community.”\textsuperscript{98} But as Buchwalter points out, Hegel argues that “notions of cultural value and civic sentiment are implied by the very concept of law,” even if laws are not reducible to cultural values and norms.\textsuperscript{99} Moreover, culture is not strictly an assumption for Hegel; it is continuously built, worked on, and re-formed, even as it pre-exists, in some form, particular individuals.

This [cultural] world is, however, a spiritual entity, it is in itself the interfusion of being and individuality; this its existence is the \textit{work} of self-consciousness, but it is also an alien reality already present and given, a reality which has a being of its own and in which it does not recognize itself. This real world is the external essence and the free content of legal right (\textit{PG} § 484).\textsuperscript{100}

This “content of legal right” itself is, as we saw in the previous section, constructed by objective spirit—“it \textit{is} his work” (\textit{PG} § 484)—so the state unifies these complementary legal and cultural worlds, the worlds of objective and subjective freedom.

Since the norms of a society are already implicitly legal, Hegel views it as an error to follow Kant (and Habermas after Kant) in defining “law [solely] in terms of external considerations, be it observable behavior, objective institutions, or formal procedures.”\textsuperscript{101} The constitution, like the legal code, has its legitimacy founded in the freedom and self-determination it affords its citizens, though the constitution expresses this freedom as a \textit{positive} aim for society as a whole. Hence, “Hegel claims that a constitution must not be viewed exclusively or even

\begin{footnotes}
\item[99] Ibid., 212.
\item[100] “Consequently, this spirit constructs for itself not merely \textit{a} world, but a world that is double, divided and self-opposed” (\textit{PG} § 485).
\item[101] Buchwalter, “Law, Culture, and Constitutionalism,” 212.
\end{footnotes}
primarily in terms of formal-legal institutions” because it “must accommodate the broader cultural values and practices of a people.” If the constitution remains purely formal, specifying general political rights and freedoms without linking them to the specific, cultural norms and social practices already at work in civil society, in the interdependent system of needs, then it is abstracted from the everyday lives of the people, of the Volk, and appears either as a mystical superstructure of the powerful or an external imposition by foreign or alien forces.

This “accommodation” or, more accurately, “integration” of cultural values and norms into a political constitution lends it the ability to be recognized by citizens as both deeply rooted in their own cultural values and expressing the unification of a Volk according to shared ends. For the individual conceived abstractly as a mere person, this aim is the protection of property. For individuals considered as moral subjects, the end of the state is “the happiness of its citizens […] for if their welfare is deficient, if their subjective ends are not satisfied, and if they do not find that the state as such is the means to this satisfaction, the state itself stands on an insecure footing” (GPR § 265 Addition). But for citizens and the state as a whole, the aim is to fashion an ethical whole enabling the freedom of its members. Constitutive of the legitimate authority of the constitution is that the people recognize and acknowledge it and the laws (both civil and criminal) it underpins as legitimate—not as external constraints or limits on their actions, but as expressions of an actual institutional apparatus that embodies their own commitments and values and so enables their own interests and aims. “The right of the state consists in the idea of the state being recognized and actualized. Individuals have the right with their particular will to enter the state and form part of it” (LNS § 124).

102 Ibid., 213.
The essence of the modern state is that the universal should be linked with the complete freedom of particularity and the well-being of individuals. […] Thus, the universal must be activated, but subjectivity on the other hand must be developed as a living whole. Only when both moments exist together [bestehen] in full measure can the state be regarded as articulated and truly organized (GPR § 260 Addition).

Articulating the state’s organization and making it into an explicit object of knowledge requires representing how the mediation between persons and institutions, between the family and civil society, exists and is actualized, and this representation requires using language to distinguish and express the mediated unity of the state. So it is the expression of the political constitution and its publication that enables citizens to recognize each other as legitimately bound together in a joint endeavor for freedom and self-determination.103

We can compare the United States’ Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in its Constitution Act, 1982 to see what Hegel has in mind here, namely how their differences express different cultural norms, histories, and practices.104 Both documents contain similar list of rights and freedoms. For instance, we can see the close similarity between the Canadian “Fundamental Freedoms”:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association;

and the first amendment to the U.S. Bill of Rights:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of

103 Though Hegel again does not address language explicitly in these sections, I have attempted to foreground and make explicit the importance of language for expressing a state’s constitution.
grievances.

There are slight differences, particularly in the linguistic style—similar freedoms are expressed positively in the Canadian Charter and negatively as prohibitions in the American Bill of Rights—but these general freedoms for citizens are quite similar. However, one significant difference between the two is that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms designates two official languages of Canada in 16(1), whereas neither the Bill of Rights nor the U.S. Constitution specify any official, federal languages. Another striking difference is the value expressly granted to the “multicultural heritage of Canadians” in 27: “This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians,” whereas the Bill of Rights claims no such thing. I do not wish to pursue this further, as my point is just this: Hegel’s view seems supported empirically as these particular state constitutions do not merely express legal rights, freedoms, and statutes, but also cultural values and norms. The preamble to the U.S. Constitution also captures another emphasis of Hegel’s—the unifying function of constitutions: “We the People, in Order to form a more perfect Union...”

The expression of a political constitution, according to Hegel, is crucial to forego the problem of citizens viewing the state as an external force exerted upon them, for “subjective freedom, which must be respected, requires freedom of choice on the parts of individuals” (GPR § 279 Remark). While I cannot go more into the topic of Hegel’s endorsement of constitutional monarchy here, I hope to explore it and his account of the language of the monarch in a later work. For a recent account of Hegel’s defense of constitutional monarchy, see Philip J. Kain, “Hegel on Sovereignty and Monarchy,” Idealistic Studies 45, no. 3 (2015): 265-277.

105 The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription, accessed December 2, 2018, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript. Controversially, Hegel contends that only a constitutional monarchy can satisfy the need for the state to speak with the voice of a single person. “The personality of the state has actuality only as a person, as the monarch.” Hegel goes on to claim, “Without its monarch and that articulation of the whole which is necessarily and immediately associated with monarchy, the people is a formless mass” (GPR § 279 Remark). While I cannot go more into the topic of Hegel’s endorsement of constitutional monarchy here, I hope to explore it and his account of the language of the monarch in a later work. For a recent account of Hegel’s defense of constitutional monarchy, see Philip J. Kain, “Hegel on Sovereignty and Monarchy,” Idealistic Studies 45, no. 3 (2015): 265-277.
§ 262 Addition). One key way this subjective freedom is recognized and protected is by allowing all citizens to express their own personal views (Meinungen) in public concerning what is going on in the state. The collection of these personal expressions Hegel calls “public opinion” (die öffentliche Meinung).

Formal subjective freedom, whereby individuals as such entertain and express (äußern) their own (eigenes) judgements, opinions, and counsels on matters of universal concern, makes its collective appearance in what is called (heißt) public opinion (GPR § 316).

To be sure, this “freedom of expression” or the right to “free speech” merely captures the right of citizens to express their individual, subjective beliefs and does not encompass the freedom for self-determination or to self-determine their lives, a freedom in their entire being, as concrete citizens pursuing their particular aims that give substance to the overarching aims of the state. Just as the right of individuals to have their private property protected by the state is insufficient as a guarantor of their freedom—this is already apparent in the structure of civil society. Thus, Hegel’s view of “freedom of public communication” is deeply ambiguous, for he attempts to navigate between the extremes of either lauding the freedom to express personal opinions as the most important right of citizens or prohibiting such expressions and deeming them politically worthless.

Public opinion, the ever-growing mass of public utterances made by individual citizens, is fundamentally a self-contradictory mixture for Hegel. In the expression of public opinion, the universal in and for itself, the substantial and the true [Wahre], is linked with its opposite, with what is distinct in itself [dem für sich Eigentümlichen] as the particular opinions of the many [Vielen]. This existence [Existenz] is therefore a manifest self-contradiction, an appearance of cognition; in it, the essential is just as immediately present as the inessential (GPR § 316).

On the one hand, the freedom of public opinion, individual citizens voicing their views in public
about the public sphere (i.e. the functions of the state) as well as the interaction between public
and private interests, is paramount, for it not only ensures that the subjective freedom of
individual citizens is formally respected, but it is also “the unorganized way in which the will
and opinions of the people make themselves known” (GPR § 316 Addition). On the other hand,
because it is “unorganized” and is expressed “in the form of common sense [des gesunden
Menschenverstandes]” (GPR § 317), “every kind of falsehood and truth is present” in it (GPR §
318 Addition). Hegel concludes, “Public opinion therefore deserves to be respected as well as
despised – despised for its concrete consciousness and expression, and respected for its essential
basis, which appears in that concrete consciousness only in a more or less obscure manner”
(GPR § 318).106

Hegel never maintains that the press should be censored even though he does admit that
certain expressions by the press can be deemed by the law to be “crimes and misdemeanors of
widely varying degrees of gravity” (GPR § 319 Remark). It is in this lengthy remark on the
“freedom of the press” where he highlights the abiding ambiguity of the public expressions of
the press and hence the “indeterminacy” of the laws regulating the utterances of the press. Hegel
initially criticizes the idea of identifying freedom of the press with the unbridled freedom to
express whatever one wishes.

106 In the introduction to the Critical Journal of Philosophy (1802-03), which Hegel co-wrote with Schelling,
they lament the fact that ideas of “the highest beauty and the greatest good have not been able to escape the fate
of being mishandled by the common mob which cannot rise to what it sees floating above it, until it has been
made common enough to be fit for their possessing; so that vulgarization has forced its way into being
recognized as a meritorious kind of labor.” Their rather elitist criticism of the “common mob” is then extended to
include the press. “An idea, in art or in philosophy, needs only to be glimpsed in order for the processing to start
by which it is properly stirred up into material for the pulpit, for textbooks, and for the household use of the
newspaper public.” See MW, 216-217. Hegel’s view on the role of a free press does not seem to have changed
substantially between this introduction and his 1921 Philosophy of Right, though in the latter he perhaps
foregrounds to a greater extent the ambiguity of the press and its “opinionated” expressions.
To define freedom of the press as freedom to say and write \textit{whatever one pleases} is equivalent to declaring that freedom in general means freedom to do \textit{whatever one pleases}. – Such talk is the product of complete uneducated, crude, and superficial thinking (Ibid.).

Yet he then makes clear that \textit{laws} limiting freedom of the press inevitably run into practical problems because to restrict “the most fleeting, contingent, and particular aspect of opinion in the infinite variety of its content and modulations,” which is expressed by public media, is to involve the law in attempting to regulate a vast, indeterminate body of subjective utterances, something the law is ill-equipped to handle.

Beyond direct incitement to theft, murder, rebellion, etc. lie the art and cultivation of its expression, which seems in itself quite general and indeterminate yet at the same time conceals another quite specific meaning, or leads to consequences which are not actually expressed and of which it is impossible to determine whether they follow legitimately from it and whether they were meant to be drawn for it or not. This indeterminacy of the material and of its form makes it impossible for laws on such matters to attain that determinacy with the law requires; and since any misdemeanor, wrong, or injury here assume the most particular and \textit{subjective} shape, judgement on it likewise becomes a wholly \textit{subjective} decision (Ibid.).

The danger Hegel sees is that by attempting to regulate or otherwise restrict the freedom of the press, the legal system itself inevitably risks descending to the level of arguing over the perceived effects and impacts of subjective utterances on certain persons, thereby introducing a significant amount of indeterminacy into the laws and their application.

The identification of this problem of legal indeterminacy leads Hegel into a brief but insightful discussion on the ambiguity of linguistic expression itself—namely, whether such expressions are \textit{merely} expressions of someone’s subjective opinion or are \textit{acts} that can injure or incite others to violent action. In his lectures on “Anthropology,” Hegel shrewdly notes that “\textit{language is exposed to the fate of serving just as much to conceal as to reveal human thoughts}” (\textit{EPG} § 411 Addition), and his analysis of the freedom of the press raises the potential
concealment and openness of linguistic expression once again, but now in the context of whether or not such expressions truly count as acts, particularly if they are seen as injurious to particular individuals. He ultimately concludes the unelidable difficulty in ruling legally on such matters.

Besides, such an injury will be directed at the thoughts, opinion, and will of others, and they are the element in which it attains actuality. But this element is part of the freedom of others, and it will therefore depend on them whether or not the injurious action constitutes an actual deed. – Laws in this area are therefore open to criticism on account of their indeterminacy, and also because turns of phrase and forms of expression can be devised in order to circumvent the law or to maintain that the juridical decision is a subjective judgement. It can further be argued, if the [offending] expression is treated as an injurious act, that it is not an act at all, but only opinion and thought on the one hand and talk on the other (GPR § 319 Remark).

The law itself thus cannot help but fall short in justifying how it regulates (or does not regulate) freedom of the press, for the opinionated expressions of the press can at one moment be treated as mere expressions and at another as consequential acts. As soon as judges attempt to rule on such matters, their legal interpretations are inevitably “open to criticism” by the public.

Thus, it is argued in one breath that mere opinion and talk should be exempt from punishment because their form and content are purely subjective and because they are insignificant and unimportant, and that this same opinion and talk should be highly respected and esteemed on the grounds that the former is personal property of the most spiritual kind, and that the latter is the expression and use of this personal property (Ibid.).

Hegel does not resolve this issue, which we still face today in public discussions about the impact of news and social media. Instead he bunts the responsibility to legal professionals to decide on a case by case basis, conceding their legal decisions on such indeterminate situations will never cease to be contentious but nevertheless that they must rule on them.

But the substantial [issue here] is and remains the fact that all injuries to the honor of

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107 For an attempt to parse these issues in the context of social media in India, see Shishir Tiwari and Gitanjali Ghosh, “Social Media and Freedom of Speech and Expression: Challenges Before the Indian Law” (2014). Available at SSRN: [http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2892537](http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2892537).
individuals, slander, abuse, vilification of the government, of its official bodies and civil servants, and in particular of the sovereign in person, contempt for the laws, incitement to rebellion, etc., are crimes and misdemeanors of widely varying degrees of gravity. The fact that such actions become more indeterminate as a result of the element in which they are expressed does not annul this substantial character, and its effect is therefore simply [to ensure] that the subjective sphere in which they are committed also determines the nature and shape of the reaction (Ibid.).

It seems that for Hegel the law must intrude into such sticky, indeterminate cases of free speech since the law must simultaneously protect the subjective individuality of citizens (and its right to self-expression) and ensure the stability of the state and its constitution.

Thus, Hegel relegates the expression of public opinion to a subsidiary, but necessary role in the public sphere: to allow members of the public to participate by voicing their own opinions on matters that affect them and other citizens. Codifying this freedom of public opinion is therefore crucial to respect and protect the subjective freedom of all individuals, the freedom to express their particular concerns, criticisms, and praise. Yet this freedom of expression should not, according to Hegel, be esteemed as the highest freedom, for it expresses only the particular interests, representations, and beliefs of individual citizens instead of their contribution to the concrete universal aims of the state as a whole. What Hegel is concerned about is not so much yelling “Fire!” in a crowded movie theatre or even people purposefully lying and misleading others.  

Rather, his target seems to be those individuals that believe their own utterances are of

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108 In fact, Hegel claims it is “impossible to deceive a people [as a whole] about its substantial basis, about the essence and specific character of its spirit.” This seems highly dubious, particularly in light of the rise of propaganda in the 20th century, though he quickly qualifies this claim by specifying how a people can be “deceived by itself about the way in which this character is known to it and in which it consequently passes judgement on events, its own actions, etc.” (GPR § 317 Remark). These claims are difficult to parse. It seems that Hegel means that a people cannot be deceived about its own characteristic nature by those outside the culture and state but can be deceived by members of its own public. Perhaps this belief is why Hegel is so suspicious of public opinion – its inherent capacity to deceive itself about its own nature.
greatest value or at least of equal value to the expressions of the state and its institutions.¹⁰⁹

Hegel runs into three notable issues here. First, he seems to overlook the previous emphasis he placed on the public education of all citizens. Education is meant to raise citizens from their immediate submersion and engagement with the objects around them, merely given to them, through the process of abstraction that allows citizens to mentally distinguish themselves from their objects of knowledge to finally think through and understand how both empirical objects and mental representations relate to each other. This formative process mirrors, in the roughest way, general stages of human development that he identifies: from infancy to adolescence to adulthood. If such an education system is in place as a constitutive part of the culture (with both “education” and “culture” designated by the same term, Bildung), it is less certain that individual utterances could simply be relegated to the realm of “common sense” instead of, e.g., thoughtful criticism of their internal contradictions.

Second, he goes significantly beyond the claims of a self-contradictory mixture in public opinion when he claims that “the first formal condition of achieving anything great or rational, either in actuality or in science, is to be independent [Unabhängigkeit] of public opinion” (GPR § 318). It is unclear how this independency would exist, since public opinion contains, albeit in an “unorganized way,” the essential nature of the culture and the state. Indeed, it is plausible that some philosophical works would themselves arise out of attempts to understand, at least in part, the problems voiced by and facing the public.¹¹⁰ Public education would also make engagement

¹⁰⁹ Though he does not cite anyone in this section, Hegel appears to be targeting his Romantic contemporaries, particularly Friedrich von Schlegel, whom he harshly criticizes in GPR § 140 Remark for raising the subjective ego to a “divine status” as the ultimate arbiter not only of goodness but of reality itself.

¹¹⁰ For an excellent example of such an engagement with the specific problems facing the public in his own time (and perhaps ours too), see John Dewey, The Public and its Problems (Athens: Swallow Press, 1954).
with public opinion paramount.

Moreover, the desire to be independent of public opinion fails to acknowledge the many real cases of public, intellectual *debates* in place of the din of disparate, unconnected opinions that Hegel seems to have in mind. Such debates, including those Hegel and his contemporaries engaged in, seem crucial to the individual and collective processes of “achieving anything great or rational.” Indeed, Hegel retreats somewhat from his rather pessimistic view of public opinion when he recommends that the debates of political representatives should be publicized because 

the provision of this opportunity of [acquiring] knowledge has the more universal aspect of permitting *public opinion* to arrive for the first time at *true thoughts* and *insight* with regard to the condition and concept of the state and its affairs, thereby *enabling it to form more rational judgements on the latter* (*GPR* § 315).

Public opinion itself can grow more nuanced and thoughtful through exposure to political debates among representatives (and, one would assume, intellectuals and academics). Hence, this independence from public opinion not only seems implausible but undesirable.¹¹¹

Third, Hegel includes freedom of the press as one of two modes of “freedom of public communication,” the other being free speech (*Rede*), in the literal sense of “the spoken word” (*GPR* § 319). He could not foresee the importance that would later be placed on protecting the free speech of the press, which is now seen less as mere expressions of subjective opinion than as reporting vetted and mediated by corporations. As we have seen, Hegel’s initial impetus in this

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¹¹¹ We should note that Hegel’s view of political “representation” is significantly different than that operative in representative democracies. His idea is that corporations, organized not strictly around making profit but around their manual and intellectual jobs, should serve as mediators between members of the public and the government (*GPR* §§ 250-256). Thus, corporations together elect their own political representatives who serve in the government. We cannot here discuss this interesting idea (and the kinds of linguistic expression it seems to entail), but for an analysis of political representation in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, see Kenneth R. Westphal, “Hegel on Political Representation: Laborers, Corporations, and the Monarch,” *The Owl of Minerva* 25, no. 1 (1993): 111-116.
section is to point out a potential misunderstanding of the word “freedom” in “freedom of the press.” “To define freedom of the press as freedom to say and write \textit{whatever one pleases} is equivalent to declaring that freedom in general means freedom \textit{to do whatever one pleases}” (\textit{GPR} § 319 Remark). Hegel warns against treating statements by press agents as free in an unlimited sense—that is, as a right to express whatever particular opinions we might have—for the idea of freedom he esteems and defends is not reducible or identifiable with \textit{the ability to say or do otherwise} but a social freedom where individuals find their own individual aims identified with their community’s and ultimately their state’s.\textsuperscript{112} Indeed, his pointing out of the difficulty and indeterminacy in regulating the press prefigures the dynamics of an ongoing debate over regulating and limiting to the right degree social media companies and the expressions they enable. Yet it is easier for us to see now that the publications of the press, or of journalistic institutions, \textit{prima facie} do not seem equivalent to the utterances of individuals. Despite the fact that press agents report stories from a particular vantage, Hegel overlooks the internal mediation at work in press organizations—the organized body of writers, editors, and publishers who mediate and speak collectively through their publications. He harangues the esteem given to “the most fleeting, contingent, and particular aspect of opinion in the infinite variety of its content and modulations” (\textit{GPR} § 319 Remark) but seems to unduly equate such wholly subjective, opinionated expressions with reports and stories published by the press.

We can conclude our analysis of Hegel’s ambiguous view of the freedom of public communication on a more positive note, by noting his recognition of an additional, crucial feature of this freedom and any attempts to curtail its use. One of his main worries, particularly

\textsuperscript{112} See \textit{GPR} §§ 257-258.
concerning the freedom of the press, is the often subtle, propagandistic form it can take.

Beyond direct incitement to theft, murder, rebellion, etc. lie the art and cultivation [Bildung] of its expression, which seems in itself [für sich] quite general and indeterminate yet at the same time conceals another quite specific meaning, or leads to consequences which are not actually expressed and of which it is impossible to determine whether they follow rightly [richtig] from it and whether they were meant to be drawn from it or not (GPR § 319 Remark).

Hegel highlights a key conceptual difficulty here: distinguishing speech as the expression of opinion from speech as an act with consequences. He recognizes that positive laws are in themselves incapable of solving this issue.

The indeterminacy of the material and its form makes it impossible for laws on such matters to attain that determinacy which the law requires; and since any misdemeanor, wrong, or injury here assumes the most particular and subjective shape, judgement on it likewise becomes a wholly subjective decision. Besides, such an injury will be directed at the thoughts, opinions, and will of others, and they are the element in which it attains actuality. But this element is part of the freedom of others, and it will therefore depend on them whether or not the injurious action constitutes an actual deed. – Laws in this area are therefore open to criticism on account of their indeterminacy, also because turns of phrase and forms of expression can be devised in order to circumvent the law or to maintain that the judicial decision is a subjective judgement (Ibid.).

Unfortunately, Hegel retreats from any attempt to solve to this problem and kicks it back to the courts as an irreducible, judicial thorn to be addressed on a case by case basis, which remains “always open to criticism.”

This concludes our analysis of Hegel’s accounts of state constitutions and the freedom of public communication, or free speech. The former expresses the institutional structure and operations of the state, the rights and freedoms of all citizens, and the cultural values and norms on which the state rests. The constitution expresses the unification of all these dimensions of ethical life. Freedom of public communication is crucial, for it guarantees the subjective freedom to voice one’s personal opinions is protected and respected within the state, though Hegel is
adamant this should not overshadow or usurp the freedom to participate in and shape, both individually and as members of organized groups, the ethical life of the state. Freedom of public communication shows in one stroke how the state must respect everyone’s right to express their subjective opinions in order to mediate the individual form of those utterances into the unified and universal voice of the state and its institutions.

### 3.7 International Treaties: The Resurgence of Contract

Hegel invokes language in one final section on the external relations between political states, on the topic of what he calls “the outer constitutional law” (*das äußere Staatsrecht*) as opposed to what we previous referred to as “the state constitution,” but would be more accurately translated as “the inner constitutional law” (*das innere Staatsrecht*). I have chosen to foreground the role of treaties and pacts in Hegel’s brief account of *das äußere Staatsrecht* because he uses the same word, *Vertrag*, to express the nature of international treaties (*Verträge*) as he did to speak of property contracts (*Verträge*) made between persons. He even explicitly draws an analogy between property contracts and international treaties, even though there are crucial differences between the two, most importantly, the kinds of entities or parties (i.e. persons versus states) who makes such pacts. Our aim here is to show first what problem is addressed by international treaties and then the multiple problems raised by his account.

A political state for Hegel must exist alongside and related externally to other states, for

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113 For Hegel’s claim that the people should be organized to exert their legitimate power in the state, see GPR § 290 Addition.

114 These are the respective titles of GPR §§ 260-329 and §§ 330-40. In the briefer sections covering international law or the external constitution of states, Hegel sometimes refers to *Völkerrecht*, which could be translated as “international law” or “the law of peoples.” Curiously, Hegel does not use the more straightforward *internationales Recht*, electing to center the state (inner and outer state laws) as the focal point in his account instead of taking a more global, international perspective.
its concrete universality—its internal division of powers and particular functions and institutions—must comprise an internally complex, but united *individual*. The state is *one* state if understood in reference to *other* states, for the state cannot be simply abstracted from its international relations with others. He illustrates this idea by comparing states to individual persons. “Without relations [*Verhältnis*] with other states, the state can no more be an actual individual [*Individuum*] than an individual [*der Einzelne*] can be an actual person [*Person*] without relation to other persons (see § 322)” (*GPR* § 331 Remark).¹¹⁵ States cannot exist alone.

Therefore, the problem for Hegel becomes how to determine the relations between distinct states such that these state-to-state relations, on the one hand, are acknowledged and recognized but also, on the other hand, do not infringe the *sovereignty* of individual states. For Hegel maintains that “the state has a primary and absolute entitlement [*Berechtigung*] to be a sovereign and independent *being for others* [*für den anderen zu sein*], i.e. *to be recognized* [*anerkannt zu sein*] by them” (*GPR* § 331). Indeed, the legitimacy of state power is at stake: “the legitimacy [*Legitimität*] of a state, and more precisely – in so far as it has external relations – of the power of its sovereign, is a purely *internal* matter (one state should [*soll*] not interfere in the internal affairs of another)” (*GPR* § 331 Remark). Hegel’s view is that the internal constitution of the state is meant to guarantee and secure its sovereignty over and against other states, and the

¹¹⁵ Not only does Hegel refer the reader to an earlier section in *GPR*, but his use of *Individuum* implicates his arguments concerning the nature of individuality made in his greater and lesser logics. For instance, on the nature of “the one” (*das Eins*), which even though it is self-related as an individual and thus has what Hegel calls “being-for-itself” (*Fürsichsein*), is also necessarily related to others, see *SL*, 163-69 and *EL* §§ 96-98. In the latter, Hegel references an atomistic view of the state, which he criticizes. “In modern times, the atomistic [*atomistische*] view has become even more important in the *political* than in the physical. According to this view, the will of individuals as such is the principle of the state; what produces attraction is the particularity of needs [and] inclinations; and the universal, that state itself, is the external relationship of a contract” (*EL* § 98). Though Hegel disagrees with this conception of the state, his account of “external constitutional law” strikingly overlaps with this view when it comes to accounting for relations between states.
recognition states afford each other should not lead them to overstep and meddle in the domestic affairs of one another.\footnote{For an interesting account of Hegel’s view of state sovereignty, see Robert R. Williams, Hegel's Ethics of Recognition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 336-41. Williams’ account is quite good, drawing on Hegel’s analogy between the state and an organism, though he is perhaps too charitable to Hegel’s arguments supporting state sovereignty. We will see how when we raise problems with Hegel’s account below. That said, Williams acknowledges that on Hegel’s account of international relations, “there is no mutual recognition that issues in a higher union; there is no We” (335).}

International treaties and pacts address this problem, and here is the role Hegel allots to language. The language of contracts (Verträge) is invoked once again, though this time the stipulations of a contract are agreed to not by persons, whether conceived abstractly or concretely as citizens in society, but rather by states that are, in themselves, internally complex and determinate.

The immediate actuality in which states coexist is particularized into various relations which are determined by the independent arbitrary wills of both parties, and which accordingly possess the formal nature of contracts in general. The subject-matter [Stoff] of these contracts, however, is of infinitely less variety [Mannigfaltigkeit] than it is in civil society, in which individuals are mutually interdependent in innumerable respects, whereas independent states are primarily wholes which can satisfy their own needs internally (GPR § 332).

It is striking that Hegel believes international treaties would contain “less variety” than agreements struck in civil society, and he provides no examples or evidence in the Philosophy of Right to support this claim. Perhaps international trade agreements are what Hegel has in mind here, though again he provides few details to decide one way or the other.

The primary purpose of entering into international agreements, according to Hegel, is much the same as it is for persons agreeing to the stipulations of contracts: recognition.

Contractual agreements enable the mutual recognition of each other’s social status, though here
what is recognized between states is their respective political status as sovereign wholes. Hegel makes clear that such mutual recognition, much as it is for mere persons, is “purely formal” in nature, and

the requirement that the state should be recognized simply because it is a state is abstract. Whether the state does in fact have being in and for itself depends on its content – on its constitution and condition; and recognition, which implies that the two [i.e. form and content] are identical, also depends on the perception and will of the other state (GPR § 331).

The key to Hegel’s account is that international treaties do not have the “universal” status of state laws, but rather depend on the particular aims of the states involved. In other words, in the international realm, states are understood not as universal, self-directed entities but as *particular* states external to each other, such that the binding quality of each states’ laws—the legitimacy that these laws possess by arising from the practices of a particular people in a particular place—does not apply in the international realm. International law superseding international treaties thus functions as an “ought” instead of a binding law: states “ought” to abide by the treaties they have entered into.

The principle of international law, as that *universal* right which ought to have international validity in and for itself (as distinct from the particular content of positive treaties), is that *treaties*, on which the mutual obligations of states depend, *should be observed*. But since the sovereignty of states is the principle governing their mutual relations, they exist to that extent in a state of nature in relation to one another, and their rights are *actualized* not in a universal will with constitutional powers over them, but in their own particular wills (GPR § 333).

The problems we saw generated by property contracts reemerge at the level of international relations. Hence, Hegel repeatedly claims that states *should* or *ought* (*sollen*) to recognize each
other even though they are under no legal obligation to do so. The “obligation” is, according to Hegel, strictly contingent on whether or not international agreements appear to benefit the “welfare” \( Wohl \) of the state and its people. Yet whereas the civil legal code and court system guarantee that all persons are respected as owners of property and moral subjects attempting to meet their needs, situating property contracts and any disputes over them in a cultural and legal milieu, states, on Hegel’s account, have no such recourse to a binding legal system. Thus, if states do not find that international treaties benefit their own welfare, the alternatives are either to renge on those treaties, remain relatively indifferent to other states (as far as this is possible), or to wage war.

Hegel’s account generates several problems, which he seems unable to overcome: two logical errors and one crucial oversight. First and perhaps most pivotally, he asserts that the

\[\text{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft What [external constitutional law] contains in and for itself therefore assumes the form of an ought [\textit{die Form des Sollens}] because its actuality depends on distinct and sovereign wills\textquoteright\textquoteright} (GPR § 330). “The principle of international law [\textit{Völkerrecht}], as that universal right which ought [\textit{sollenden}] to have international validity in and for itself (as distinct from the particular content of positive treaties), is that treaties, on which the mutual commitments [\textit{Verbindlichkeiten}] of state depend, should [\textit{sollen}] be observed. But since the sovereignty of states is the principle governing their mutual relations, they exist to that extent in a state of nature [\textit{im Naturzustande}] in relation to one another, and their rights are actualized not in a universal will with constitutional powers over them, but in their own particular wills” (GPR § 333).

\[\text{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft Wohl is a concept Hegel introduces in his analysis of morality, so his pointed use of it here signals an inability of international relations to attain the status of law. On the contingency of welfare and its satisfaction, see GPR § 128. International “law” for Hegel can rightly be said to be a conceptual impossibility. At root of Hegel’s use of Wohl here is a dismissal of Kant’s vision of international perpetual peace. See Immanuel Kant, Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983). For Hegel’s explicit criticism of Kant’s idea, see GPR § 333 Remark. For Hegel’s criticism of attempts to judge state action by using moral criteria, see GPR § 337 Remark. For Hegel’s account of war, see Stephen B. Smith, “Hegel’s Views on War, the State, and International Relations,” The American Political Science Review 77, no. 3 (Sep., 1983): 624-632; Robert R. Williams, Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition, 335, 342-47; and Youri Courier, War as Paradox: Clausewitz and Hegel on Fighting Doctrines and Ethics (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), ch. 8.}\]
internal constitution of the state can be (theoretically and practically) separated from its external affairs, where the purpose of international agreements is merely for mutual recognition, but nothing further. Again, he claims recognition between states remains completely “formal” and abstract. Thus, whereas persons contract together to form new, common wills, there seems to be no clear reason why states would need to recognize each other on Hegel’s account, particularly if their statehood was already validated by their internal constitution and made recognizable through language, as he claims. The attempt to isolate the inner of the state from its external relations contradicts many moments in his greater and lesser logics where he discusses the dialectical relationship between the inner and outer of something. We need not go into detail on this issue, for we already saw how Hegel acknowledges that not only must multiple states coexist if one state is to become actual, but also that states must relate to each other as particular individuals. Indeed, he criticizes an atomistic conception of states.\textsuperscript{120} The concept of the state itself requires external relations, and these relations, to be actual, must attain substantial existence in some way. Therefore, it seems conceptually necessary that the purported self-subsistence of states would never actually be completed, would never be actualized, and that states would always have a sort of quasi-sovereignty, open to perturbations, disruptions, and even annihilation from the outside.

One might defend Hegel against this charge by suggesting that states are much more internally complex than mere “ones,” “individuals,” or “persons,” such that their external relations would overdetermine the state and jeopardize its internal sovereignty if they were treated like individual persons or even moral subjects. Certainly, the state is internally

\textsuperscript{120} See note 99 above.
determinate to a much greater degree than mere ones, individuals, or persons. Yet Hegel argues in his lesser and greater logics that external relations always, by necessity, shape the internal structures or “constitutions” of the things related, including organisms.¹²¹

Perhaps the most glaring failure to abide by his own dialectical method is Hegel’s own admission that international relations, while not constitutive of the internal operations of the state, nonetheless constitute a necessary “supplement” to its internal constitution. He concedes that for a state’s legitimacy “to be completed” [vervollständigt] each state needs to be aware, at least to some degree, of the innerworkings of other states they make pacts with.

[I]t is equally essential that this [state] legitimacy should be supplemented [vervollständigt] by recognition on the part of other states. But this recognition requires a guarantee that the state will likewise recognize those other states which are supposed to recognize it, i.e. that it will respect their independence; accordingly, these other states cannot be indifferent to its internal affairs (GPR § 331 Remark).¹²²

Thus, the recognition between states must be more than merely “formal.” States must recognize at least some of the internal contents, laws, institutions, and values of each other. When he asserts that states are internally “self-sufficient” (selbständig), without needing to rely on other states to meet their needs (GPR §§ 322, 328, 332), Hegel implicitly appeals to his account of

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¹²¹ For example, see the complementary arguments in EL §§ 216-21 and SL, 764-74, where Hegel maintains that organisms (and he repeatedly calls the state an organism) first posit other, different organisms (like multiple states) and then each “living individual, which behaves inwardly as subject and concept in its first process, assimilates its external objectivity to itself in the second process” (EL § 220). The separation of the inner-workings of organisms from their external environment and relations is an abstraction that Hegel criticizes. His account of eating in the Philosophy of Nature also undermines his attempt to separate the state from its external relations. “But this involvement with the outer world, the stimulus and the process itself, has likewise the determination of externality over against the university and simple self-relation of the living being. This involvement itself therefore constitutes, properly speaking, the object and the negative over against the subjectivity of the organism, which the latter has to overcome and digest” (EPN § 365).

¹²² This convoluted remark as a whole shows Hegel’s tenuous attempts to both acknowledge the significance of international relations for states and limit their importance in order to preserve state autonomy. Jacques Derrida’s account of the “supplemental” nature of writing seems applicable here as a criticism of Hegel’s account of international relations, though Derrida’s critical eye is set directly on Jean-Jacques Rousseau. See Of Grammatology, Part II.
colonization made in GPR § 248, which justifies a state’s extraction and use of resources from territories beyond its own borders.\footnote{See Lampert, “Locke, Fichte, and Hegel on the Right to Property,” 67-71. Lampert argues on good grounds that “For Hegel, the [national] border is the persistence of the element of private will that entered the world in the form of property” (71), suggesting further that if Hegel had overcome the property model of state-to-state relations as that “between superior and subordinate,” between culturally advanced colonizer and spiritually deficient colonized, he could have worked out an alternative “model involving the joint dialogue of authors” and state diplomats (70). For a similarly critical account that situates Hegel’s view of colonialism in the context of his intellectual forebearers, see Gabriel Paquette, “Hegel’s Analysis of Colonialism and Its Roots in Scottish Political Economy,” Clio 32, no. 4 (Summer 2003), 415-432. For a more recent account of Hegel on colonization, see Alison Stone, “Hegel and Colonialism,” Hegel Bulletin (2017): 1-24.}

The second “logical” problem, as I have called it, concerns his passing rebuke to those who pass judgement on the state by using moral concepts and criteria (GPR § 337). This is a tricky issue, one more exhaustively treated by Adriaan Peperzak in his Modern Freedom: Hegel’s Legal, Moral, and Political Philosophy.\footnote{Adriaan T. Peperzak, Modern Freedom: Hegel’s Legal, Moral, and Political Philosophy (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), ch. XI.} I will only point out what appears to me an unresolved tension in Hegel’s account of international affairs: his pointed use of moral language and categories [i.e. ought (Sollen), welfare (Wohl), intention (Absicht)] to express the nature of international relations, while at the same time criticizing attempts to pass moral judgement on the behavior of state actors.\footnote{See GPR § 337 Remark.}

It is unclear how Hegel can have it both ways, deploying categories of morality while censuring those who use those same categories to evaluate the moral quality of state actions. The spheres of abstract right and morality are supposedly overcome by showing how these become concrete, though subsidiary features of the collective, ethical life of citizens in a state. Yet his revival of moral categories to describe state-to-state relations appears to legitimate the
reemergence of moral judgement on the international stage. Perhaps it also reopens the issue of cosmopolitanism, which Hegel criticizes in *GPR* § 209 Remark. Though it could be argued that *historical* judgement—the “judgement” that world history passes on particular states—is what Hegel sees as the proper mode of evaluating state relations and developments, it is not at all clear how histories are cleanly separable either from moral judgements or the deployment of moral categories.

Finally, and with a more direct implication on Hegel’s account of language, he omits in the *Philosophy of Right* and his earlier lectures on natural right any discussion of translation and interpretation of languages. These difficult practices seem *prima facie* crucial, at the very least, for successful communication and diplomatic agreement between states and state officials. Because the particularity of states is constituted by their own “national spirit [*Volksgeist*]” (*GPR* § 209 Remark).

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126  In his earlier lectures on natural right and law, Hegel claims, “War may be condemned by morality, which can say that wars ought not to be; but the state is not merely an ‘ought.’” He goes on to express much the same idea later in *GPR*, namely that war has an *ethical* dimension by disturbing the tranquility and stasis of states and allowing them to engage in important struggles for recognition and power. Without war, states grow stagnant. “Wars are like winds upon the sea; without them the water would become foul, and so it is with the state” (*LNS* § 160 Remark). Compare with *GPR* § 324 Remark. However, while “the state is not merely an ‘ought,’” international relations are formed by “oughts”—i.e. a state ought to respect the treaties it enters into. So war for Hegel, which is always international—there is no mention of civil war—does seem open to legitimate, moral condemnation.

127  For an argument supporting the inextricability of moral judgement from historical writings, see Adrian Oldfield, “Moral Judgments in History,” *History and Theory* 20, no. 3 (Oct. 1981), 260-277.

128  I have found few places where Hegel discusses translation between languages, and his most important example seems to be Martin Luther’s German translation of the Bible in his lectures on world history. Luther’s translation makes possible a “generally recognized and classical book for popular [Christian] instruction” (*LPH*, 436). In his long remark on language in *EPG* § 459, Hegel dismisses the idea of a universal language and claims, “it may be thought that it was rather the communication of peoples […] which occasioned the need of alphabetical writing and led to its emergence.” But he says nothing further, and this remark is less about translation than proposing a hierarchy of spoken and written languages. As will become clear in Part III and from what he says on his lectures on world history, translating a foreign language into one’s native tongue enables three important things: (1) the ability to recognize in other languages the same forms and determinations of thought; (2) the ability to express and communicate across state and cultural limits a common world spirit at work in all particular cultures; (3) the capacity to make oneself “in this other [language], only at home with itself [in diesem Andern nur bei sich selbst zu sein]” (*EL* § 18).
§ 340), habits (*Gewohnheiten*) and customs (*Sitten*) (*GPR* § 151), and particular welfare (*GPR* § 337), their particularity extends to the linguistic sign systems customarily used within the state, whether between citizens and citizen groups or between citizens and their public officials. Constitutions would also have to be expressed in a particular “natural language” like Welsh, Pashto, or Beothuk. Hegel does not broach this vast topic, which is unfortunate because it could have opened not only the possibility of a more nuanced picture of international relations, but also an opportunity to examine more closely the potentially dialectical relationship between language and culture.¹²⁹

The articulation of these problems concludes our analysis of Hegel’s account of international treaties and the role of language therein. This resurgence of the concept of contract on the international stage shows both how linguistic expression in the form of international contracts serves to address the problem of state-to-state relations and the problems these external relations generate in turn. Though Hegel’s schematic account remains problematic, we can still see the pivotal role he gives to language for expressing, determining, and making recognizable international relations.¹³⁰ These relations, despite Hegel’s view to the contrary, also seem


¹³⁰ Hegel overlooks a wealth of sticky issues related to international treaties, and he could have provided a fuller account of the role of language in international relations had he addressed, for instance, diplomatic communication between state actors; business discussions between corporate actors; translations of state constitutions into different languages; disputes that arise from mistranslation and miscommunication between states; peace treaties and declarations of war; the language of trade agreements; immigrant experiences learning new languages and integrating into other cultures; the cultural status of multilingual translators; and, given their liminal political status, the languages of stateless persons. In each case, state and cultural borders pose problems for communicating between states and persons, and Hegel would certainly not propose a “universal” language to solve them. Rather, it seems more likely his response would be to specify how particular languages remain unsaturated and open in specific ways, both to external translation and internal transformation, such that they can
important for determining the state from the outside and allowing it to express to the world its
national values and how it actualizes the freedom of its citizenry through its concrete institutions,
laws, practices, and ends.

3.8 Conclusion: Collective Expression as Collective Self-Determination

In this Part II, I have traced and tried to demonstrate how Hegel discusses and understands the
role of language in his philosophy of objective spirit, primarily how it appears in the *Philosophy
of Right*. He thematizes linguistic externalization or expression (Äußerung or Ausdruck) as a tool
to address a series of problems that arise from attempts by persons and states to form, codify, and
recognize social bonds that are necessary to enable their freedom. Freedom for Hegel is
necessarily social.

Accordingly, we have analyzed five ways that language contributes, on Hegel’s account,
to shaping ethical relationships and making families, civil societies, and states concrete bastions
of freedom, with each sphere of social life capturing a particular manifestation of free will. We
have also charted the limits to and problems with each form of freedom in the attempt to show
that Hegel’s view of freedom is not a condition or state of affairs (Zustand), but a paradoxical
process of collective self-determination (Selbstbestimmung), on the one hand, and self-
overcoming (Selbstaufhebung), on the other. Thus, the purpose or end (Zweck) is actually the
journey (Weg) itself.

The basis [Boden] of right is in general the spiritual [Geistige] and its precise place and
starting point is the will, which is free, so that freedom constitutes [ausmacht] its
substance and determination [Bestimmung] and the system of right is the realm of

Each be used to express across borders personal beliefs, cultural values, and state aims. This “trans” aspect of
language as a tool for overcoming borders and limits (even within language itself) is addressed in Part III, where
the transformation of language comes to the fore.
actualized freedom [verwirklichten Freiheit], the world of spirit produced [hervorgebracht] from within itself as a second nature (GPR § 4).

In general, the five cases we examined could also be summarized as showing that language in the Philosophy of Right plays a decidedly recognitive role. Each mode of linguistic expression enables a recognition of either the creation of a common or familial will, a legal code founded on implicit cultural norms, the constitution that unifies a state’s powers, functions, and institutions, or the content of public opinion and particular agreements struck between states. Whether language serves to make explicit what was implicit or to create actual social bonds and connections, it always functions as a tool for recognizing how social milieus are constructed, our own participation within them, and the freedom (and limits) characteristic of our social interactions.

The socially recognitive role of linguistic expression is presaged in Hegel’s analysis of signs in his philosophy of subjective mind, for signs in that context enable an individual to recognize their own capacity to create intuitions that bear a subjective meaning for themselves. In the domain of right, this creative capacity is once against utilized, but such individual, semiotic creations of the psyche can only enable multiple individuals to recognize their social bonds if they actually understand what the words mean and which social relationships they instantiate and signify. This means that truly social language is only made possible in subjective spirit but becomes actualized or realized in the spirit and activities within an intersubjective community, where these signs are actually used to communicate with others. The five forms of objective spirit we have analyzed in Part II show increasingly concrete instances of such social uses of language, as a medium first for exchanging items of property, then for binding oneself to another in marriage, making explicit the customs of a civil society, making explicit the constitution of a
state, and expressing the relations between states, which should be upheld. Yet Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* does not ensure that language does, in fact, serve these social purposes and actually enables our collective freedom. The normative framework of the text (and indeed the concept of *Geist* itself) determines freedom as the ultimate goal of objective spirit, and this aim determines the conditions under which a free society can become actual.

To consider something rationally means not to bring reason to bear on the object from outside in order to work upon it, for the object is itself rational for itself; it is the spirit in its freedom, the highest apex of self-conscious reason, which here gives itself actuality and engenders itself as an existing world; and the sole business of science is to make conscious this work which is accomplished by the reason of the thing itself (*GPR* § 31 Remark).

We might say that if our community is actually rationally ordered, language *must* play these roles. Thus, for Hegel, it is clear that we cannot truly become free without language serving these ends, that is, without collective education on the proper use and understanding of language and linguistic signs and without language being actually used in these ways to create and make recognizable these social relations, which all enable our freedom *within* a society. Otherwise, we necessarily fall short of becoming the free individuals we implicitly are.

In the next and final Part III, we examine Hegel’s account of philosophical language and how his actual use of language in his *Phenomenology of Spirit, Encyclopedia*, and *Philosophy of Right* provides a model for overcoming the final barrier: representational language. Language itself, or rather the representational understanding of language, according to Hegel, erects barriers to our freedom to think. If linguistic signs and the modes of linguistic expression we have examined so far serve to represent for ourselves to recognize the form and content of either our own individual minds or the social spirit we construct collaboratively, Hegel finds in speculative uses of philosophical language the tool to overcome and free the relatively fixed
customs and norms of what words mean and how we use language to understand ourselves and
the world. Philosophical speculation, in Hegel’s particular sense of the phrase, embodies how
language can itself be deliberately retooled and transformed so as to trace the speculative
movement of philosophical thought.
4 Part III: Philosophy and the Speculative Problematic of Language

Religion is the mode and type of consciousness, in which truth is present for all mankind, for all levels of education; but scientific cognition of truth is a particular type of consciousness, whose work not everyone but only a few undertake. The import [Gehalt] is the same, but just as Homer says about certain things that they have two names, one in the language of the Gods and the other in the language of everyday [über tägigen] people, so there are for that import two languages, one of feeling, of representation, and of the thinking that nests in the finite categories and one-sided abstractions of understanding, and the other of the concrete concept (EL, Preface to the Second Edition).

4.1 Introduction: Philosophy as Speculative, Truth as Movement

In the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel discusses the relation between philosophy and language by problematizing certain views of how philosophers grasp and express truth. On the one hand, philosophy is not a particular discipline or subject-matter for Hegel, nor even a type of discursive activity that trades arguments back and forth in attempts to defend “true” statements and bolster more defensible positions. “It is not difficult to see that the way of asserting a proposition, adducing reasons for it, and in the same way refuting its opposite by reasons, is not the form in which truth can appear” (PG § 48). On the other hand, he does not reject or dismiss the search for truth as irrelevant or unattainable, and he chastises those who “retreat from the truth and strive to hold on to what it is in danger of losing,” whether by

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1 In this preface, Hegel rarely names the thinkers whose positions he criticizes, though undoubtedly his targets are many. They include the “metacritics,” Hamann, Herder, and to a certain extent Jacobi, who were skeptical of any claims to truth made by Kant’s and Fichte’s transcendental philosophies, primarily because of the constraints imposed by their expression in the German language. His criticisms also implicate the common sense philosophies of the so-called “Lockeans” and their contention that truth can be known immediately through our empirical faculties, as well as those adherents of F. W. J. Schelling’s Identitätsphilosophie who fail to work out and express specifically what the true identity of thought and being entails. See Metacritique: The Linguistic Assault on German Idealism, ed. and trans. Jere Paul Surber (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2001); J. G. Herder, “Essay on the Origin of Language” in On the Origin of Language, trans. Alexander Gode (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), 85-166; and Frederick C. Beiser, The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), chs. 1, 4, 5, 6.
“remaining in a state of unthinking inertia,” “entrenching itself in sentimentality,” or “hiding, from itself and others, behind the pretension that its burning zeal for truth makes it difficult or even impossible to find any other truth but the unique truth of vanity” (PG § 80). Instead, he argues “truth” (Wahrheit) takes the form of a movement. To be truth, this movement must be traced in thought, explicated in language, and carried out (ausführen), and he tasks philosophers with undertaking this movement to grasp (fassen) and reveal its pathway.2 “For the real issue [Sache] is not exhausted in its aim [Zwecke], but in its execution [Ausführung], nor is the result the actual whole, but it together with its becoming” (PG § 3).

The aim of Part III is to examine Hegel’s account of how philosophers express truth in language and thus how his own speculative philosophy participates in the “movement” of truth by tracing and expressing its movement. In the process, I present what I call Hegel’s “speculative problematic of language,” where I analyze his arguments for how speculative uses and interpretations of language overcome the limitations of representational language, which speculative philosophy encounters as a problem in its efforts to express truth.3 Such a vision of philosophical language, as it functions in practice, at once overcomes the epistemologically limited and limiting conception of language as a representational and semiological tool while

2 Hegel describes the Phenomenology of Spirit as a pathway towards the concept of knowledge, an epistemological “pathway of doubt, or more precisely as the way of despair” (PG § 39). “Through this movement [Bewegung] the pathway [Weg] by which the concept of knowledge is reached becomes likewise a necessary and complete process of becoming: […] this pathway, through the movement of the concept, will encompass [umfassen] the entire worldliness [Weltlichkeit] of consciousness” (PG § 39). It is the movement along this path that for Hegel constitutes truth.

3 I have omitted sustained discussion of the role of language in Hegel’s accounts of history, art, and religion and elected to conclude by analyzing only his discussions of philosophical language. My writings concerning language in these aspects of Hegel’s system were cut due to institutional constraints on the space I have at my disposal. Yet a more extensive treatment of the relation between representational and speculative language in Hegel would undoubtedly benefit from considering his lectures on these forms of Geist. Accordingly, I plan to analyze how language functions in Hegel’s philosophies of art, religion, and history in a later work.
exposing the movement of truth.

This task requires us first to understand Hegel’s dual criticisms of the correspondence theory of truth. These criticisms allow the problem of representation, which philosophy encounters with its own use of language, to emerge alongside his theory of truth. In the prefaces (Vorreden) and introductions (Einleitungen) to the Phenomenology of Spirit, Science of Logic, Encyclopedia, and Philosophy of Right, Hegel repeatedly distinguishes his conception of truth from correspondence theories of truth, which he rejects as inadequate for capturing actual truth—that is, philosophical truth or the truth that philosophy seeks. Though he does not clearly distinguish between the different forms the correspondence theory can take—e.g. correspondence between a proposition (Satz) and state of affairs (Zustand) or between a state of affairs and a judgment (Urteil)—his criticisms apply equally to both as insufficient accounts of

4 For a thorough accounting of all the variations of this theory, see David, Marian, “The Correspondence Theory of Truth,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/truth-correspondence/. For an account similar to the one I give concerning Hegel’s overcoming of the correspondence theory, see John McCumber, The Company of Words: Hegel, Language, and Systematic Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 62-67. See also Kaveh Boveiri, “Hegel and the Correspondence Theory of Truth in the Science of Logic,” Hegel-Jahrbuch no. 1 (2016): 102-107. I agree with McCumber that Hegel does not explicitly subsume his criticism of this theory within his systematic philosophy. It appears in his prefaces and introductions, which he claims are not philosophical (PG § 1), so he does not dialectically negate, overcome, and preserve the correspondence theory (Aufheben). I do not attempt like McCumber to find a replacement word such as “real”, “genuine”, or “noble” to translate Wahr in Hegel’s philosophy (67-70, 112-118). But I sympathize with his impulse to find a different, though equally common English term to more adequately translate the term and distinguish it from correct (richtig) correspondence. McCumber selects “nobility” as the best candidate for translating Wahrheit, for it hearkens back to Aristotle’s use of kalon. But this term is also burdened with an unfortunate social class connotation, which might somewhat obscure Hegel’s strange use of Wahr, which carries the sense of thought restlessly overcoming its limits and moving to form itself into a system of knowledge, a becoming-systematic of thought. Perhaps I would offer “harmony” as a possible alternative translation, for it connotes a hallmark of Hegel’s philosophy: difference with/in unity, difference integrated into a whole. It also, in its musical sense, pairs well with movement and progression, other strong themes in Hegel, not to mention its proximity to “chord” or “accord,” which also carry the sense of difference in unity. Nevertheless, I stick to the standard translation of Wahrheit as “truth.”

5 Because Hegel is addressing common, everyday uses of the word Wahrheit, it is likely that he is directly criticizing the semantic variant of truth as the correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs. For in the Science of Logic, he distinguishes a mere proposition with “a subject and predicate in a grammatical sense” from a judgment, which “requires that the predicate be related to the subject as one conceptual determination to
philosophical truth.⁶

Fundamentally for Hegel, correspondence theories mistake truth (Wahrheit) for mere “correctness” (Richtigkeit). Accordingly, John McCumber suggests we think of Hegelian truth less as “truth” in the contemporary sense and more as “nobility,” with everything that word implies.⁷ McCumber is right to say that Hegelian truth departs from contemporary English usage, but I think we should retain the standard translation of Wahrheit as truth and instead clearly distinguish between philosophical truth and empirical correctness, which is a key difference for understanding Hegel’s own usage of the term.

For Hegel, the correctness of propositions—that they correspond to an objective state of affairs or “fact”—is often acceptable in “conversational discussion” (PG § 49) and for the expression of “historical truths” (PG § 41). It can capture an important relation between a proposition or judgment and relations between empirical objects, such as “Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 BC” or “I need to go to the toilet.” But he does not devote much effort to validating the correspondence theory, nor to picking apart its multiple complexities. Instead, he argues, both in the preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit and introduction to the Encyclopedia Logic, that correspondence is an insufficient standard to capture the truth philosophy aims to express—namely, the truth of what thinking is and its place in the objective world. For Hegel, another, and therefore as a universal to a particular or individual. If a statement about a particular subject only enunciates something individual, then this is a mere proposition” (626). Judgments have propositional form, but empirical propositions are not judgments in Hegel’s use of the term. Nevertheless, his target is primarily the form of the proposition and its inadequacy.

In this section, I draw primarily on the preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit and the introduction to the Encyclopedia Logic. His criticism also implicates the theory of truth as correspondence between concept and object, for judgments are for Hegel the splitting and diremption of a concept. Below, we will have occasion to return to this understanding of truth, which is sometimes attributed to Hegel, and we will also see how Hegel overcomes the so-called coherence theory of truth, albeit more indirectly than the correspondence theory.

See note 4 above.
philosophy aims to express a more robust conception of truth than is often needed in everyday circumstances, a truth that unfolds and is exposed as thought progressively grasping its own movement. Let us discuss Hegel’s three main criticisms of the correspondence theory as a standard for philosophical truth and proffer Hegelian responses to potential defenders of that theory.

First and foremost, Hegel argues that the correspondence theory of truth overlooks the processual nature of experience and thus how we experience what are often called “facts.” The *Phenomenology of Spirit* demonstrates in its entirety that objects, facts, or states of affairs are not merely given to us in experience, but instead appear differently as objects depending on how we as knowers adopt, consciously or not, a particular mode of knowing them. Our experiences themselves generate objects for us, and we can even reflect on our own acts of knowing those objects, taking the relation between knower and objects as itself our “object” of knowledge.

*Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it, this dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called experience [*Erfahrung*]. […] Consciousness knows something; this object is the essence or the *in-itself*; but it is also for consciousness the *in-itself*. This is where the ambiguity of this truth enters. We see that consciousness now has two objects: one is the first *in-itself*, the second is the being-for-consciousness of this *in-itself*. […] And this then is the true: the being-for-consciousness of this in-itself. Or, in other words, this is the *essence*, or the *object* of consciousness. This new object contains the nothingness of the first, it is what experience has made of it (PG § 86).

Our experiences of objects are generative of how those objects appear for us as items we can

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8 Though Hegel does not name this theory that of “correspondence,” he clearly discusses it in terms of a concept or proposition corresponding with an object or state of affairs. See PG § 80: “But the goal is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where concept corresponds [*entspricht*] to object and object to concept.” Bertrand Russell expresses the fact-based correspondence theory this way: “Thus a belief is true when there is a corresponding fact, and is false when there is no corresponding fact” [*Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912).]
know and speak about. As John Russon claims, “The key is that the object of experience takes
different forms, even in relationship to the same putative “thing.” At one point I see the thing
“as” a set of properties, at another point “as” an independent and unique reality, at yet another
point “as” an aspect of the appearing of reality itself. […] That which is the object of the
experience changes, and the object changes as the subjective interest changes.”

For instance, a rubber ball, a concept, a human being, a society, and a solar system all
“appear” differently epistemically depending on how we experience them, what interest we have
in them, and which presuppositions we bring to bear in our knowing them as the objects they are.
We must already know what kind of object a solar system is—how and where solar systems
appear—for us to recognize a solar system when we come across one. Moreover, only if we
already know how to recognize one could we then gauge whether or not statements made about
the Milky Way, for instance, are true or false. Or whether statements like “I threw the solar
system in the trash” can even be true or false. The process of experiencing these objects in a
particular way, whether seen with a telescope or quantified as sets of data and equations,
necessarily affects how we gauge whether or not propositions about solar systems correspond to
the facts, and for Hegel, there is no God’s eye view of the world, no comprehensive perspective,
from which to judge “true” correspondence between a proposition and a fact. Thus, simply
testing correspondence would presuppose a certain mode of experience from which an object or
state of affairs is generated for us experientially and from which we judge correspondence
between proposition and fact. This test omits any analysis of how we experience and generate the
object or fact and whether or not that way of understanding the object is adequate to know it.

9 John Russon, Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 51.
One might respond to this criticism by maintaining that the correspondence theory of truth does not presume that all objects and facts are experienced the same way, but only that however the objects and facts appear to an experiencing subject the truth of a proposition is nonetheless gauged by its correspondence to the facts. Though objects and facts may appear differently depending on what kinds of objects they are, how the facts appear, and how subjects experience the objects, truth is still the correspondence between a proposition and fact. This response retains Hegel’s epistemic perspectivism within an overall schema of correspondence.\textsuperscript{10}

Yet Hegel maintains that philosophical truth must encompass not only the abstract relation of correspondence between a proposition and a fact that appears already given for us by a particular mode of experience, but also the experiential or phenomenological processes of coming to grasp what propositions mean and how facts appear for us in experience. Even the “pure thinking” demonstrated in his \textit{Science of Logic} grasping the \textit{logical} process by which one proposition follows another. Thus, philosophical truth—what Hegel calls the “truth of knowledge” (\textit{PG} § 83)—includes the process whereby propositions attain sense for us and facts appear for us in a particular way, experientially. Jean Hyppolite calls this process of truth “the passage from the sensible to sense, from immediate intuition to thought signification. But it also appears in the reverse passage from thought to its own alienation, to its \textit{Dasein}, language. These two movements coincide. […] That of which one speaks and the one who speaks show themselves to be inseparable.”\textsuperscript{11} Empirical propositions like “The pen is on the table” seem so obviously true or false that it is easy to forget that the correspondence of such claims to facts is

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\textsuperscript{10} Hegel’s epistemic perspectivism is the topic of a relatively recent dissertation. See Gerard Kuperus, \textit{Hegel’s Perspectivism} (DePaul University: ProQuest Dissertations, 2006).

only evaluable because we have already learned what these words mean, what a pen and table are (the knowledge of which is mediated through our social interactions and experiences with others), and what relation this proposition signifies.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* demonstrates that the foundation of the correspondence theory is, instead of a given, clear standard, the result of a long experiential process.

The object, it is true, seems only to be for consciousness in the way that consciousness knows it; it seems that consciousness cannot, as it were, get behind the object as it exists for consciousness so as to examine what the object is *in itself*, and hence, too, cannot test its own knowledge by that standard. But the distinction between the in-itself and knowledge is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all. Something is *for it* the in-itself; and knowledge, or the being of the object for consciousness, is, *for it*, another moment (*PG § 85*).

At first, we need only compare the essence of the object or fact, what appears essential to the object apart from a knower, with how we know it to check correspondence. But a disparity between the two yields a need to alter either knowledge of the object or the object itself for us.

If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge (*PG § 85*).

What becomes apparent in our alteration of both the object as it appears for us and our knowledge of that appearance is that we are in fact testing our standard for what constitutes knowing as such.

Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test; in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is (*PG § 85*).

Thus, abstracting propositions and facts from our phenomenological activity of experiencing and
knowing them severs their relation if not to empirical correctness then to philosophical truth, the truth of how we come to know propositions and facts at all. If we are to grasp the truth of how we know propositions and facts and not merely that we know them, we must expose the philosophical truth of knowing that makes the correspondence theory of truth possible.

Second, Hegel argues that correspondence theory of truth is inadequate in cases where propositions involve conceptual terms like “absolute,” “truth,” “cognition,” or “spirit”—in instances where there is uncertainty, confusion, or disagreement about the meaning of terms. In cases like “The batter hit the ball” and “There is a book on the desk,” propositions, which we already understand, and facts that we already recognize can be treated as fixed, static entities, so we can simply check whether the batter did in fact hit the ball and whether there is in fact a book on the desk to judge correspondence between proposition and fact. Truth as “correct” correspondence suffices to specify the truth conditions of everyday, pragmatic claims, which presuppose a widely shared conception of what the words mean and how we experience the facts.¹² Philosophical truth, the truth of what knowing is, is presupposed as an already settled issue. Yet Hegel asserts that such a “common sense” interpretation of facts and propositions proves itself lacking when we seek the truth of claims about the more esoteric, conceptual concerns of philosophy, and if we attempt to distinguish philosophical truth from more ordinary, commonplace “truths.”¹³

One may set this [philosophical truth] aside on the grounds that there is a type of cognition which, though it does not cognize the absolute as science aims to, is still true,

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¹² This is Donald Davidson’s conception of truth as expounded in his “Truth and Meaning,” *Synthese* 17, no. 1 (1967): 304-323.
¹³ See *PG* § 69. For an earlier, but similar account of common sense in relation to speculative philosophy, see *D*, 98-103. For his later, most detailed account that associates the position of common sense and “immediate knowing” with the philosophies of Descartes and, in a more advanced form, F. H. Jacobi, see *EL* §§ 61-78.
and that cognition in general, though it be incapable of grasping the absolute, is still capable of grasping other kinds of truth. But we gradually come to see that this kind of talk which goes back and forth only leads to a hazy distinction between an absolute truth and some other kind of truth, and that words like ‘absolute’, ‘cognition’, etc. presuppose a meaning which has yet to be ascertained (PG § 75).

He is pessimistic about the intentions of philosophers who pass over philosophical truth in this way, seeing in it a deceptive attempt to forgo the effort required to trace the truth of knowing.

For to give the impression that their meaning is generally well known, or that their concept is comprehended, looks more like an attempt to avoid the main problem, which is precisely to prove this concept. We could, with better justification, simply spare ourselves the trouble of paying any attention whatever to such ideas and locutions; for they are intended to ward off science itself, and constitute merely an empty appearance of knowing, which vanishes immediately as soon as science comes on the scene (PG § 76).

The main problem, as we saw in Hegel’s response to the former objection, is to undertake the effort of tracing how we experience certain objects and how the adjustment of our criteria of knowing unfolds into different ways of knowing according to different sorts of objects, such that the truth of knowledge is exposed along the way. Adopting the correspondence theory of truth cuts this process short.

One might respond to Hegel’s objection by claiming that the correspondence theory can still account for the truth of conceptual claims, or claims with conceptual content, if we first define what conceptual terms mean. We need only define at the outset what words like “concept,” “truth,” “spirit,” “cognition,” etc. mean to then apply the correspondence theory of truth to propositions that include them. The fault thus lies not with the correspondence theory itself, but only our knowledge of the terms upon which it rests, such that defining them would abet its legitimate application.

I think Hegel would agree that the fault here lies in failing to define or justify the terms used in propositions but would attribute that failure to the correspondence theory itself. The
theory of truth fails to account for the conditions of its actual application, which makes it incapable of justifying why terms are defined in the way they are or how facts appear and are determined for us, prior to testing their correspondence. We must be contented to accept definitions that are merely posited and remain unjustified, for as Hegel maintains, “one bare assurance is worth just as much as another” (PG § 76). Indeed, he associates the presupposition of what propositions and terms mean with “dogmatism,” whether the meanings of terms are merely presupposed, defined initially, or fixed once and for all.

Dogmatism as a way of thinking, whether in ordinary knowing or in the study of philosophy, is nothing else but the fixed opinion that the true consists in a proposition which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known. To such questions as, When was Caesar born?, or How many feet were there in a stadium?, etc. a clear-cut answer ought to be given, just as it is definitely true that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides of a right-angled triangle (PG § 40).

The problem with dogmatism is its unexamined foundation on the movement of our experiences that initially gives sense to propositions (and their terms) and enables facts to appear for us.

But even such plain truths as those just illustrated are not without the movement of self-consciousness. To cognize one of them, a good deal of comparison is called for, books must be consulted, in some way or other inquiry has to be made. Even an immediate intuition is held to have genuine value only when it is cognized as a fact along with its reasons, although it is probably only the bare result that we are supposed to be concerned about” (PG § 41).

It is the sole concern with the “bare result,” the mere proposition itself and the given fact separated from their origins in experience and their relation to other propositions and facts upon which the correspondence theory founders.\(^\text{14}\) Defining conceptual terms initially would only

\(^{14}\) Hegel does not criticize the everyday dogmatism and reliance on the correspondence theory for empirical questions or claims—for pragmatic purposes, \textit{Richtigkeit} is often sufficient. He thinks it becomes problematic when presumed or deployed as the measure of philosophical truth, for \textit{Wahrheit}. This helps to explain Hegel's ambiguous assessment of Jacobi’s philosophy of faith and immediate knowing between the early \textit{FK} (1802) and the later editions of \textit{EL} (1827, 1830). Hegel sees Jacobi as something of an advance beyond Kant’s critical
throw the problem back on a prior question of how to define them and would do nothing to offset the narrow focus on a proposition and fact isolated from their epistemic context. Truth as correspondence thus fails to justify how abstract, conceptual terms are defined in relation to each other. This leads us to the final problem, a problem of form.

The third and final problem with the correspondence theory of truth is its reliance on propositional form, on truth as correspondence represented between a proposition and a fact. A proposition presents the relation between a subject and predicate as a fixed relation between distinct signs. In fact, a proposition represents a fact as fixed and static, a state of affairs, instead of a temporary stage of an ongoing process of experience. “In the ordinary way, what we call “truth” is the agreement of an object with our representation of it. We are then presupposing an object to which our representation is supposed to conform” (EL § 24 Addition 2). Severing propositions and facts from their experiential origins accordingly means that correspondence between a proposition and fact can only be judged by representing both fact and proposition and then comparing them. For Hegel, truth as representational correspondence provides merely a subjective account of truth, comparing only our subjective representations with one another and never exposing the truth of objects.

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philosophy, for Jacobi recognizes the epistemic skepticism the latter is forced into by limiting the appropriate use of reason (Vernunft). Jacobi defends the primacy of faith (Glauben) and intuition instead of reason, arguing they grant us immediate knowledge of God and things. This is his way of overcoming Kant’s critical skepticism and J. G. Fichte’s “rationalism” to unify the subject and object of knowledge. Yet Jacobi also represents for Hegel something of a regression back to pre-Kantian dogmatism, since the unification of subject and object, the capacity of a subject to know an object, is only posited as immediately unified in intellectual intuition. It is not philosophically demonstrated and so remains merely an article of faith. Fichte is the figure for Hegel who first attempts a thorough demonstration of the progressive unification of subject and object by working through the mediation of Kant’s categories, though Fichte too for Hegel falls short of overcoming the duality of skepticism and dogmatism, falling back into a transcendental subjectivism, a “subjective subject-object.” See D, 135-142. For an historical and conceptual examination of these philosophical relations, see Frederick C. Beiser, The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).
As we saw in Part I, representation functions by arresting the movement of experience, internalizing the material of intuition, and creating individual signs. To apply the correspondence test, both propositions and facts must be represented in the same form such that they can be compared. To represent a fact is to abstract it from its lived context, to transform it, and present it as an abstract relation between the subject and predicate of a proposition. To check correspondence then requires simply testing whether or not our representation of a proposition and our representation of a fact match each other, effectively comparing our subjective representations with each other. Any “objective” truth is beyond the scope of the correspondence theory; one never rises beyond an absolute subjectivism.

One might respond to Hegel by maintaining that we can never access a truth beyond representational correspondence—that this is the only truth we can know. We must content ourselves with truth as correspondence between our representations of facts and propositions and cannot venture any claims to truth that go beyond our subjective experiences. To do so, superseding Kant’s critique of reason, would be to extend our cognition into the realm of unfounded speculation on the nature of the world, something we cannot access.

This raises the problem of representation directly for Hegel’s philosophy, namely how representation limits his own presentation of truth in words. For Hegel, the shortcomings of the correspondence theory show that truth cannot be represented, and if our “faculty” of representation is unable to present and test more than subjective “truth,” how can even Hegel purport to present philosophical truth in his own texts? This problem implicates not only Hegel’s conception of truth but also his prior conception of language as a set of expressive, representational signs. Part III aims to show how Hegel resolves precisely this problem.
This account suffices to make clear Hegel’s objections to the correspondence theory. In the remainder of Part III, we will see not only how he develops a different conception of truth as a movement (Bewegung) or self-movement of thought, but also how his speculative philosophy in particular demonstrates and expresses that “truth is its own self-movement” (PG § 48). This account will show why for Hegel the practice of speculative philosophy cannot be separated from truth and also why expressing its movement demands a new understanding of language and a new way of using language that demonstrates how the expression of his philosophy overcomes the limitations of representation and the representational understanding of language. The question becomes how philosophers can understand and use language differently to express truth, that is, the movement of speculative thought that is “never at rest but always engaged in moving forward” (PG § 11). How can language become speculative so that it can express this movement? If Hegel’s philosophy is to provide a demonstration of how language serves neither as an accessory or supplement to speculative thought nor as a separate (mis)representation of it, his own language use must participate in the exposure or exposition of the self-unfolding of

15 The peculiar sense Hegel gives to Spekulativ should be distinguished from the sense it often carries in German and in the English “speculative” or “speculation” as unfounded or risky conjecture. In his lectures to the Encyclopedia Logic, Hegel acknowledges how it is ordinarily used and then differentiates this from his own usage. “The comment made earlier about the idea holds for this ordinary linguistic usage in respect of “speculations,” too. And this connects with the further remark that very often those who rank themselves among the more cultivated also speak of “speculation” in the express sense of something merely subjective. What they say is that a certain interpretation of natural or spiritual states of affairs or situations may certainly be quite right and proper, if taken in a merely “speculative” way, but that experience does not agree with it, and nothing of the sort is admissible in actuality. Against these views, what must be said is that, with respect to its true significance, the speculative is neither provisionally nor in the end something merely subjective; instead, it expressly contains, sublated [aufgehoben] within itself, the very antitheses at which the understanding stops short (including therefore that of the subjective and objective too), and precisely for this reason it proves to be concrete and a totality. For this reason too, a speculative content cannot be expressed in a one-sided proposition” (EL § 82 Addition). In his early works, Hegel identified Fichte as first introducing true speculation into his philosophy (D, 132), followed shortly by F. W. J. Schelling (D, 172-174) and himself.
truth. This need raises a problem: language as representation.16

The following section returns to the issue of representation to show why a representational conception of language appears as a problem for doing speculative philosophy. I then examine Hegel’s accounts of conceptual terms and what he calls “speculative propositions,” which together resolve this problem. I conclude Part III by arguing for the importance of speculative expositions and presentations (Darstellungen), which explicate Hegel’s speculative propositions and form the speculative passages between concepts constitutive of his philosophy and of the movement of truth through it.

4.2 Representation as a Problem

Language as both tool and product of representation (Vorstellung), as signifying meaning (Bedeutung) or expressing social bonds, becomes explicitly a problem in Hegel’s philosophy only for the culminating form or mode of Geist: philosophy—in Hegel’s philosophy of philosophy.17 Specifically, it arises as a problem for practicing speculative philosophy, for

16 Though most do not frame the Preface to the Phenomenology in terms of language (except when it comes to discussing the “speculative proposition”), many commentators still highlight Hegel’s emphasis on the need of philosophy to overcome representational thinking undertaken by the “Understanding.” See Richard Schacht, “A Commentary on the Preface to Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of Spirit,’” Philosophical Studies 23, no. 1 (Feb. 1, 1972), 14-16, 20-23; Donald Phillip Verene, Hegel’s Absolute: An Introduction to Reading the Phenomenology of Spirit (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), ch. 1; and Ardis B. Collins, Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Dialectical Justification of Philosophy’s First Principles (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013), ch. 8. Yet some fail to grasp Hegel’s argument, unable to see how philosophy could overcome adopting a fixed position from which to reflect “absolutely” on its self-representations. Hegel then appears as a further practitioner of transcendental critique. For this error that relegates philosophy to another mode of reflective, representational thinking, see Werner Marx, Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: Its Point and Purpose—A Commentary on the Preface and Introduction (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), ch. IV.

17 Representation and representational language are also treated as a problematic limit in Hegel’s lectures on art and religion. For Hegel, both art and religion attempt to represent the truth, including in language, which inevitably falls short due to the fixity of representation and the movement of truth. See for example EPG § 573 Remark, where Hegel accounts for the difference between religion and philosophy as a difference between representation and speculative thinking: “The whole question turns entirely on the difference of the forms of speculative thinking from the forms of representation and the reflective intellect.” Yet we must leave the important analysis of the artistic and religious use of language in Hegel for a later project.
though he sometimes uses the term Philosophie simpliciter he often specifies, from his early publications to the Phenomenology of Spirit and his later Encyclopedia and lectures, that he intends the term in its speculative sense.\textsuperscript{18} Whereas the young Hegel (1801-1802) links speculative philosophy to Schelling’s Identitätsphilosophie and the project to show the shared, absolute ground of subject and object of knowledge, spirit and nature, logic and world, the later Hegel (1803-1831) characterizes speculative philosophy increasingly as the mode of knowing that develops all logical, natural, and spiritual forms and modes of being into a methodological system or “science” (Wissenschaft).\textsuperscript{19} In a speculative system of philosophy,

> these forms [of logic, nature, and mind] are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole (PG § 2).\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} In Part III, I follow Hegel in this trend, for whenever I use the word “philosophy” I intend it in its speculative sense.

\textsuperscript{19} These two ways of characterizing speculative philosophy are not strictly different for Hegel, but he begins to emphasize the systematic and scientific nature of (his) speculative philosophy when he begins to develop his own philosophical approach in Jena (1804-5), culminating in the Phenomenology of Spirit (1807). This is almost certainly due in part to Hegel’s break from Schelling and Hegel’s effort to distance his project from Schelling’s Identitätsphilosophie. By emphasizing scientific systematicity, Hegel distances the methodological and processual character of (his) speculative philosophy from the formal identity claims of the absolute upon which he saw Schelling’s philosophy grounded. In the preface to the Phenomenology, Hegel gives one of his most well-known and dismissive characterizations of the identity philosophy precisely to distance the “formalism” of that philosophy of the absolute from his own developmental one. “Dealing with something from the perspective of the absolute consists merely in declaring that, although one has been speaking of it just now as something definite, yet in the absolute, the A=A, there is nothing of the kind, for there all is one. To pit this single insight, that in the absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfillment, to palm off its absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black—this is cognition naively reduced to vacuity” (PG § 16). Hegel’s emphasis on systematicity also seems to take a swipe at Schelling, who never completed his projects of providing a Naturphilosophie or a philosophical system.

\textsuperscript{20} Hegel contends that despite the plurality of philosophical treatises, they all enumerate philosophical principles that are part of one philosophy being worked out through the history of philosophy. Speculative philosophy links these principles by enumerating and explaining them to show how they pass conceptually into each other. See EL § 13: “With regard to philosophies that appear diverse, the history of philosophy shows, on the one hand, that there is one philosophy at diverse stages of its formation, and, on the other, that the particular principles on which each system is grounded one by one are only branches of one and the same whole. The philosophy that is the latest in time is the result of all the preceding philosophies; and it must therefore contain the principles of all of them; for this reason, it is the most unfolded, the richest, and the most concrete one—provided that it does deserve the name of philosophy.” We cannot explicate these claims here about the nature of philosophical
The challenge for speculative philosophy is to express the supplanting, fluid, and developmental character of forms. Representational language is inadequate to the task since representation is only one form of thought among many, and since Hegel’s own aim is to produce a speculative philosophy—to trace and express the self-development of thought through its finite logical, natural, and spiritual (geistig) forms and determinations—representational language arises as a problem for his own philosophical project, for expressing his own philosophy in words. Let us trace how representation, Vorstellung, and the linguistic sign come to appear no longer as the solution to a problem (as it did in Parts I and II), but as a limit that speculative philosophy must overcome in its mode of expression.

As we saw in Part I, Hegel conceives of representation (Vorstellung) in a post-Kantian manner, in that he distinguishes representation both from an immediate sense-perception of Stoff and from the intuition of objects, which necessarily includes the I’s or ego’s self-awareness as subject. He also differentiates Vorstellung from Denken, which is a thinking through of “its product, the thought [Gedanke],” a mediated outcome of realizing that “intelligence is [a] re-cognizing,”21 that one’s thoughts are epistemically the thing or the being that is abstracted from discourse(s), for it would require detouring through Hegel’s philosophy of history, which is not strictly at issue here. Yet at the very least they indicate why Hegel uses “philosophy” to designate both his own speculative philosophical project and those whose works he sees his philosophy indebted to.

21 Hegel’s proposition, “Die Intelligenz ist wiedererkennend,” is awkward to translate. Wallace and Miller translate the last term as “recognitive,” but this does not quite capture the meaning of this present participle. He links wieder (meaning “re-” or “again”) with erkennen (meaning “to recognize”) to once again emphasize, but this time grammatically, that intelligence is not a thing with qualities, but an activity of recognizing-again. The first recognition is the awareness or cognition of self as an experiencing subject—I see this flower petal, I remember falling on the concrete—where “I” always accompanies my intuitions and representations. The second is the awareness or cognition of that self-recognition—I am always thinking my thoughts. Thus, “re-cognizing” is intended to capture the intelligent acts of recognizing some object and thinking it over again, cognizing the object again, but now as in my possession, as my thought.
intuition and penetrated by thought$^{22}$—the “simple identity of the subjective and objective” ($EPG$ § 465). Intuition grasps the sensuous properties of objects by finding ($finden$) them in the world, whereas representation abstracts from the intuitive content to posit an active subject distinguished from its object of knowledge, which the subject represents by selecting certain features and transforming the object into a subjective image for itself. The act of representing isolates and sets up ($stellen$) for ($vor$) an “I” to understand in abstraction the particular determinations of epistemic objects qua images. When it creates intuitable images outside itself, it transforms images into signs ($EPG$ § 457).

Once I abstract from my immediate immersion and experience of the world to contemplate what I bring to my experience of particular phenomena like desks, windows, books, and persons, I engage my capacity for representation. I represent myself as a subject standing over and against an object that I seek to understand, paradoxically taking what is other into my own activity—“penetrating” ($durchdringend$) both the object and myself to represent their relation. This abstraction allows me to create internal images and external signs, that is, objects that bear a significance for me other than their intuitive content: a meaning. Thus, in being represented, the object also penetrates my own subjectivity, so to speak, so I can know it as a represented object.

Hegel, following Kant who maintains that “it must be possible for the “I think” to

$^{22}$ Hegel’s curious use of the term Durchdringung (penetration) deserves more attention in Hegel studies. For an interesting interpretation that emphasizes the mutual penetration of subject and object, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 14-18. “Thought sinks into things only to the extent that it sinks into itself—which is its own act of thought. Thought that does not think itself is not yet thought, that is, it is not what it must be as thought” (15).
accompany all my representations,” identifies the subjective capacity to represent objects for oneself with the “Understanding” (Verstand). Accordingly, for both Kant and Hegel, the Understanding enables a subject to represent their own subjectivity to themselves, and this yields great benefits since it allows for the separation and analysis of particular features of particular objects of experience, including experiences of oneself. “The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the Understanding, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather absolute power” (PG § 32). It is the power to dissect and reconstitute both the subjective I and its objects of experience in order to understand them.

Yet representation is limited by how it (re)presents the activity of thinking—namely, by arresting it into a static form. Its analytic and synthetic operations work by distinguishing features or properties of objects (e.g. shape, color, essence, type) and treating them as isolated, fixed representations that are held together by the I. Subjectivity is thus represented as a given (natural or transcendental) entity or principle with fixed faculties and powers, and we understand it by analyzing its given capacities, even if those are given only as conditions of possible experience. This presents subjectivity as a substance or substantial ego, which cannot transform itself or its capacities by thinking no matter how complex a cognitive apparatus it possesses (a la Kant). Everything is rigorously distinguished, parsed, and represented discretely such that we can understand how a subject could know any object of experience.

24 See Siyaves Azeri, “Transcendental Subject vs. Empirical Self: On Kant’s Account of Subjectivity,” Filozofia 65, no. 3 (2010), 269-283. I disagree with some of the details of this account, but the criticism of Kant aligns with much of Hegel’s view. Another way to express the thrust of Hegel’s criticism is that Kant fails to show how the transcendental ego becomes the empirical ego and further how it becomes the objective world.
Representation is thus for Hegel an analytic and synthetic (as the imagination) capacity for abstraction, which is necessary for philosophical thinking but insufficient to capture the activity of thinking and its traversal through different forms, which is the object of speculative philosophy. It is insufficient for presenting the process of thinking, as “this thinking itself in the philosophical mode of cognition needs to be grasped in its necessity, as well as justified in respect of its ability to become cognizant of the absolute objects” (EL § 10, my emphasis). Representation attempts to grasp the “restlessness” of philosophical thinking by arresting it, breaking it into discrete parts, and arranging (stellen) them like pieces of a puzzle. But thinking is not a tableau, and Humpty Dumpty cannot be revived simply by gluing pieces back together. The representational method of “construction” cannot show, for example, how consciousness “is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, [how] it is something that goes beyond itself” (PG § 80). Like Zeno reducing movement to a set of discrete segments, the movement of the concept (Begriff)—the movement of thinking that is the concept, for Hegel—slips through and is lost. It is (speculative) philosophy’s task, according to Hegel, to express the actual movement of conceptual thinking, where each conceptual determination “is at the same time a moment that flows [fließendes]; hence, the single science is

26 On the restlessness of Hegel’s conception of thought, see Nancy, Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative, 3-7. On how representation “isolates” its determinations and “leaves them side by side,” see EL § 20 Remark.
27 Hegel, rather uncharitably, goes so far as to claim that the Understanding provides little more than “a table of contents” (PG § 53).
28 In PG § 51, Hegel speaks of the dismemberment effected by the operation of the Understanding and of its inability to grasp the “living essence of the matter.” The living movement of the object and the subject cannot be grasped, and “all the flesh and blood has been stripped from this skeleton.”
29 For the formalism and inadequacy of the method of “construction,” see PG § 51.
just as much the cognition of its content as an object that is, as it is the immediate cognition of its passage [Übergang] into its higher circle” (EL § 18 Remark). Representation cannot but misrepresent thought.

Now we can return to language. Up to this point, we have seen how Hegel invokes language (Sprache) to solve specific problems for mind or spirit, as obstacles to becoming free in and with the world. In each case, language functions as a semiotic tool for representing something else—a meaning (Bedeutung), a social relationship (Verhältnis), an agreement (Vertrag), a law (Gesetz)—for Geist to make explicit, recognize, and understand its own formal limits. This malleable tool created by Geist enables it to overcome (aufheben) the constraints and limits of the particular forms it takes on in its movement, whether as an individual subject or social milieu. Language allows mind to overcome these obstacles by being used and understood in different ways, whether to overcome the limits of one’s dependence on the outside world (through the creation and memorization of signs) or the limits to my own individual subjectivity (through intersubjective modes of expression). The process of mind overcoming itself (sich aufheben) transforms the mind, literally passing into another form of mind characterized by a new sort of freedom to think and act. Language as representation resolves problems in mind’s

31 In the Preface to the Phenomenology, this idea of passage or transition [Übergang] through concepts is expressed in terms of bringing “fixed thoughts into fluidity [festen Gedanken in Flüssigkeit]” (§ 33) and revealing the “fluid nature [flüssige Natur]” of conceptual forms (§ 2). I will sometimes have recourse to this idea of the fluidity of concepts, particularly how this fluidity is expressed in language.

32 Philosophy traces and presents this formative, deformative, and reformative process. This way of expressing Hegel’s view of philosophical thought as both a taking-on and overcoming of form(s) aligns with Jay Lampert’s interpretation of Hegel’s idea of philosophy as “the form of mediative forming.” See his “Religion and Philosophy: Same Content, Different Form—What Does Hegel Mean?” in Irreconcilable Differences?: Fostering Dialogue among Philosophy, Theology, and Science, eds. Jason C. Robinson and David A. Peck (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 91.
aim to be free.  

Yet this conception of language is inadequate when it comes to doing philosophy and expressing the truth of mind (Geist), which is made most explicit in the actual practice of philosophy. Representational language becomes a problem for philosophers, who Hegel asserts must actually enact and demonstrate what the mind is—namely, a process of explicating its own concepts and forms of activity to show how each passes across its thresholds into new forms, thus manifesting the mind’s own freedom and self-transformative nature. The practice of philosophy for Hegel exposes the truth of mind as a free movement or, more precisely, a movement of becoming-free. Yet one does not actually do philosophy merely by meditating or thinking abstractly, “in one’s own head” so to speak, for “the power of mind [Geist] is only as great as its expression [Äußerung], its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition [Auslegung]” (PG § 10). The nature of speculative thinking must be manifested in philosophical texts, exposed and presented (darstellen) in the language of a philosophical system, for “this alone is the speculative in act, and only the utterance [Aussprechen] of this movement is a speculative presentation [Darstellung]” (PG § 65). “Such an exposition would demand that at no stage of the development should any thought-determination or reflection occur which does not immediately emerge at this stage and that has not entered this stage from the one preceding it” (SL, 40). The problem is thus the inability of representational language to present and expose this movement as the plasticity of thought—its capacity to form, deform, and reform itself—coupled with the necessity of presenting it, of actually expressing the self-transformative

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If, as Hegel claims, “it can be said in general that philosophy puts thoughts and categories, but more precisely concepts, in the place of representations” (EL § 3 Remark), then the language of philosophy too must replace the seemingly isolated units of representational language, its signifying words and names and propositions, with some sort of integrated, developing “whole” of language in process, which no longer represents the movement of thought but carries it out within language. Let us now see how Hegel sets the language of his own philosophy into motion and how he suggests philosophy must be read differently, speculatively, first at the level of conceptual terms and then as these terms operate in propositions.

4.3 Conceptual Terms: Abbreviated Movements

Hegel’s idea of conceptual (begrifflich) terms is quite unique: they often indicate in themselves the “speculative spirit” of language (in general and within particular languages) (SL, 32). Their ability to signify and slip between different, even opposite meanings testifies for Hegel to the inherent unrest and speculative spirit of language and proves invaluable for their participation in

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34 In the preface to the Phenomenology, plastisch is determined as a goal of “philosophical exposition,” that is, speculative exposition, which requires a specific way of understanding or reading propositions, different from the “usual” way or the way propositions are used in syllogistic argumentation. “The one method interferes with the other, and only a philosophical exposition that rigidly excludes the usual way of relating the parts of a proposition could achieve the goal of plasticity” (PG § 64). In the Science of Logic, plasticity is expressed as the goal of philosophical “discourse” (40). This term is thematized in Catherine Malabou, The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic, trans. Lisabeth During (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005). We return to Malabou’s reading when we examine speculative propositions in 4.4. John McCumber also analyzes this problem not so much in terms of becoming plastic and free in our thinking, but in terms of presenting the truth. Yet McCumber suggests two types of names to resolve this problem. See McCumber, The Company of Words, chs. 7 and 8.

35 I use “conceptual terms” to refer generally to those words that title sections of the Science of Logic, Encyclopedia, and Philosophy of Right, such as “being,” “plant,” “will,” and “morality.” Thus, conceptual terms include not only the categorical terms of Hegel’s logics, but those of his Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Spirit as well.
the speculative propositions comprising his philosophy.36

In this section, I argue that Hegel’s conceptual terms act as abbreviations of conceptual movements within his speculative philosophy. After examining his comments on the speculative nature of language (largely in his introductions and prefaces), we will see how he enacts his theory of conceptual terms by his own word choice and play, which exploit terms’ polysemy and semantic resonances to slip terms closer together as he passes between concepts and between terms. My account of his conceptual terms will begin to show how Hegel’s philosophy overcomes representational language in order to trace and express the movement of truth.

In the introduction to the Philosophy of Right, Hegel maintains that we can simply root around in our everyday experience with language, in our everyday discourse with others, to find conceptual terms suited for doing speculative philosophy. “In philosophical cognition, […] the chief concern is the necessity of a concept, and the route by which it has become a result [is] its proof and deduction. Thus, given that its content is necessary for itself, the second step is to look around for what corresponds to it in our representations and language” (GPR § 2 Remark). We need to select terms suitable for signifying necessary stages of conceptual development. Moreover, in the introduction to the Encyclopedia Logic, he links the genesis of philosophy itself

36 The remainder of Part III has structural similarities to Jean-Luc Nancy’s The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel’s Bons Mots), trans. Céline Surprenant (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), particularly chs. 3 and 4. I find Nancy’s close reading of Hegel’s prefaces, remarks, and introductions quite insightful, and his challenging book highlights the difficulty of writing about Hegel’s use of Aufheben and his conception of speculative language. Though I will sometimes have recourse to draw from Nancy’s text, I should point out that Nancy’s project is different than mine. Whereas he focuses on reading (and re-reading) the remark in the Science of Logic concerning “The Expression: To Sublate [Aufheben]” and relating this reading to the other appearances of Aufheben in the logic and elsewhere in Hegel’s system, my focus remains on appearances of Sprache and how Hegel’s speculative language overcomes or aufhebt the problem of representational language. So while my reading crosses paths with Nancy’s, they diverge in significant ways, not least because of the need to express and utilize the speculative nature of our own “mother tongues” (French and English).
(and not merely its terms) to everyday experience. “The emergence [Entstehung] of philosophy [...] has experience [Erfahrung], the immediate and argumentative consciousness as its starting point” (EL § 12). In relation to both language and thought, philosophy finds its materials and tools in the content of everyday experience and thus in the content of its representations and in its everyday, representational language.

Hegel addresses the relation between language and philosophical thought even more directly in the preface to the second edition of the Science of Logic. He emphatically declares, “Philosophy needs no special terminology whatsoever [überhaupt]” (SL, 32, modified), for “the forms of thought are initially set out and laid down [herausgesetzt und niedergelegt] in human language [Sprache]” (SL, 31, modified). For Hegel, everyday, “natural” language sets out and exposes (ausgesetzt) thought in certain forms. However, he further specifies that these forms of thought are not always apparent in language.

Into all that becomes something inward for men, an image or conception as such, into all that he makes his own, language has penetrated, and everything that he has transformed into language and expresses in it contains a category—concealed, mixed with other forms or clearly determined as such (SL, 31).

As he states in his lectures on the Philosophy of Mind, “Even language is exposed to the fate of serving just as much to conceal as to reveal human thoughts” (EPG § 411 Addition). Philosophy can thus extract its terms from everyday language, but must often work to discover, distinguish, and clarify the significance of conceptual terms, which it finds obscured in common usage.

37 The same link is drawn between philosophy and everyday experience in the introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit §§ 76-79.
38 This preface is one of the final things he wrote before his death. Hegel dates the preface November 7, 1831, which is one week before he died on November 14, 1831. The older Hegel grew, it seems, the more he became concerned with language.
Moreover, in the German language in particular, Hegel finds that “some words have the further peculiarity [Eigenheit] of not only having different meanings [Bedeutungen], but opposite ones, so that in it a speculative spirit of language is unmistakable” (SL, 32). Hegel, of course, often makes use of such a word: *Aufheben*, which means to cancel, to preserve, and to raise up. He also frequently notes the polysemy of his key terms, such as *Realität* (empirical reality and actuality) (SL, 111-112), *Sinn* (physical and intellectual “sense”) (A, I:128-129), and *Urteil* (judgment and the “original partition of the concept”) (SL, 628). While such terms appear “nonsensical to the [everyday] understanding” (SL, 32), they prove to be a boon for speculative philosophy. So he employs these everyday terms and devotes many remarks (*Anmerkungen*) in his philosophy to specifying their speculative significance.

One might suspect Hegel of suggesting that a speculative spirit is found only or primarily in German, his native language, thereby giving German philosophy a sort of speculative superiority. But this suspicion is immediately quelled, for Hegel immediately seems to hedge on his previous claim that philosophy needs no special terminology. He acknowledges that for his philosophy in German “some words have to be taken from foreign [fremdem] languages,” though he reassures us that these words “have already received the right of citizenship [Bürgerrecht] through their use [Gebrauch]” (SL, 32). In the *Science of Logic*, in an early remark entitled “Sublation of Becoming [Aufheben des Werdens],” he explains the particular utility of Latin terms that have been integrated into the German language. According to Hegel, latinate terms like *Identität*, *Differenz*, *Existenz*, and *Substanz* indicate “reflective” determinations and distance them from determinations of immediacy signified by native German terms, such as *Sein* (being) and *Dasein* (determinate being or being there).
Still more often will the observation be forced upon [aufdringen] us that the technical language of philosophy uses Latin expressions for reflective determinations, either because the mother tongue [Muttersprache] has no expressions for them or if it has, as here, because its expression is more what is immediate, whereas the foreign language [fremde Sprache] calls to mind more what is reflected (SL, 107).39

Hegel walks a fine line between claiming philosophy needs no special terminology (besonderen Terminologie) even while acknowledging the need to use a technical language (Kunstsprache) that includes terms and expressions derived from foreign languages.

It is both because certain “foreign” or “unfamiliar” (fremd) terms have already been integrated into common usage and because they “call to mind [erinnert]” determinations of reflection instead of immediacy that for Hegel justifies their philosophical use. Hegel’s idea seems to be that latinate words like “Form” indicate to readers mediated relationships, e.g. between form and content or form and matter, since such terms began as alien to German (and English) before they were integrated into common usage. Readers of Hegel would of course need to be educated in Latin to pick up on the significance he supposes them to have for his readers, though he never maintains this knowledge is strictly necessary to grasp these determinations.

In 1809 when Hegel was rector of a Gymnasium (i.e. high school), he gave an address on the importance of learning foreign languages, particularly dead languages like Latin. This education, according to Hegel, is crucial to teach students how to think abstractly about pure conceptual determinations, for in attempting to learn a foreign language they are epistemically alienated from the words and grammatical structures they immediate grasp and use habitually in their first language. The alienation students experience not only enables them, upon grasping the

39 See also SL, 399: “Illusory being [Schein] is the same thing as reflection [Reflexion]; but it is reflection as immediate. For illusory being that has withdrawn into itself and so is estranged from its immediacy, we have the foreign word reflection [Reflexion].”
rudiments of other languages, to return to their own native language with a deeper understanding of how language shapes everyday experience, but it also allows them to overcome the foreign quality of the other language by expressing their own thoughts in it. This rationale seems to be at work in his justification of and esteem for latinate terms in his own philosophy.

Furthermore, it would appear to be highly beneficial on Hegel’s account if foreign terms had already migrated into common usage since they would be well-suited to expressing concepts of mediation and reflection, which are necessary stages of thought. On Jean-Luc Nancy’s reading, Hegel’s aim of expressing the nature of things themselves itself requires borrowing and integrating words from foreign languages, insofar as the ultimate nature of reality must find expression in particular languages (for “language in general” expresses nothing). “The Thing, the thing-in-itself, the matter of thought contributes to babelize the privileged language. [...] The privilege of aufheben, then, concludes nothing. On the contrary, it opens up onto the frequency of the necessary borrowings from foreign languages.” Hegel remains mum on the issue of whether foreign words necessarily migrate into all languages, but regardless, we can see the benefit of such a migration on his own philosophy and even on this dissertation, with its reliance on latinate terms like “problem,” “solution,” and “overcome.”

40 See ETW, 321-330. “This centrifugal force of the soul explains why the soul must always be provided with the means of estranging itself from its natural condition and essence, and why in particular the young mind must be led into a remote and foreign world. Now, the screen best suited to perform this task of estrangement for the sake of education is the world and language of the ancients. This world separates us from ourselves, but at the same time it grants us the cardinal means of returning to ourselves: we reconcile ourselves with it and thereby find ourselves again in it, but the self which we then find is the one which accords with the tone and universal essence of mind” (328). Hegel argues that learning the grammar of a foreign language is particularly important for teaching students how to think abstractly. See Jim Vernon, “The Realm of Abstraction: The Role of Grammar in Hegel’s Linguistic System” in Hegel and Language, ed. Jere O’Neill Surber (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 165-177.

41 Nancy, The Speculative Remark, 67.
Regardless of their origin or how they entered the language, it is key for their philosophical use, according to Hegel, that the “logical objects and their expressions all be familiar [allbekannten] in the culture” (SL, 33), founded in everyday experiences with language. So while he esteems the speculative spirit of German in particular, he acknowledges the presence of polysemous terms in other languages, such as “the double meaning of the Latin tollere (SL, 107), and indeed seems forced to conclude that since in general forms of thought are “set out and laid down in human language” (SL, 31, modified), all particular languages display to one degree or another a speculative spirit. For as Nancy notes, “If the German language holds privileges, the appropriation of [philosophical] science must nevertheless be done in each mother tongue.”

Indeed, English too has its fair share of common, polysemous terms capable of becoming conceptual terms within a speculative system, e.g. “sense,” “mind,” and “ground.”

It is not quite right to call any language “natural” in Hegel’s sense of the term, for even the “familiarity” (Bekanntschaft) people have with the potential conceptual terms of a language like English is based in habit (Gewohnheit). Foreign words also gain “right of citizenship” in a language only by habitual use. Acquiring habits is for Hegel a process of (re)forming oneself through the “repetition [Wiederholung]” of particular acts or reactions—“the production of habit appears as practice”—which is the process of constituting the “internality” of a unified subject

42 Nancy, The Speculative Remark, 66. See note 47 on Hegel’s intention to “teach philosophy to speak German” (EL xvii).
43 John McCumber has probed the relation of habit and language, indicating problems with the idea of a “natural language,” particular in the context of Hegel’s philosophy. See “Hegel on Habit,” The Owl of Minerva 21, no. 2 (Spring 1990), 155-165, and “Hegel and ’Natural Language’” in Hegel and the Analytic Tradition, ed. Angelica Nuzzo (Continuum: London, 2010), 83-95. He also rightly points out the equally problematic term “ordinary language,” for Hegel uses specific German terms for a dual purpose: to link his use with that of previous philosophers and to tie philosophical language to the exoteric German familiar to a wide audience. While Hegel does not use German in an “ordinary” way, his German is also not particularly extraordinary.
through the repetition of “external” behaviors, or behaviors responsive to what is “external” to them (EPG § 410). The subject, who begins to distinguish themselves from an “outside” through habit, develops what Hegel calls a “second nature.”

So our repeated exposure to, use of, and familiarity with language in communicating with others means that it is first experienced not as “natural,” but as what could be called “second natural.”

It is advantageous for philosophers, according to Hegel, if the “second natural” language they use “possesses an abundance of logical expressions, that is, specific and separate expressions for the thought determinations themselves” (SL, 32). It is also “important that in language the categories should appear in the form of substantives and verbs and thus be stamped with the form of objectivity” as opposed to “particles” signifying “relationships based on thought” (SL, 32). These features of a language for Hegel make it more amenable to reveal the


45 Jim Vernon ambitiously uses these comments on “particles” signifying logical relations and similar ones in Hegel’s psychology as grounds for drawing a universal, “Hegelian” grammar out of the sections on the concept, judgement, and syllogism in the Science of Logic. He also takes Hegel’s claim that “many prepositions and articles denote relationships based on thought” (SL, 32) to suggest that syncategorematic terms (e.g. “all,” “some,” “and,” “if”) can be generated simply out of the logical relationships inherent in forms of judgement and syllogism. See Hegel’s Philosophy of Language (Continuum: London, 2007), ch. 3. While Vernon rigorously shows significant parallels between Hegel’s suggestions here and arguments in his subjective logic, I find that Hegel does not provide sufficient clarity into how precisely logical forms appear in the grammar of a language like German. Indeed, when he claims that “into all that becomes inward, in representation generally, what humans make their own, language has penetrated, and everything that humanity has transformed into language and expresses in it contains a category,” he also admits these categories are “concealed, mixed, or worked out [eingehüllter, vermischter, oder herausgearbeitet]” in language (SL, 31). Vernon’s attribution of a “universal” or “deep” grammar to Hegel certainly gets at this idea that forms of thought are hidden in language. Yet after arguing that an abstract, formal grammar is implicit in Hegel’s logic, Vernon does not go on to show how grammatical forms themselves (and syncategorematic terms) unfold into and become the determinate content of formed propositions. Hegel’s account of the relation between form and content expounded elsewhere in the Science of Logic (455-456) would seem to require this demonstration if the form and content are actually to be grasped as stages of the same conceptual movement and not merely as separate representations that can be combined. To be fair, Hegel does not indicate how this might be done. But to support his view, Vernon is forced
logical relations between concepts that are laid out in all languages, albeit in a mixed, confused way, for the task of speculative philosophy is to present these concepts and explicate their relations in a developmental system.

Furthermore, according to Hegel, the initial, habitual experience with language is not only convenient for doing philosophy; it is one of philosophy’s necessary preconditions.

Philosophy can, of course, presuppose some familiarity with its objects [Gegenstände]; in fact it must presuppose this, as well as an interest in these objects. The reason is that in the order of time consciousness produces representations of objects before it produces concepts of them; and that the thinking spirit only advances to thinking cognition and comprehension by going through representation and by converting itself to it (EL § 1).

Philosophy must extract the linguistic, expressive material it habitually experiences and transform it to express the movement of the concept through discrete representations. Its transformation of and movement through representations indicates its overcoming of them.

The necessity of this presupposition is one of the reasons Hegel rejects (while using a latinate term) the idea of philosophers adopting “an affected purism [affectirter Purismus]” in their terminology and language use (SL, 32). His target seems to be not only the misplaced desire to purge foreign words from philosophical use, but also the conviction that philosophers should signify concepts and express their arguments in an artificial language, perhaps a formal “logical language.” One might suppose using an artificial language would clarify and more precisely determine the meanings of terms, but this artificiality would open a rift between the language to bridge the gap between the (universal) grammatical form and (particular) lexical content of language by positing a grand synthesis of the two performed “dialectically” through the practice of using linguistic expressions. This final move seems more in line with Fichte’s method than Hegel’s, for the synthesis is merely posited and does not show one developing into the other but rather the external synthesis of two separate abstractions of language. I have not staked out a position concerning the sticky issue of grammar in Hegel because he does not seem to present grammar as the solution to a problem.
used in a culture and that used by philosophers to express the truth of that culture. It would
cordon off the inquiries of philosophy from its cultural, historical, and linguistic foundations,
which would prevent philosophical texts from illuminating how a language like German, which
has been cultivated by habitual use, itself implicitly contains forms of thought and the historical
work of reason.\footnote{For John McCumber, this schism between everyday and philosophical language in Hegel is of particular concern
to what he calls “right Hegelians.” These readers of Hegel, according to McCumber, which include G. R. G.
Mure, Malcolm Clark, and Josef Simon, claim Hegel’s thought “manage[s] to achieve an ‘absolute expression’
which leaves it unable to relate to everyday language, and unable to dialogue with its time” (The Company of
Words, 219). McCumber attempts to resolve this problem and the mirrored problem raised by “left Hegelians,”
who claim the historical contingencies of everyday language never leaves Hegel’s philosophical language, by
arguing there are in fact two types of words that Hegel’s philosophy uses and attempts to integrate. This would
allow Hegel, McCumber claims, to accommodate everyday language while still producing a “universal”
philosophical idiom. Jim Vernon also sees the problem in terms of a left and right split, but he resolves it by
arguing that Hegel synthesizes a particular, historically contingent lexicon with a universal, logically deduced
grammar. See Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 116-117. I largely agree with McCumber’s and Vernon’s shared
diagnosis of this problem for Hegel, though I find it less than useful now to express the different interpretations
in terms of “left” and “right” camps. My alternative resolution to the problem will soon become apparent:
Hegel’s philosophical language is neither “finite” nor “absolute” in itself, neither strictly historical nor eternal.
His philosophy can only be understood speculatively, I contend, if his terms are no longer grasped as possessing
fixed, representational meanings—they are no longer Vorstellungen—but are seen rather as markers or signs of
the movement or process of philosophical thinking.}

Therefore, to link the expression of his philosophy with the language of everyday life,

\footnote{“Spirit is here [in logic] purely at home with itself, and thereby free, for that is just what freedom is: being at
home with oneself in one’s other, depending upon oneself, and being one’s own determinant. In all drives I begin
with an other, with what is for me something external. Hence, we speak of dependence in this case. Freedom is
only present where there is no other for me that is not myself” (EL § 24 Addition 2). A “free knowing” would
thus entail the process of overcoming the otherness of what I am seeking to know, thereby showing my own
activity of knowing in the object itself. This includes the otherness of an artificial language. In addition, there is
simply no reason to use an artificial or formal language since the “forms of thought” are already for Hegel “first
set down and laid out in language.” Perhaps he is also targeting philosophers who fill their works with
neologisms and baroque stylings instead of using relatively common German terms and phrases. For Hegel’s
criticism of J. G. Hamann on this issue, see HH, 6: “Hamann’s writings do not so much have a particular style as
they are style, through and through. In everything which came from Hamann’s quill, his personality is so
extremely intrusive and absolute preponderant that the reader is referred at every point more so to it than to that
which might be interpreted as content.”}
Hegel uses rather prosaic German terms like *Geist* (mind), *Gewohnheit* (habit), *Staat* (state), *Gesetz* (law), *Sein* (being), *Werden* (becoming), and *Material*. To read philosophical texts requires an initial foothold, some basis from which to interpret and understand a text—habit. One cannot simply dive in without some prior, habitual experience with the language and its use, without some interpretive experience and familiarity with linguistic terms, their representational meanings, and how they tend to relate in propositions. Otherwise, Hegel’s philosophy and this entire dissertation too would appear incomprehensible. There must be an initial, habitual ground for interpreting philosophical texts, a foundation of *common sense* from which the reader can begin to follow and grasp what is said.

Yet this habitual and customary exposure to language is only a starting point; Hegel is no ordinary language philosopher. As any reader of Hegel knows, the fact that he employs relatively exoteric terms like “quality,” “existence,” “nothing,” “contradiction,” “state,” “conscience,” “actual,” and “property” does little to make his texts comprehensible.

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48 Thus, this need of philosophy explains one sense in which philosophy cannot “issue instructions” because “it appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its completed state. […] the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk” (*GPR* Preface, 23). Philosophy comes late as a digestion of past and present, so it requires material (prior experiences with texts and linguistic utterances) whereby to disclose the implicit speculative nature of thought operative within these experiences.

49 Hence, Hegel esteems the role of habit in his philosophy of mind as the basis for all the more complex activities of the mind. “Habit is the most essential feature of the *existence* of all mental life in the individual subject, enabling the subject to be *concrete* immediacy, to be *soulful* ideality, enabling the content, religious content, moral content, etc., to *belong* to it as *this self*, as *this soul*, not in it merely *implicitly* (as predisposition), nor as a transient sensation or representation, nor as abstract inwardness, cut off from action and actuality, but in its very being” (*EPG* § 410 Remark). Furthermore, habit is not strictly individual; it takes the form of social customs when it is actualized by the will. See *GPR* § 151.

50 For an account of how Hegel anticipates ideas developed by the ordinary language philosopher Gilbert Ryle, see John McCumber, “Hegel on Habit.” Though McCumber does not mention Ryle in his later, more thorough account of Hegel and language (*The Company of Words*), he explains there how Hegel overcomes ordinary language philosophy by demonstrating how to supplant the ordinary, representational meanings of his terms. See *The Company of Words*, Part III. Though I agree with McCumber that Hegel overcomes problems that arise from doing ordinary language philosophy, I depart from McCumber’s account of how he does so.

51 This is a prime theme of Alexandre Koyré, “Note sur la langue et la terminologie hégéliennes,” *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger* T. 112 (July to Dec., 1931), 409-439. It is explored more fully in
“Familiarity” and experience with a language is how we first encounter the words, but this familiarity is not sufficient to do philosophy, nor can the latter rest content that its content can be expressed simply by appeal to the familiar meanings of terms. In fact, readers of Hegel will be led astray if they assume his terms bear the sense they do in everyday speech. Hegel makes this point by playing on the lexical root shared by bekannt and erkannt.

Quite generally, the familiar [bekannt], just because it is familiar, is not recognized [erkannt]. It is the most common [gewöhnlichste] self-deception and deception of others to presume something familiar [bekannt] is known [Erkennen] and also to be satisfied with it; with all the talk [Hin] – and heralding [Herreden] comes such knowledge [Wissen] without knowing, as it happens, not from that spot. Subject and object, God, Nature, Understanding, sensibility, and so on, are uncritically [unbesehen] taken for granted as familiar, and also as a valid basis put and made into fixed points [feste Punkte] for starting and stopping (PG § 31).

This mistaken view sees philosophy as a simple back and forth debate involving conceptual terms, but in such a way that their familiar meanings are assumed as unquestioned foundations for the debate.

While these [terms] remain unmoved, the knowing activity goes back and forth between them, thus moving only on their surface [Oberfläche]. Apprehending and testing likewise consist in seeing whether everyone's impression of the matter coincides with what is asserted about these fixed points, whether it seems [scheint] that way and is familiar or not (PG § 31).

Rather than a philosophical comprehension, we get a surface-level debate about opinions.


“Natural language appears therefore as the proper medium of philosophic discourse; in natural language, this absolute genesis [of sense] will be able to be said. This can be done by sublating [aufheben] the purely poetical language that still belongs to representation, by maintaining the understanding’s determinations and fixations, but as well by dissolving them or rather by following their own internal dissolution, in a dialectic which engenders the totality of sense” (53). On the other hand, there is William James’ famous remark that understanding Hegel’s “mystical” philosophy requires an “anaesthetic revelation,” since grasping the “living sense of its reality only comes in the artificial mystic state of mind” (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures XVI And XVII, note 231). Many readers new to Hegel might share James’ view; then again, James fundamentally misunderstands the “absolute” in Hegel by treating this process as a fixed, overarching subject or deity.
(Meinungen) and appearances (Erscheinungen) that never penetrates to the objects themselves.\textsuperscript{52}

Instead, the everyday use and common sense understanding of words must be transformed to become adequate to express the speculative nature of philosophical thought.\textsuperscript{53}

Hegel thus distinguishes the conceptual grasp of terms from simply understanding their definitional content.

According to the formal, non-philosophical method of the sciences, the first thing which is sought and required, at least for the sake of external scientific form, is the \textit{definition}. […] But the deduction of the definition may perhaps be reached by means of etymology, or chiefly by abstraction from particular cases, so that it is ultimately based on people's feelings and representations. The correctness [\textit{Richtigkeit}] of the definition is then made to depend on its agreement with available [\textit{vorhandenen}] representations. […] In philosophical cognition, on the other hand, the chief concern is the \textit{necessity} of a concept, and the route by which it has become a \textit{result} [is] its proof [\textit{Beweis}] and deduction (\textit{GPR} § 2 Remark, modified).

The necessity of a concept can only be demonstrated from within a philosophical system—that is, if it is shown to be a necessary outcome of explicating a prior concept, such that a conceptual

\textsuperscript{52} The “object” itself that thought penetrates to and cognizes is its own process of comprehending its epistemic objects. It is the process of thinking (i.e. the truth of thinking) that philosophy aims to express. We already saw in 4.2 how the correspondence theory of truth relies on these familiar meanings, and this also further explains Hegel’s criticism of the freedom of public opinion, which we examined in 3.6 above. He makes clear in the \textit{Philosophy of Right} that philosophical expressions and those of the “sciences” (\textit{Wissenschaften}) are not merely opinions (\textit{Meinungen}) and so are not implicated by his criticisms. “The \textit{sciences}, however – that is, if they really are sciences — have no place at all in the sphere of opinion and subjective views, nor does their presentation consist in the art of allusions, turns of phrase, half-utterances and semi-concealment, but in the unambiguous, determinate, and open expression of their meaning and sense. Consequently, they do not come under the category of public opinion” (\textit{GPR} § 319 Remark). However, this remark reignites concerns over Hegel’s distinction between public opinion and scientific utterances. First, his use of “science” is normative—signaled by his qualification, “if they really are sciences” or “namely, if they are sciences”—and he does not make clear who or what institution would decide whether or not an utterance was actually part of public opinion or scientific discourse. Second, I will soon point out how Hegel often uses polysemous terms and plays on their multiple senses to link and transition between them. So even apart from the obvious interpretive challenges of reading and grasping Hegel, his claim that philosophical expressions are “unambiguous” (\textit{unzweideutigen}) and “open” or “clear” (\textit{offenen}) in their meaning and sense is not borne out by his own philosophy.

\textsuperscript{53} On this point, my reading aligns more with those of Jim Vernon and Anglica Nuzzo than John McCumber. Compare Vernon’s emphasis on reading propositions otherwise (\textit{Hegel’s Philosophy of Language}, 130-133) and Nuzzo’s on the logic of language transformation (“The Language of Hegel’s Speculative Philosophy” in \textit{Hegel and Language}, ed. Jere O’Neill Surber (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 75-91) to McCumber’s discussion of “two philosophical media” (\textit{The Company of Words}, 238-249).
term comes to indicate not a discrete meaning but the process of a new concept emerging and then eventually being overcome (aufheben) through its own explication and the philosophical exposition of what it entails. For Hegel, this can be called the standard of “proof” for a concept.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, what conceptual terms “signify”—if we can still use this word—no longer has the form of definitions with representational content.

But just as this concept itself is in its truth and as it is in representation cannot only be different, they must also differ in their form and shape. If, however, the representation is not also false in its content, the concept may well be contained in it and essentially revealed in it; that is, the representation becomes raised [erhoben] to the form of the concept (GPR § 2 Remark).

Conceptual terms relay a particular conceptual movement—the emergence, development (Entwicklung), and overcoming (aufheben)—of a concept instead of fixed, representational meanings. Accordingly, speculative philosophical “thinking conducts itself essentially so as to raise (erhebt) itself above the natural, sensible, and argumentative consciousness into its own unadulterated element; and it gives itself initially a self-distancing negative relationship to this beginning” (EL § 12).

In summary, the “positive” relation of philosophy to everyday thinking and language use is its foundation in the everyday—the concept is latent in everyday thought and language—whereas the “negative” relation involves philosophy’s task to negate, preserve, and raise (aufheben) its thinking to conceptual thought and its language to that suited to the expression and

\textsuperscript{54} In the preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel devotes several sections to criticizing, often sarcastically, the acclaim bestowed on formal, mathematical proofs (PG §§42-45). He then proposes this idea of a philosophical proof of concepts or, using his terms, of forms of the concept by appealing directly to language. “This return of the concept into itself must be presented [darstellt]. This movement, which constitutes what formerly the proof was supposed to accomplish, is the dialectical movement of the proposition itself. It alone is the speculative in act, and only its utterance [Aussprechen] is speculative presentation [Darstellung]” (PG § 65).
presentation of its movement. This explains, on the one hand, why Hegel staunchly criticizes many of his contemporaries for using what he sees as esoteric jargon, often in Latin or Greek, instead of ordinary German terms; on the other hand, it also explains why he ridicules those who complain about the incomprehensibility of philosophical texts and who wish to read and grasp them immediately without having to re-read and actually practice doing philosophy. The question is, how exactly does Hegel’s speculative philosophy, in its presentation and linguistic expression, “raise” the form and content of everyday experience and representational knowledge to express a necessary development between concepts? How does he recast conceptual terms as marks of movements rather than as signifiers of fixed, representational meanings?

One might suppose a reasonable solution would be for Hegel to provide a glossary of terms at the beginning of his philosophy. That way, readers could acquaint themselves with the

55 These positive and negative sides of the relation between philosophy and everyday consciousness are also present, according to Hegel, between philosophy and the empirical sciences, albeit in a slightly different form. Hegel maintains that the empirical sciences have the same “stimulus [as philosophy] to vanquish the form in which the wealth of their content is offered only as something that is merely immediate and simply found, as a manifold of juxtaposition, and hence as something altogether contingent. They are stimulated to elevate this content to necessity” (EL § 12), which the empirical sciences do by “finding universal determinations, genera, and laws. In this way they prepare the content of what is particular so that it can be taken up into philosophy” (EL § 12 Remark). Yet “they contain [only] the invitation for thinking to advance to these concrete determinations. The assumption of this content, through which the immediacy that still clings to it, and its givenness are sublated [aufgehoben] by [philosophical] thinking, is at the same time a developing of thinking out of itself. Thus, philosophy does owe its development to the empirical sciences, but it gives to their content the fully essential shape of the freedom of thinking (or of what is a priori) as well as the validation of necessity (instead of the content being warranted because it is simply found to be present, and because it is a fact of experience)” (EL § 12 Remark). On Hegel’s view of the relation between philosophy and the empirical sciences (and their respective use of language), see Jeffrey Reid, Real Words: Language and System in Hegel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), ch. 1.

56 On the former criticism he leveled at his contemporaries, see the translators’ introduction to the Encyclopedia Logic (xiv-xviii), where they cite Hegel’s student Karl Rosenkranz’s reports of Hegel’s effort “to teach philosophy to speak German” (EL xvii). See also EL § 5 on preserving the initial content that everyday consciousness experiences and PG § 13 on the aim of science to transform what initially appears esoteric into a system “at once exoteric, comprehensible, and capable of being learned and appropriated by all.” On the latter criticism of those who expect to comprehend philosophy immediately and without practice, see PG § 67 and EL § 5 Remark. On the need to undertake the “work of the concept” to overcome a common sensical understanding of things, see PG §§ 70, 76-78.
precise meanings he assigns to his terms—based on their common sensical meanings, but more precisely defined. Yet Hegel rejects this idea because it raises a more significant problem. Definitional presuppositions would either be superfluous or would undermine the systematicity of his philosophy, its *scientific* quality. If he initially defined his conceptual terms using other terms not defined within his philosophy, he would forego the possibility of creating a systematic philosophy, “systematic” meaning that each bit of content and each conceptual term it contains is justified by its relative position in his philosophy as a whole.

A content has its justification only as a moment of the whole, outside of which it is only an unfounded presupposition or a subjective certainty. Many philosophical writings restrict themselves like this—to the mere utterance of *dispositions* and *opinions*.—It is erroneous to understand by “system” a philosophy whose principle is restricted and distinct from other principles; on the contrary, it is the principle of genuine philosophy to contain all particular principles within itself (*EL* § 15).

The definitional content of Hegel’s philosophy would itself not be justified by his philosophy, which would rest upon it, so his philosophy as a whole would rest (uneasily) on unsubstantiated presuppositions.⁵⁷ It would not meet the burden of philosophical proof he espouses.⁵⁸ On the other hand, if he provided definitions of key terms using other terms in his philosophy but stopped there, these definitions would appear as empty tautologies of a floating, narrowly self-enclosed, and static “system.”⁵⁹ So a glossary of Hegel’s terms will not do.

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⁵⁷ Thus, Hegel rejects the method (e.g. Fichte’s) of stating first principles or *Grundsätze* as the foundational starting point of his philosophy, so there are no fundamental or grounding propositions in his philosophy that are not also grounded by other propositions elsewhere in his philosophy. For his criticism of founding a philosophy on *Grundsätze* and the necessity of explicating and developing those propositions, see *PG* §§ 19, 70. For one influential reading of how Hegel begins his systematic philosophy, see Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006). For a different reading that focuses on method, see Angelica Nuzzo, “Thinking Being: Method in Hegel’s Logic of Being” in *A Companion to Hegel*, eds. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2011), 109-138.

⁵⁸ See note 53 above.

⁵⁹ Hence, Hegel implicitly rejects the coherence theory of truth. Coherence, for Hegel, is mistaken as the criterion of truth because it does not require actually thinking and understanding objects. It can content itself with mere
It is not merely clarity of meaning nor coherence or consistency between Hegel’s conceptual terms that is needed, but rather a technique, a method, of systematically relating terms and (re)defining them in relation to each other even as new ones are introduced on and along. For instance, the term “concept” (Begriff) is introduced in the third part of the Science of Logic as marking the conceptual “unity of being and essence” (SL, 596), linking those terms together as their conceptual result, but then Hegel goes on to further determine its meaning as a process of sundering itself to form judgements. “As individuality, the concept in its determinateness return into itself, and therewith the determinate moment has itself become a totality. Its return into itself is therefore the absolute, original partition of itself, or, in other words, it is posited as judgement” (SL, 622). Each term does not signify a fixed meaning but instead marks a particular trajectory or segment of conceptual thinking, but those particular segments and the terms that mark them are preserved as thinking develops into new forms and as Hegel’s text proceeds to trace these new forms. We can think of these conceptual terms—which are negated by other terms and overcome by them but are also explicated and made actual in the formal consistency. See PG §§ 51-53. Again, the question of truth becomes fixed in a formal solution (coherence), such that the movement of thought and the genesis of the contents of philosophy is overlooked by separating the method from its result. The process of unfolding the truth (of thinking) is itself the truth for Hegel. “It is in this way that the content shows that its determinateness is not received from something else, nor externally attached to it, but that it determines itself, and arranges itself as a moment having its own place in the whole” (PG § 53). Furthermore, Hegel’s use of System should not be taken in a mechanistic sense, though I have found no thorough study in English that traces its appearances in his philosophy. But it is clear he uses the term to allude to organic, biological systems like the nervous or skeletal system, which grow and change as organisms develop and interact with their environments. Hence, it is not just that a philosophical system is coherent, complete, and self-grounding, but that it grows and develops while struggling to remain itself in the face of its outside. Any representation he gives of his philosophy—e.g. “a circle of circles” (EL § 15; SL, 842)—is necessarily insufficient to express the developmental process the system undergoes in its own growth and construction, for the system is equally the process and its result. See SL, 838-842.

Angelica Nuzzo has examined the relation between Hegel’s method and philosophy of language from multiple perspectives. See her essays, “The Language of Hegel’s Speculative Philosophy” in Hegel and Language, 75-91, and “Vagueness and Meaning Variance in Hegel’s Logic” in Hegel and the Analytic Tradition, ch. 3.

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text but as preserved and overcome—as marks of movements. They are at once marks that the
movement of the concept (through particular concepts) leaves behind and the very relay process
of marking out and delineating a certain segment of the path of speculative thinking or “the
concept” (der Begriff). This use of conceptual terms does not primarily create new words, but
reveals something implicit in the linguistic sign that was latent in its initial introduction—
namely, its capacity for transformation. In other words, the speculative use of language reveals
the speculative potential of all signs to mark and relay movements of thought instead of merely
representing fixed meanings or objects.

As Hegel introduces new terms to explicate previously introduced terms and to mark new
stages or trajectories of conceptual development (e.g. from Geist as “intelligence” to “will”),
each term must remain open to redefinition and to taking on new sense in the context of what
John McCumber calls Hegel’s “company of words.” In other words, once Hegel introduces a
new term to carry the sense of a new stage of conceptual development (e.g. Geist no longer as
abstract Intelligenz knowing itself, but as Wille expressing and externalizing itself; Sein no
longer as the immediate being of something, but as a shimmer or shine, Schein, that both
discloses and obscures something’s essence, Wesen), the previous terms in being overcome
(aufgehoben) are nevertheless preserved and their sense recast as moments constitutive of this

61 This suggestion of a concept of the mark brings us in close proximity to Jacques Derrida’s trace, and the former
shares with the latter the displacement caused by the inscription of a conceptual term in Hegel’s text. See
Hegel discusses the relation between marks and concepts in SL, 613-614, but he winds up reducing marks to
representational signs, which is precisely what I am attempting to avoid here. It is not, as Hegel says, that
conceptual marks mean or signify “the determinateness or the simple content of the concept” (613); rather they
mark or trace in his text the movement of a concept toward or along its limit. Unfortunately, I do not have the
space to develop this idea further in this project.
new stage and new way of grasping determinations of thought (logic), nature, or mind. This simultaneous operation of overcoming the limits of one finite concept (and the sense its particular conceptual term carries) and preserving it as a moment of a new, finite concept or conceptual movement (designated by a new term) just is the operation performed by speculative thought overcoming itself into a new form. This is expressed by Hegel’s use of the crucial term Aufheben, which is not a conceptual term (it does not title any section but a remark) nor a representational sign, but instead marks a transformative operation performed by thinking on and over itself. So in fact, if Hegel sought mainly terminological clarity, he would sacrifice the ability of language to express the conceptual movement his philosophy traces: the restless movement of thought progressing through its forms, of overcoming the finitude of its particular forms and finding itself anew, transformed.

Accordingly, Angelica Nuzzo identifies Hegel’s dialectical method with his method of

63 Angelica Nuzzo expresses this operation of Aufheben as opening a new “horizon of meaning” for grasping a form of logic, nature, and mind. See “The Language of Hegel’s Speculative Philosophy,” 87. This horizon is founded upon overcoming the previous stages of the concept, which are preserved as moments.

64 On Hegel’s notion of “speculative meaning,” see Jean-Luc Nancy, The Speculative Remark, 96-101. Though all definitions of aufheben are by definition one-sided, Nancy provides one that reflects many of the themes I have raised in Part III: “The aufheben will be the concept of the movement of truth or, more precisely, of the passage as truth” (29). There is good reason to think this term is untranslatable, for while Hegel notes that it unifies the conflicting meanings of canceling, preserving, and raising up (SL, 106-108), he uses it to signal a pure operational of thought on itself, to express that thinking cancels, preserves, and raises up itself into a new form. It also functions somewhat differently in each of its appearances, for it presupposes the operation of determinate negation and includes negation in its functioning. One always negates something in particular; therefore, each negation has positive content in itself. I have typically emphasized a particular dimension of this operation by translating the term as “to overcome,” which is not a strict translation. But since we have focused on Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind and the process of mind or spirit developing into new forms and attempting to become free, “overcoming” seems largely to capture the operation of aufheben that mind performs on itself to free itself, even though the word connotes negation or canceling less than aufheben and its standard translation, “sublation.” Given Hegel’s concern to use relatively everyday terms, I think “sublation,” which is not a word in common usage, is ill-suited as a translation since it may thwart new readers of Hegel. Using “sublation” transforms aufheben into a technical term for English readers and distances them from Hegel’s contention that the operation of aufheben is perhaps one of the most ubiquitous processes we experience and undergo.
language transformation.\textsuperscript{65} The functioning of this method relies on his conceptual terms remaining vague and indeterminate, such that their meanings can be modified with respect to other terms and undergo shifts in meaning, \textit{Bedeutungsverschiebungen}, since each particular term will be overcome and preserved within the becoming-systematic of his philosophy. Each term marks a trajectory of sense as concepts are introduced, explicated, and overcome. Paradoxically, if Hegel’s system is to actually be systematic, his conceptual terms must remain irreducibly vague, indeterminate on borderline cases, and open to carry new sense since once the concepts they designate are surpassed they then come to mark preserved moments of a new concept, or what amounts to the same thing, constitutive moments in the movement of conceptual thought considered as a whole.

For example, let us look Hegel’s use of the term “ideality” (\textit{Idealität}) in the early sections of the \textit{Philosophy of Mind}. In his discussion of “the feeling soul [\textit{Die fühlende Seele}],” Hegel claims, “Ideality is the \textit{negation} of the real, but the real is also \textit{preserved} [\textit{aufbewahrt}], virtually retained, although it does not exist” (\textit{EPG} § 403 Remark). A few sections later, in his discussion of habit, which is another form the soul takes, he claims, “This abstract being-for-self [\textit{Fürsichsein}] of the soul in its corporeality [\textit{Leiblichkeit}] is not yet I, not the existence of the universal that is for the universal. It is corporeality reduced [\textit{zurückgesetzte}] to its pure \textit{ideality}, and corporeality thus belongs to [\textit{zukommt}] the soul as such” (\textit{EPG} § 409 Remark). Ignoring the invocation of “universality” for the moment, to grasp \textit{Idealität} and \textit{Negation} and understand what Hegel is saying requires following the subtle shift of meanings taking place here. In § 403,

\textsuperscript{65} Nuzzo, “The Language of Hegel’s Speculative Philosophy,” 86-88; “Vagueness and Meaning Variance in Hegel’s Logic,” 65-77. See also Hyppolite, \textit{Logic and Existence}, 161-176.
Idealität is defined as “the negation of the Real,” but in § 409 it is related specifically to the concept of the soul and expressed differently as a reduced moment of corporeality. We might initially conclude that corporeality is the real, or at least part of it, and this aligns with common usage. But § 409 also indicates its capacity for becoming preserved (aufbewahrt) as ideal. So strangely, the body in relation to the soul can also be understood as an ideality, which does not simply mean the body is obliterated into non-existence or becomes a figment of the imagination.

If we ask, “Is the body real or ideal for Hegel?” we must conclude that it is in a way both: it is real if considered “in itself” (an sich) and ideal if considered in relation to the soul. It is real if we understand the body as a natural object just like other natural objects, but it is ideal if we understand the body in relation to the soul that animates it. Put differently, we could say that the soul negates the body, which means that it negates its own natural corporeality to preserve it as an ideality for the soul. We could follow a similar line of thought by asking, “Is the soul real or ideal for Hegel?” It is an ideality an sich but a reality, a being-for-self, if seen as “the existing truth [Wahrheit] of matter [Materie]” (EPG § 389 Remark). Furthermore, it is not just the vagueness of Idealität that makes this shift possible, but also the polysemous verb zukommt, which holds together two meanings that Hegel slips between: “belongs to” and “becomes.” Thus, we can conclude that the body not only belongs to the soul but becomes the soul, the latter’s ideality and being-for-self. Even in this one instance, we begin to see the justification of Hegel’s insistence that speculative philosophy must be read and re-read (and re-read some more) to grasp the movement of its content.66

66 Paradoxically, the need for semantic vagueness explains why, as Angelica Nuzzo claims, “Hegel’s dialectic holds rather that completeness itself requires vagueness on two counts. First, the process of progressive determination of the terms through which completeness is achieved takes place precisely by means of the vagueness of the
Bearing in mind our previous invocation of terms as marks or markings, I propose to understand Hegel’s conceptual terms (e.g. Geist, Idee, Natur, Ding, Teleologie) as abbreviations both of finite segments of conceptual movement and exposition as well as of the conceptual movement traced by his philosophy as a whole. In the Science of Logic, he claims conceptual terms “first serve as abbreviations [Abbreviaturen] through their universality [Allgemeinheit] (for what a host of particulars of outer existence and actions is embraced by a representation [Vorstellung]—battle, war, nation, ocean, or animal, for example—and in the representation of God or of love there is epitomized in the simplicity of such representing an infinite amount of representations, actions, states, etc.!)” (SL, 34-35).

In Hegel’s system, words like Wesen (essence) first appear to be (at least for new readers) abstract representations, as Allgemeinheiten, which is one dimension of a concept, or a one-sided representation of a concept. Such a representation appears when a concept is conceived solely as a universal, without noticing this “utterly simple determination” is actually also a particular concept (in relation to others) and a singular one (in relation to itself) (SL, 601). For examples of these abstractions, we might think of a general “class” of objects like “mammal” or an umbrella term like “musical instrument,” though conceived only as a pure generality and forgetting the objects that comprise them as well as other related classes or terms. Conceived in isolation from these other conceptual terms involved. […] Second, dialectic completeness requires indeterminateness and vagueness as constitutive elements or “moments” of the complete whole” (“Vagueness and Meaning Variance in Hegel’s Logic,” 77). Vagueness and indeterminacy of terms must be a constitutive part of Hegel’s philosophy if it is to be complete. It is the motor of Hegel’s system. “This process […] advances by way of introduction of terms that in turn, exhibit a new penumbra or vagueness of their own. As such, vagueness cannot be entirely eliminated because it is the motor of dialectical processes. It can only be transformed” (ibid.).

67 Hegel claims we are also familiar with these terms because they “serve for the more exact determination and discovery of objective relations” (SL, 35).
determinations, these are what Hegel calls “abstract universals.”

For Hegel, actually doing speculative philosophy requires moving beyond simply understanding conceptual terms as signifying abstract universals or generalities, these one-sided representations of concepts, in order to express their truth as markers of movement. This requires the reader to bring for themselves such abstract universals and “fixed thoughts into a fluid state” (*PG* § 33), where “through this movement the path by which the concept of knowledge is reached becomes likewise a necessary and complete process of becoming” (*PG* § 34). This idea of going beyond representation is one sense of the term “speculative” as Hegel uses it, but he also expresses it as a “raising” of representation to the fluid form of the concept or a “going through representation” and “converting itself to it” (*EL* § 1). Tracing the movement of Hegel’s philosophy requires personally undertaking this difficult transition and alteration of one’s mode of thinking: a going beyond representational thinking by first converting oneself to or adopting this mode of thought, that is, understanding how abstract universals are themselves related by the same activity of thought, by the same subject, and thus how their subjective relations enable the reader to traverse and pass through its representations as stages or moments of thinking, whereby it has reached the conceptual limit of the capacity of representation and upon recognizing the nature of that limit thereby raises its own form of thought—from representation to conceptual

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68 See *SL*, 602, 604. Abstract universality is a mistake, a one-sided view of concepts. This representation of abstraction, what we might call a mere generality, not only fails to specify the determinations of universality—how it stands in relation to itself (singularity) and other universals (particularity)—but also obscures such determinacy. “This universality with which the determinate moment is clothed is abstract universality” (*SL*, 608). Universals are for Hegel never merely abstract; to think so is to overlook how they are also necessarily determined as singualr and particulars. See Charlotte Baumann, “Adorno, Hegel and the concrete universal,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 1 (2011): 73-94.
thinking. This self-alteration or transformation is precisely the operation of aufheben.

Accordingly, Hegel can only express the “fluidity” of speculative thinking by introducing “fluidity” into his language use—making use of polysemy, vagueness, and phonic or semantic resonances between terms—where conceptual terms no longer represent stable forms of thought or fixed objects but instead participate in the ongoing presentation of the movement, self-development, and self-overcoming of these forms. Hegel enacts in practice an “alteration of the categories,” where “what has usually been called a “concept” has to be distinguished from the concept in the speculative sense” (EL § 9 Remark). The concept, Begriff, in the speculative sense is the movement of thought itself as it encounters its limit, its negative, and negates and overcomes that limit to establish itself paradoxically as both the self-same movement and a movement of becoming-other.

As to the relation between representational words or names and conceptual terms, the latter are derived from the former, so they are homonyms—words that are pronounced and

69 Hegel colorfully expresses this conversion from representation to conceptual thinking in terms of the ignition of a brushfire. See SL, 612.
70 In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel associates the bringing into fluidity of fixed determinations as a key feature of life and of individual, living beings. The living thing is at one an individual differentiated from other individuals and a unity of different parts or members held in a processual, fluid whole. “Life in the universal fluid medium, a passive separating-out of the shapes becomes, just by so doing, a movement of those shapes or becomes life as a process. The simple universal fluid medium is the in-itself, and the difference of the shapes is the other. But this fluid medium itself becomes the other through this difference; for now it is for the difference which exists in and for itself, and consequently is the ceaseless movement by which this passive medium is consumed: life as a living thing” (PG § 171). In a way, we could think of speculative language as “consuming” the passive medium of representational language by presenting language as a life or living whole; representational signs appear as the moments of the life of language abstracted from their role in the living process of language, which others itself and preserves itself at the same time. “It is the whole round of this activity that constitutes life: not what was expressed at the outset, the immediate continuity and compactness of its essence, nor the enduring form, the discrete moment existing for itself; nor the pure process of these; nor yet the simple taking-together of these moments. Life consists rather in being the self-developing whole which dissolves its development and in this movement simply preserves itself” (PG § 171).
spelled the same but are different in meaning.\(^{71}\) But they are not really different words as much as different ways of interpreting them, whether as signifying representational meanings or marking and relaying particular paths of thought. It is thus always possible to mistake one for the other. To become aware of the speculative character of Hegel’s text can only truly be done by reading it and attempting to trace the appearances of its terms like “mind” and “contract,” where after undoubtedly rereading perhaps many times the reader can grasp terms as themselves charting a movement of thought through the text. The raising of representational meaning to conceptual trajectory, while preserving the homonymy of terms between the two, transforms the representations signified by everyday language by linking them together as stages in the development of the process of conceptual or speculative thinking. The encounter with Hegel’s text not only teaches how to discover the inherent “speculative spirit” of language—like spirit, language’s restless becoming—but also how to think speculatively.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the reader of Hegel must undertake the effort to trace the conceptual movement he presents and avoid conceiving of conceptual terms as words representing meanings (Bedeutungen). For speculative philosophy to become actual, its movement must not only be presented and actually expressed in the language of his philosophical texts; it must be also be read and grasped. It must be actualized in the activities of both writer and reader, such that in the carrying out and exposure of speculative movement these two roles become difficult to disentangle.

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\(^{71}\) Though Angelica Nuzzo does not define conceptual terms in the way I have, she does note the homonymous relation between conceptual terms and representational signs. See “The Language of Hegel’s Speculative Philosophy,” 83-84. John McCumber also emphasizes the homonymy and homophony of terms, but between “representational names” and “names as such.” See The Company of Words, 238.
A good example of how Hegel simultaneously initiates and expresses the transformation of terms from signifying abstract meanings to abbreviated conceptual movements is an emplotematically, winding and fluid (non-)definition of a key term in his philosophy: *Begriff*.

We have already said how it is that restrictions are imposed on this multitude [of objects], that the concept, simply as thought, as a universal, is the immeasurable abbreviation of the multitudes of particular things which are vaguely present to intuition and representation; but also a concept is first in its own self *the* concept, and this is only one and is the substantial foundation; secondly, *a* concept is *determinate* and it is this determinativeness in it which appears as content: but the determinateness of the concept is a specific form of this substantial oneness, a moment of the form as totality, *of that same concept* which is the foundation of the specific concepts. This concept is not sensuously intuited or represented; it is solely an object, a product and content of thinking, and is the absolute, self-subsistent matter [*Sache*], the logos, the reason of that which is, the truth of what we call things (*SL*, 39).

Unpacking and tracing the movement *Begriff* marks, both as a particular part of and as the whole movement, would entail re-reading and re-expositing the whole of Hegel’s philosophy.

To trace and link the appearances of a term like “essence” (*Wesen*) in relation to other terms in Hegel’s text is also to trace and express the movement of conceptual thought, which is precisely the goal of Hegel’s philosophy. If we take this term to possess a fixed, definitional meaning (e.g. “The absolute is the *essence*,” *EL* § 112 Remark), then Hegel’s text will appear hopelessly convoluted, for Hegel takes this term to initially mean one thing and then, by unpacking the nature of what that meaning entails, reveals a new, more complex meaning to the term. Thus, he further determines its initially abstract meaning—whether as “being as *shining* within itself” (*EL* § 112) or “the truth of *being*” (*SL*, 389)\(^72\)—by specifying in propositions what these “definitions” entail and by relating “essence” to other terms he has either already

\(^72\) Hegel’s sentence, “Essence is the truth of *being*,” is actually a speculative proposition that must be read speculatively and explicated to show how the concept (*Begriff*) is the truth of essence, and so on. We turn to Hegel’s account of speculative propositions in the next section.
introduced or that he introduces to mark a new determination and stage of the concept of essence. By this process, the concept of essence is explicated up to the point where Hegel shows it to consist of the same determinations and movement as its opposite, appearance. He then makes the unity between essence and appearance explicit by generating a new conceptual term to mark a new concept or stage of conceptual development. By explicating the concept of essence, the term “essence” is shown to be an abbreviation marking (a segment of) the movement of conceptual thinking, and to grasp Hegel’s philosophy, we trace and understand each of Hegel’s conceptual terms this way. The proximate goal is to uproot the assumption that “essence” merely signifies a meaning, and this can only be done by actually tracing its emergence, explication, and preservation (i.e. its expression) in Hegel’s texts.

We can see the same process at work in Hegel’s use of Geist. We have struggled to translate this term because there is no clear English equivalent since Hegel uses the term not to

73 In this case, the concept of actuality is produced. “The essential relation, in this identity of appearance with the inner or with essence, has determined itself into actuality” (SL, 528). Hegel’s tracing of the development of the concept of essence supplies an implicit rejection of foundationalism, for he shows how the concept of an essential relation between essence and appearance, foundation and founded, entails that “essence consists simply and solely in being that which manifests itself” (ibid.). For an account of Hegel’s anti-foundationalism, particularly as it concerns his conception of essence, see Stephen Houlgate, “Hegel’s Critique of Foundationalism in the ‘Doctrine of Essence,’” Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 44 (1999): 25-45. I largely agree with Houlgate’s argument, particularly the main thrust of it: “What I wish to suggest in this essay is that this foundationalist interpretation of Hegel is in fact deeply mistaken” (26). I would add that Hegel’s criticisms of foundationalism are apparent also in his own dynamic use of terminology, including Wesen, as well as his rejection in the Phenomenology of Spirit of founding philosophy on basic principles, Grundsätze.

74 One might downplay the uniqueness of Hegel’s idea of conceptual terms as abbreviations of movement by pointing out that all philosophers and indeed most writers use terms in similar ways—not to signify discrete meanings, but to abbreviate movements of thought or processes of discursive activity. Hegel’s use of conceptual terms would then appear only marginally different from that of other philosophers; speculative language would appear to be at work in nearly all philosophical works. Hegel just makes this speculative use of terms explicit. But this is really no objection to Hegel and serves rather to highlight the great importance of his view of language, for these uses of terms as abbreviations attest to the speculative nature of language itself, a more fundamental, living conception of language upon which the idea of language as a collection of abstract, discrete signs rests. What Hegel contributes further is the idea of conceptual terms marking particular segments of one and the same process of thought, a process where thinking unfolds itself into and through a system of developing forms.
signify a discrete meaning but to mark an extensive trajectory of conceptual thought (the entire Philosophy of Mind traces this trajectory). The words “mind” and “spirit” share some senses with Geist, but Hegel traverses all these senses using the same term, uniting a conceptual trajectory that is marked by this term. So in this dissertation, we have sacrificed the unity of the term as it appears in Hegel by translating it sometimes as “mind” when it marks the development of an individual subject abstracted from relation to others and “spirit” when it marks the process of a social grouping coming to be free. But these are simply stages in the self-same and self-differing movement of the concept of Geist. This German term links in process a host of conceptual terms, which themselves mark shorter segments of the movement of Geist that unfold one into the other: “soul” (Seele), “consciousness” (Bewusstsein), “self-consciousness” (Selbstbewusstsein), “reason” (Vernunft), “intelligence” (Intelligenz), “person” (Person), “family” (Familie), “world history” (Weltgeschichte), “philosophy” (Philosophie), etc. But through all these stages, it is Geist who moves, taking on new forms, and then overcoming these forms as it strives to become free. Each particular term like “reason” marks at once the whole movement of Geist and a particular part of the whole, showing how one segment of conceptual movement unfolds into another stage marked by a new term. Viewed from the perspective of the whole movement of Hegel’s system, these particular movements are continuous with each other, but if viewed only as a particular trajectory of thought, e.g. marked by the term “reason,” each stage appears discontinuous with the others. The parts of the whole movement are thus distinguished by the introduction of new conceptual terms, each of which mark a double movement: a process of developing the movement of thought as a whole as well as a self-differentiating movement into the other or outside of thought. In general, Geist marks a self-differentiating unrest, and this is
what produces (self-)movement out of its own relation to self. “For this simple thinking is the self-moving and self-differentiating thought, it is its own inwardness, it is the pure concept. Thus common understanding, too, is a becoming” (*PG § 55*). Freedom or a “becoming-free” is the implicit nature of *Geist*, which is progressively demonstrated and enacted through the speculative exposition of terms and propositions.

We can therefore agree with Jacques Derrida’s assessment of Hegel’s system when he claims,

> What a word properly means (to say) cannot be known by referring back to some would-be primitivity or authentic primordiality. This did not prevent him from playing with dictionaries in a productive and genetic, verily poetic, way. That the same word or two words of analogous root can have two conceptually different, verily opposite, significations proves that a word is never a concept.\(^\text{75}\)

Put differently, a word marks a conceptual trajectory, not a meaning. They do not signify meanings but rather mark a *terminus* or an internal limit that thinking must encounter, struggle with, overcome, and that speculative philosophy must trace and express in its language.\(^\text{76}\) Such an inseparable explication of concepts and tracing of terms is “the speculative *in act*” (*PG § 65*).

The initial way concepts are explicated and determined is their self-division into judgments, which are expressed in propositional form. We will see in the following section (4.4)


\(^{76}\) The finitude (of parts) within the infinite, unfolding, and self-referential *Begriff* is also indicated by Hegel’s use of the term “moment” to capture the nature of a concept like being, which in being overcome in the concept of essence becomes a “moment” in the conceptual trajectory of essence. Though, what complicates this picture somewhat is Hegel’s use of *Begriff* to indicate both a particular part of the movement of speculative thought (the final third of Hegel’s logic) as well as the entire trajectory of the logic. Hence, a becoming-other or traversal of conceptual limits by speculative thinking can be understood both as a preservation of conceptual moments or previous stages *within* the concept as well as a freeing of those moments as particular concepts *distinct from* the concept as a whole. “The progression of the concept is no longer either passing-over or shining into another, but *development*; for the [moments] that are distinguished are immediately posited at the same time as identical with one another and with the whole, and [each] determinacy is as a free being of the whole concept” (*EL § 161*).
how for Hegel propositions, like conceptual terms, must be understood differently, which entails a new kind of speculative reading that overcomes the presupposition of a fixed separation in the proposition between subject and predicate. Then, in 4.5, we discuss Hegel’s arguments for why the conceptual content of judgments must be explicature further into syllogisms, which are expressed by Hegel in the form of speculative “expositions” (Auslegungen) and “presentations” (Darstellungen).

4.4 Speculative Propositions: The Rhythm of Plastic Reading

Conceptual terms alone or in isolation are for Hegel only implicitly dialectical; they merely abbreviate and imply the speculative movement of philosophical thinking. This is why they can be mistaken for mere representational names (Namen), which we saw in Part I is the product of the individual intelligence. Indeed, Hegel assumes this is how readers will initially encounter and understand terms like “concept,” “mind,” and “philosophy.”

In his interpretation, John McCumber distinguishes “representational names” and “empty names” as two different media operative in Hegel’s system. He argues that (1) “both types of expression are necessary;” (2) “the inadequacies of each cannot be found in the other;” and (3) “the two types of expression can be brought together in philosophical expression so that the disadvantages of each are canceled out and the advantages preserved” (The Company of Words, 241). Representational words signify historically-mediated meanings, and the content of empty names have been erased by the intelligence, such that they can serve as a medium for expressing the movement of pure thought in Hegel’s system. McCumber argues these two media together enable Hegel to satisfy both the demands of a complete systematic philosophy and the need to link his philosophy to its social and historical roots in the German language. Yet McCumber’s account omits the crucial role played by Hegel’s readers, by the process of reading comprehension necessary to trace the unfolding of Hegel’s speculative philosophy. The two media that McCumber claims are at work in Hegel’s philosophy are not different in themselves—they are all only words—and Hegel does not indicate when one word should be taken as an empty name as opposed to a representational one and vice versa. The problem as Hegel often expresses it is to “raise” the form of representation to that of the concept, and this requires not the creation of a new “medium,” but transforming our approach to reading his text. Hegel indicates that we as readers need to transform our habitual way of understanding the terms he uses, for the terms of his system only appear differently by being grasped differently by the reader. The reader must transform not only their understanding of terms, from an everyday representational understanding to a conceptual one, but themselves and their mode of thinking to grasp the movement of the concept. This self-transformative aspect of reading and Hegel’s emphasis on becoming “plastic” thinkers able to transform our mode of thought is overlooked by McCumber. This transformation undergone by the reader unites not two different media, but rather the reader with themselves through their
with their ordinary meaning and usage, which as we saw in Part II are determined through their social use to solve problems. We learn what terms mean from our everyday experiences and communications with others, however limited and partial those representational meanings might be. We might initially think “concept” signifies an abstract, subjective representation, for instance. Yet such representational meanings must be raised to the form of the concept by explicating the movement conceptual terms mark in abbreviated form, for each term marks a particular concept’s trajectory and a particular segment of the concept’s movement beyond itself, a becoming-different in becoming itself. The first stage of a concept’s explication is its self-division into a judgment, which takes propositional form. Therefore, tracing this speculative passage through concepts—that is, enacting the speculative—requires the aufheben of the representational form not only of terms but of propositions as well.\textsuperscript{78}

In this section, we analyze Hegel’s idea of “speculative propositions” (spekulative Sätze), arguing this term indicates not a different kind of proposition or sentence but a different way of reading and understanding propositional content.\textsuperscript{79} Specifically, understanding Hegel’s propositions requires they be read speculatively and not representationally. This sort of reading requires abandoning the traditional subject/predicate logic of the proposition—which separates

\textsuperscript{78} The substantive sense of “speculative” is explained by Hegel in \textit{EL} § 82. On this word, see Nancy, \textit{The Speculative Remark}, ch. 5. Of course, as with terms, there is necessarily the potential to understand sentences in Hegel as representational instead of speculatively. Hence, below we stress the importance of the reader in interpreting Hegel’s claim speculatively instead of representationally.

\textsuperscript{79} In this way, I follow from Malabou’s interpretation in \textit{The Future of Hegel} (167-183) and Vernon’s reading in \textit{Hegel’s Philosophy of Language} (130-133), both of whom propose a kind of speculative hermeneutics needed to grasp Hegel’s philosophy. For the importance of the reader to actualize speculative philosophy, see note 68.
the meaning of the subject from the meaning of the predicate—such that the reader can grasp the rhythmic movement of a concept expressed by a proposition.\footnote{In the \textit{Science of Logic}, Hegel methodically shows how the judgement develops into the syllogism, but we cannot go into his detailed analysis here. See \textit{SL}, 623-663. What is most important for considering the role of language in expressing judgements is grasping how the subject and predicate of propositions are not fixed and opposed signs. Read speculatively, both subject and predicate signify a conceptual movement that determines both terms of the judgement, even though those terms are presented in the judgement as distinct and separate from each other. “The judgement is the self-diremption of the concept; \textit{this unity} is, therefore, the ground from which the consideration of the judgement in accordance with its true \textit{objectivity} begins. It is thus the \textit{original division} of what is originally one; thus the word \textit{Urteil} refers to what judgement is in and for itself” (\textit{SL}, 625). The judgement thus presents conceptual movement in propositional form as a self-differentiating \textit{process} instead of merely positing the contingent attachment of subject and predicate. “Judgement” marks the process of judging, the activity of dividing the process of conceptual thought into its particular moments, instead of a representing of two separate terms conjoined. This is key for understanding how to read propositions speculatively and avoid treating them as fixed and immobile representations. The \textit{Science of Logic} goes into far greater detail on the specific nature of conceptual movements that particular judgements present.} Reading propositions speculatively means (1) grasping how the subject of a proposition is linked essentially with its predicate, such that the proposition expresses the \textit{movement} of the subject becoming determined in the predicate and the predicate becoming the determinate content of the subject; and (2) tracing how propositions interrelate in the whole of Hegel’s systematic philosophy. Speculative propositions thus express the movement of conceptual thinking determining itself into propositional form and eventually into a philosophical system. To grasp this movement of both thought and language, the reader must remain receptive to their own transformation and the transformation of their subjectivity by their encounter with the text, becoming, in Hegel’s terms, \textit{plastic (plastisch)}.\footnote{See \textit{PG} § 64; \textit{SL}, 40.}

To come to terms with Hegel’s idea of a speculative proposition, we must first distinguish it from how empirical propositions or propositions with empirical content are understood. Hegel acknowledges that we are first exposed to propositions and habituated to understand them as empirical subjects (e.g. “this oak tree”) attached through the copula to
empirical predicates (e.g. “is very colorful and beautiful”). This mode of understanding propositional content Hegel calls “material thinking [materielles Denken],” which is “a random consciousness [zufälliges Bewußtsein] that is sunk only into material stuff, and therefore is sour at lifting itself clear of such matter to be with itself alone” (PG § 58, modified). Hegel does not claim there is anything inherently incorrect about this mode of thought, but only that it is insufficient when it comes to understanding propositions in speculative philosophical texts, particularly his own. He anticipates that readers will initially be struck by the fact that the “philosophical propositions” of his texts do not contain sensuous or empirical content, but rather link abstract, conceptual terms to abstract predicates.

The philosophical proposition [philosophische Satz], since it is a proposition, leads one to believe that the usual [gewöhnlichen] subject-predicate relation obtains, as well as the usual attitude [gewöhnlichen Verhaltens] of knowing. But the philosophical content destroys this attitude and this opinion. We learn by experience that we meant something other than we meant to mean; and this correction of our meaning compels our knowing to go back to the proposition and understand it in some other way (PG § 63).

We are first jolted out of our habitual way of understanding propositions simply by encountering the abstract content of his propositions (e.g. “In being-for-self, qualitative being finds its consummation; it is infinite being” (SL, 157)). Their abstract content indicates we need to go back and reread Hegel’s propositions differently.\(^2\)

Hegel provides several examples of speculative propositions or sentences (Sätze) meant to demonstrate an important difference between common ways of understanding propositions

\(^2\) Hegel repeatedly indicates the need to reread and practice reading philosophical texts. On this point, see Nancy, The Speculative Remark, chs. 1 and 2; Malabou in The Future of Hegel (176-183). This practice of rereading Hegel not only means that we follow and grasp the movement of Hegel’s text better than before, but more importantly, as Malabou and Vernon contend, it transforms us into plastic readers and thinkers. See Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 131-133.
and the speculative way. The term *Spekulative Sätze* does not so much designate different kinds of propositions as different ways of understanding (or reading) them, and this Hegelian way of interpreting propositions has rightly garnered significant attention. To capture the difference between a speculative and a non-speculative reading of propositions, Jean Hyppolite differentiates between an “empirical” and speculative proposition; Catherine Malabou between “predicative” and speculative readings of propositions; Jim Vernon between “ordinary” and speculative readings; Daniel Cook between “the ordinary, static ‘either-or’ judgements of understanding” and speculative propositions; Chong-Fuk Lau between the “ordinary” form of propositions and the “speculative use of proposition;” and Jeffrey Reid distinguishes “the judgments and propositions of Science, that is, scientific discourse, from the arbitrary personal or ‘subjective’ form of judgment.” These formulations all attempt to capture a need, according to Hegel, for readers of philosophy to grasp the content of propositions and the form of subject/predicate relations in a significantly different way.

Take Hegel’s most explicit and developed example of a speculative proposition: “God is being” (*PG* § 62).

Immediately, we are struck by the abstract nature of subject and predicate, and to grasp the philosophical import of this proposition, the reader must avoid, in addition to “material

83 Of course, the fact that propositions have abstract content can suggest they should be read speculatively, but this is no guarantor of their speculative nature. Hence, there is always the possibility of mistaking speculative propositions for merely representational claims and vice versa. A key indicator of the need to read propositions speculatively is when they appear in a speculative, philosophical system like Hegel’s.

thinking,” what Hegel calls an argumentative or critical thinking attitude [räsonierenden Verhalten] “to which conceptual [begreifende] thinking is opposed” (PG § 59). Räsonierenden Verhalten means for Hegel an attitude and behavior adopted by interlocutors in a debate, where each party attempts to criticize and undermine the claims and arguments made by others. Perhaps we could see this attitude embodied by many students and practitioners of critical thinking in universities and everyday argumentation (as long as we keep in mind that Hegel characterizes such a disposition as inclining one more to stake out and defend a particular position in a debate instead of deciding to develop and link those argumentative, fixed positions within a speculative philosophy).  

Adopting this argumentative attitude [Verhalten] towards a philosophical text leads readers, according to Hegel, to engage a kind of vain, abstract form of thinking, which leads them to “adopt a negative attitude towards the content [of the proposition] it apprehends; it knows how to refute [the proposition’s content] and destroy it. […] Argumentation is reflection into the empty ‘I’, the vanity of its own knowing” (PG § 59). In other words, if this disposition is adopted consciously or unconsciously by the reader, they presume that regardless of the determinate content of the proposition they can refute it with their own countervailing reasons.

85 First, it is interesting to note that Hegel criticizes here a Verhalten, a behavior, attitude, or disposition when debating [räsonierenden]. Verhalten entails an inextricable mix of subjective attitude and objective manner of behaving towards something. We should keep this in mind when we turn to speculative (readings of) propositions, for they too beckon the reader to adopt a certain patient, but persistence disposition towards the text—which we could call a speculative attitude. Second, exactly who Hegel is targeting here is unclear, though it is apparent that this argumentative, critical disposition is not that of Kant in his Kritiken. Rather, he seems to be criticizing the disposition of people participating in everyday, argumentative dialogue and perhaps members of the Prussian empiricist school of Popularphilosophie following primarily John Locke. See Beiser, The Fate of Reason, ch. 6. While some may identify such debates as philosophical, Hegel clearly disagrees since he often conflates philosophy with speculative philosophy. On the importance of deciding to exert the effort to do speculative philosophy, see PG § 58; Nancy, Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative, 54, 73-75.
Hegel is targeting those of his readers who would forgo understanding the content of his propositions by refusing to adopt an open and receptive style of reading, by adopting a dismissive attitude towards the propositions of his system that might challenge their beliefs, deciding to refute them immediately instead of trace where they lead. For such argumentative readers, a proposition like “God is being” expresses only an abstract relation that they can refute with different, equally abstract propositions and arguments. From this perspective, according to Hegel, all propositional content given by the text appears as a threat to the reader’s own beliefs and so must be refuted or dismissed to shore up those beliefs. Reading Hegel’s text becomes an argumentative battle to be won by the reader against the propositions of his text instead of an encounter that opens their own subjectivity to transformation.

Hegel suggests this attitude often appears because of a reluctance, conscious or not, to the new.

A reception of this kind is usually the first reaction on the part of knowing to something unfamiliar; it resists it in order to save its own freedom and its own insight, its own authority, from the alien authority (for this is the guise in which what is newly encountered first appears), and to get rid of the appearance that something has been learned and of the sort of shame this is supposed to involve (PG § 57).

The problem with this attitude is not the desire to provide rejoinders and rebuttals to philosophical propositions one might disagree with. Often contentious philosophical debate and discourse is for Hegel an irreducibly central part of doing philosophy and should not be discounted. On the contrary, it is the attitude of a reader that the philosophical text is an “alien

86 Hegel’s own philosophical system is peppered with allusions and criticisms of his peers, so he is certainly not opposed to such criticisms, only the attitude that approaches other philosophical propositions as a threat to one’s own position and a difference to be quashed. See e.g. the three “positions of thought” he criticizes in the opening pages of the Encyclopedia Logic (§§19-78) or his veiled criticisms of contemporaries J. F. Fries, F. Schlegel, and K. W. F. Solger in the Philosophy of Right Preface and § 140 Remark.
authority,” which must be refuted, that bars a speculative reading of it. In approaching the text in
such an argumentative or hostile way, the reader closes themselves off from learning anything
new, from “looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it,” instead electing to reject any
and all propositional content that disrupts or goes against their already held views (PG § 32).
This is why Hegel claims this attitude embodies a “vanity” [Eitelkeit] of the I. To read
speculatively means first of all to approach a text not as an adversary or threat, but as an
opportunity to trace and unpack its propositions as speculative movements in themselves, a site
of personal education and subject (re)formation to which the reader must remain open.

For example, taking this argumentative stance, one might respond, “I believe God falls
outside the realm of being, of determinate existence, so the proposition ‘God is being’ is either
obviously false or a confused belief. Regardless, it means nothing to me. It tells me nothing
about God or the concept of being, for I decide what propositions mean, what their significance
is, and how I am to take them. I thus reject this proposition entirely as having anything to
contribute to my view of the world.”87 The reader negates all content in its entirety but does not
engage the negation of their own limited position. They only make a subjective decision as to
what it means for them and how best to strike it down.

However, all negation is for Hegel determinate negation, meaning that something or
other is negated in this conceptual crossing out. Negation is never general nor complete but
specific to the something or particular content that is canceled. It is like crossing through God is

87 Though he does not adopt the argumentative stance Hegel criticizes, Jean-Luc Marion attempts to demonstrate
precisely how God is not subsumed within the category of being. See Marion, God Without Being, trans. Thomas
being; we can still see the specific claim negated. Readers who adopt an argumentative [räsonierenden] attitude for Hegel overlook that “it is the determinate negative [das bestimmte Negative] that comes from this movement [Bewegung] [of the proposition] and with it also a positive content” (PG § 59, modified). When the reader negates the content of the proposition by asserting “God is being” or “God is not being” or “God does not exist” or “God has no existence” or “No god exists,” there is still positive content to these propositions that must still be exposed and comprehended. But instead of then taking up this positive content and tracing how it relates to other propositions as Hegel himself does, argumentative readers, according to Hegel, overlook the positive result of negating a proposition, electing to highlight only the negating act and the canceling of its content such that their already held beliefs can be protected from disturbance or dispute.

This vanity, however, expresses not only the vanity of this content, but also the futility of this insight itself; for this insight is the negative that fails to see the positive within itself. Because this reflection does not get its very negativity as its content, it is never at the heart of the matter, but always beyond it. For this reason it imagines that by establishing the void it is always ahead of any insight rich in content (PG § 59).

Precisely what is struck down or out is elided by this mode of consciousness, sunk into the void that is the ego of the reader, without them recognizing that their negation of the propositional

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88 This typography of crossing through was first suggested by Martin Heidegger, particularly to distinguish being from specific beings, Sein and Seiende. For Heidegger, it indicates the word “under erasure” as it is inadequate but necessary to indicate the nature of Sein. See Heidegger, The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude, trans. William McNeill and Nicolas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Derrida and then Marion use this typography to further effect, even as grounds for criticizing Heidegger, but my intention is simply to point out that it can work equally to signify Hegel’s “concept” or operation of determinate negation. In fact, it serves to signify the preservative aspect of Aufheben in Hegel’s philosophy, though how this relates to Heidegger’s, Derrida’s, and Marion’s usage of strikethroughs is a difficult question we cannot examine here.
content has, like the proposition itself, positive content they have not yet grasped.\footnote{It is unclear who precisely Hegel is charging with adopting this argumentative attitude—perhaps some of his academic colleagues, though he gives very few clues—and he verges on making a straw man argument that implicates few of his readers, if any. Does he believe some of his readers would be so averse to his claims that they would simply dismiss them entirely? It seems uncharitable to think so, but perhaps he has someone specific in mind. Regardless, he discusses the problems of this “argumentative attitude” not to reject argumentation as such—rather, argumentation forms one mode of consciousness among others in his system—but mainly to highlight the importance of the subjective disposition of his readers and how important it is for them to remain open and receptive (not hostile and “argumentative”) to tracing the speculative movement of propositions in his text. The need for readers of Hegel to remain open and receptive to being transformed through their engagement with his text is highlighted by Catherine Malabou in The Future of Hegel, 176-180.} Remaining receptive to being transformed by the text is paramount to read speculatively, as Hegel maintains that “a plastic discourse demands, too, a plastic receptivity and understanding on the part of the listener” \cite{SL, 40}.

Furthermore, according to Hegel, the reader must also avoid adopting an analogous attitude wherein the subject and predicate of the proposition are conceived and treated in isolation, as strictly separate and in possession of atomistic meanings. In this case, “the self is a subject [i.e. Gott] to which the content is related as accident and predicate. This subject constitutes the basis to which the content is attached, and upon which the movement [of reading] runs back and forth” \cite{PG § 60}. The proposition would then express an external or inessential relation between an essential subject and its accidental predicate. As with an empirical proposition, the predicate would be seen as contingently linked with a subject understood as the former’s essential basis. Treating S and P as fundamentally separate and isolatable terms entails that the proposition indicates nothing about the essential nature of subject, predicate, or their relation, nor how they are mutually determined in the judgement.\footnote{Hegel shows in the judgement chapter of the Science of Logic how various forms of judgement mutually determine the contents of subject, predicate, and copula. For a good exposition of this “negative judgment” as examined in the Science of Logic, see Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 88-90. I depart from Vernon’s reading insofar as he categorizes the terms occupying the subject and predicate positions as empty, memorized names. By traversing in Part II the problematic appearances of language in the Philosophy of Right, I have tried} This treatment not only
blocks an understanding of how subject and predicate are mutually and essentially determined in
the proposition, but also prevents the reading subject from undergoing a self-transformation
through the very act of reading and interpreting the proposition.

To grasp the proposition “God is being” speculatively, it must be approached in a
different way. The reader—to trace their own process of thinking through the proposition—must
first recognize that within Hegel’s speculative philosophical text this proposition expresses not a
fixed relation between subject and predicate, but rather a process of uniting subject and predicate
essentially. Its content is not irrelevant to the operation of the reader, nor is the predicate
accidentally related to the subject. In general, this kind of interpretation is speculative insofar as
speculative (readings of) propositions express movements within the proposition itself, which are
inseparable from the interpretative activity of the reader. A more static reading would simply

to show that conceptual terms are laden with socio-historical meanings based on the way they are used to solve
specific problems for objective Geist. Meanings accumulate and fade through ongoing social usage, based on the
utility of certain words, phrases, and claims to tackle specific problems of social formation, recognition, and
cohesion. Social uses partially (though not fully) determine a term’s philosophical meaning insofar as these uses
lay an initial ground for interpreting philosophical propositions; there must be an initial foundation upon which
one begins to read philosophically. In my view, it is a question of transforming and raising terminological
meanings through their role in a system of philosophical propositions, not of simply pumping significance into a
bevy of empty names duly positioned in propositions and judgments. See 4.3 above. Accordingly, I also depart
here from John McCumber’s contention that conceptual terms like Sein and Wesen are in Hegel’s usage simply
homonyms of ordinary language terms. See McCumber, The Company of Words, 215-249. Hegel does not simply
relate and saturate empty, meaningless terms that sound or look the same as terms with social import, as if Geist
was able to simply ignore or erase for itself the socio-historical roots of language (which is what the subjective
intelligence from Part I gains self-satisfaction from doing). I can find no evidence in EPG §§ 444 and 462
Additions of what McCumber contends (The Company of Words, 232) is a fundamental conceptual difference
between historically laden “representational names” and empty “names as such.” Also, McCumber fails to
trace how the subjective intelligence is more fully determined, enriched, and expanded into the forms of
objective spirit and its uses of language traced in the Philosophy of Right and Part II above. He winds up
subsuming the view of language held by the subjective intelligence (Part I) onto a very different form of mind
and understanding of language (Part III), which leads to some unsupported claims and interpretative gymnastics.
My view keeps them distinguished but attempts to show how the latter develops out of the former, from
subjective intelligence into objective, communal spirit into absolute Geist. In this way, we can better understand
the philosophical nature of speculative propositions and how these propositions demonstrate philosophical
thinking itself: its embodiment or Dasein in the active transformation of terms within a developing philosophical
system, reading them from the perspective of absolute Geist who is necessarily steeped in socio-historical
context.
attribute being to God as one of God’s qualities or would understand “being” as a broad, umbrella term under which God can be subsumed. But actually expressing a proposition’s inner movements requires the reader to explicate and expose them, to write out and inscribe these movements, which in the proposition remain implicit and hidden. It requires explicitly reconstituting and retracing the movements only implied by the proposition. Yet such a speculative interpretation of “God is being” would require situating it within the developing whole of Hegel’s philosophy and explicating it on those terms—within the context of his propositions concerning the nature of being and God—which we cannot do here. Speculative reading provokes or invites the reader to further explicate the judgment this proposition expresses within its systematic context, which would already amount to producing a speculative exposition, which we return to in 4.5.

Let us explain another example that does not involve Hegel’s discussion of religion:

“Perception takes [nimmt] what is present to it as a universal” (PG § 111). “Perception” (Wahrnehmung) is first introduced as the outcome of the opening stage of consciousness, sense-certainty, which situates it within Hegel’s system, specifically the Phenomenology of Spirit. Sense-certainty as an immediate but abstract mode of consciousness, of knowing, showed that the knower, the “I”, and what it purportedly knows, the “This”, are both generalities. Sense-certainty is a kind of knowing that functions by pointing out or pointing to—I know this, here and now—and it presumed the most immediate pointing out of something would constitute the

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91 I interpret Hegel’s repeated emphasis on philosophical “exposition” as an enjoinder to his readers to compose commentaries and explications of his philosophical system that make explicit its dialectical movements. This is part and parcel of doing speculative philosophy. In short, I think Hegel anticipates the discourse broadly comprising “Hegel Studies” wherein his words are criticized, extended, explained, or transformed. This dissertation itself slots within that discourse.
richest and most comprehensive knowledge of it. But everything it points to is a “this” and everyone who points is an “I,” so its knowledge of both itself and its object are hopelessly abstract. Both knower and known turn out not to be particular I’s or particular “this-es”, each with their concrete richness, but abstract “universals” that the act of pointing reveals is not a rich knowledge of objects, but a knowledge of extreme abstractions. Even I’s can become “this-es” if they become the object of someone else’s pointing. Perception is the mode of knowing that recognizes that the knower encounters everything as a universal, not as particular things, and understands itself as a universal I. “Just as universality is its principle in general, the immediately self-differentiating moments within perception are universal: ‘I’ is a universal and the object is a universal” (PG § 111). Reading the sentence from subject to predicate, we find the essence of perception in its “taking” what it encounters as universal.

But the essence of perception, universality, not only characterizes the object of knowledge and its own subjectivity, but also the very process of taking objects as universal. Perception is the process of perceiving objects as universals, which distinguishes two moments in its knowing: “one being the movement of pointing-out or the act of perceiving, the other being the same movement as a simple event or the object perceived” (PG § 111). Hegel goes on, “In essence the object is the same as the movement: the movement is the unfolding and differentiation of the two moments, and the object is the apprehended togetherness of the moments” (PG § 111). Because the knower conceives of itself as a universal I, their act of perceiving must itself be universal. In other words, the very act of perceiving becomes an object of knowledge since the proposition stated that whatever perception encounters, it takes as a universal. Indeed, this applies to its own perceptive act, not merely to something out in the
world. Perceiving is itself a universal; the universal object of knowledge is both the act of perception and the thing perceived. A speculative reading of this proposition thus shows that the predicate term “universal” actually characterizes the verb of the sentence—the perceptive “taking” (*nehmen*) is universal—and not merely a predicative term over and against the subject “perception.” To be sure, it is tempting to follow this explanatory path as Hegel continues to do, to unfold speculatively these sentences we have made in our explication of the first proposition. But we must stop short at this brief explication.

Let us take a final example: “The truth of *being is essence*” (*SL*, 389). Hegel reminds us, as he stated earlier in the *Science of Logic*, “Being is the immediate” (*SL*, 389) and lacks “any further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself” (*SL*, 82). Throughout the Doctrine of Being in the *Logic*, Hegel traces the significance of this determination of being as immediate, disclosing how the knowledge of the being of any object—what an object is—actually entails grasping what its essence is.

Since knowing has for its goal knowledge of the true, knowledge of what being is *in and for itself*, it does not stop at the immediate and its determinations, but penetrates it on the supposition that at the back of this being there is something else, something other than being itself, that this background constitutes the truth of being (*SL*, 389).

If we want to know what an object truly *is*, we need to disclose its essential nature, the ontological “background” of its immediate existence. Our discovery of an object’s essence is mediated by our delving into its immediate existence and showing what that existence is grounded upon. Paradoxically, thought’s penetration into an object’s immediate existence is also, as Hegel points out, the penetration into thought’s own background and what thinking presupposes in the immediate knowledge of an object. Thought presupposes that an object has an essence and that that essence is the truth of the object’s being.
This knowledge is a mediated knowing for it is not found immediately with and in essence, but starts from an other, from being, and has a preliminary path to tread, that of going beyond being or rather of penetrating into it. Not until knowing *inwardizes, recollects* itself out of immediate being, does it through this mediation find essence (*SL*, 389).

While we might be tempted to believe that disclosing how the being of an object is grounded on its essence is merely a product of the reader’s interpretive activity, Hegel points out that the concept of being itself leads us to the concept of essence. It is not merely that the reader makes this move from being to essence and imposes it upon these concepts. On the contrary, being itself *becomes* essence, for these terms, if we remember from the previous section, do not signify fixed meanings but rather mark trajectories of thought.

When this movement is pictured as the path of knowing, then this beginning with being, and the development that sublates it, reaching essence as a mediated result, appears to be an activity of knowing external to being and irrelevant to being’s own nature. But this path is the movement of being itself. It was seen that being inwardizes itself through its own nature, and through this movement into itself becomes essence (*SL*, 389).

Accordingly, a speculative reading of “The truth of *being is essence*” provides not an external or merely subjective interpretation of this proposition. It traces, exposes, and then inscribes (in the form of a speculative exposition) how the terms of “being” and “essence” mutually implicate each other in their conceptual trajectories. Hegel traces and explicates this trajectory of being into essence in the *Science of Logic*, but his point is that the reader themselves must also take it upon themselves to re-expose and re-inscribe this trajectory if this encounter with the text is to transform their own mode of thinking from relating and arguing over isolated, fixed representations to exposing the speculative movement of the concept. Hegel’s goal is to provide a philosophical text that can act as a site of self-transformation for his readers who undertake the
One might object to Hegel that recognizing how and when propositions should be read speculatively is in principle underdetermined and unknowable—propositions by themselves fail to indicate how they must be read or understood. This is true enough, for philosophical propositions are propositions. There is no clear indication that a sentence should be read speculatively and not critically, argumentatively, or as an expression of personal, subjective belief. One could understand any given proposition in multiple ways depending on the context of its utterance, for instance, whether someone hears "God is being" in a Sunday liturgy, a missionary's sermons, or reads it in Spinoza's *Ethics*. One might reasonably ask why this claim should not be taken instead as a provocation to an atheist, a church slogan, or an empty tautology.

To forestall such an objection, Hegel includes prefaces and introductions explaining how his speculative propositions should be approached by the reader. As we have seen so far in Part III, Hegel's often extensive prefaces and introductions provide helpful suggestions and recommendations for how to approach his philosophy and how best to understand his terminology and the propositions in which they appear. Yet he also claims these preliminary suggestions and claims are not actually part of his speculative philosophy; they merely try to orient the reader and prepare them to think speculatively.

For whatever might appropriately be said about philosophy in a preface—say a historical *statement* [Angabe] of the main drift and the point of view, the general content and

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92 This conception of speculative reading goes a long way to explaining Hegel's insistence that his system and the *Encyclopedia* as a whole should be taken as an educational resource, an abbreviated form of the trajectory of conceptual thought that must be explicated and elaborated by readers themselves. See the three prefaces to the *Encyclopedia Logic* for his acknowledgement of the shortcomings of his encyclopedic presentation and the pivotal role of the reader.
results, a string of random assertions and assurances about truth—none of this can be accepted as the way in which to present [darzustellen] philosophical truth (PG § 1).

In these preliminary sections, he contrasts speculative philosophy with a variety of different modes of thinking: argumentative thinking (PG §§ 59-60); mathematical or logical formalism (PG §§ 42-46); “ordinary consciousness [gemeines Bewusstsein]” (EL § 4); the empirical sciences (EL §§ 7-9); representational thinking (EL § 80, preface to the 1st edition); critical philosophy (EL § 10 Remark), among others. However, he also insists that speculative philosophy does not strictly exclude these modes of thinking but actually traverses these positions and shows their one-sidedness. This becomes particularly evident once we undertake the effort to trace the movement of the *Phenomenology* and how it becomes, moves through, and surpasses these finite modes of thinking.

Thus, it is a proposition’s situatedness within Hegel’s speculative philosophy that indicates it is to be read speculatively and not in an ordinary, argumentative, or formal way.

One difficulty which should be avoided comes from mixing up the speculative with the argumentative methods, so that what is said of the subject at one time signifies its concept, at another time merely its predicate or accidental property. The one method interferes with the other, and only a philosophical exposition that rigidly excludes the usual way of relating the parts of a proposition could achieve the goal of plasticity (PG § 64, modified).

What is required then is to grasp a proposition’s placement within Hegel’s philosophical system, such that the proposition and its terms are situationally determined with respect to the whole.

Following Michel Foucault, we could say that a proposition gains significance (though for Hegel, it is a proposition’s speculative significance) only in its placement within a discursive

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93 Nancy points out, in a playful way, Hegel’s interesting conception of prefaces and introductions, which lie on the border of his speculative philosophy. They are contingently important to orient the reader, but not speculatively necessary. See *The Speculative Remark*, ch. 1.
formation—in this case, Hegel’s system of utterances. Serving merely as an example in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, “God is being” lacks this crucial systematic context, and Hegel is forced to explain the nature of speculative propositions in a rather non-speculative way (i.e. in a preface, outside the speculative context of his philosophical system). Whereas propositions like “Perception takes what is present to it as a universal” and “The truth of being is essence” lie in the context of his philosophical system, such that they reveal their true significance only through speculative reading and interpretation. The speculative reader must trace the entire movement expressed by the proposition, not stopping short to arrest the movement of thought and interrupt the process of its comprehension. “Comprehending” propositions thus entails grasping their role in the entire trajectory of conceptual thought.

To avoid a potential misunderstanding, I should note that Hegel is not strictly opposed to critical, argumentative thinking as such. There is something insightful, useful, and important about critical thinking: recognizing logical errors, poor reasoning, and semantic confusion in syllogisms and propositions. It can also indicate the perspective and presuppositions of one’s interlocutor. “As a matter of fact, non-speculative thinking also has its valid rights which are disregarded in the speculative way of stating a proposition” (*PG* § 65). Hegel’s concern is rather to prevent his reader from adopting such an argumentative attitude and mistaking it for *speculative thinking and reading*, for the mode of thinking that concerns itself directly with its

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94 See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), Part II Ch. 2. This analogy, however, has its limitations. For one, Hegel does not intend his system to merely collect and proffer many contingent claims about logic, nature, and spirit, nor does he suggest that he presents merely one “episteme” alongside others. Yet, this analogy does suggest one feature of Hegel’s system, which we return to in the Conclusion—namely, that it must conceal or exclude consideration of certain topics in favor of highlighting and revealing others.
own process of thinking through, explicating, and expressing the nature of conceptual thought that passes through its limited stages and moments.

The speculative nature of propositions begins to appear for the reader of Hegel once propositions themselves are taken as expressing conceptual movements instead of as fixed statements of truth or falsity. Whereas formal logic for Hegel struggles to take propositions as movements and not as straightforward truth claims,95 a speculative proposition expresses in itself “the self-moving concept which takes its determinations back into itself. In this movement the passive subject itself perishes; it enters into the differences and the content, and constitutes the determinateness, i.e. the differentiated content and its movement, instead of remaining inerti over against it” (PG § 60). In fact, as Hegel argues in the Science of Logic, a judgment is not an external relation between two concepts but “the absolute, original partition of itself [i.e. the concept]” (SL, 622), which plays on the word for judgement, Urteil, which literally means original (ur-) division (teil).

The consequence of recognizing and tracing this dynamic relation of the concept dividing itself and expressing that self-division as subject and predicate makes the object of the

95 Formalism for Hegel cuts short not only a speculative comprehension of propositions but learning in general. “This formalism, of which we have already spoken of generally and whose style we wish here to describe in more detail, imagines that it has comprehended and expressed the nature and life of a form when it has endowed it with some determination of the schema as a predicate. The predicate may be subjectivity or objectivity, or, say, magnetism, electricity, etc., contraction or expansion, east or west, and the like. Such predicates are multiplied to infinity, since in this way each determination or form can again be used as a form or moment in the case of an other, and each can gratefully perform the same service for an other. In this sort of circle of reciprocity, one never learns what the thing itself is, nor what the one or the other is” (PG § 50). Formalism teaches far more about the process of formalization and abstract argument forms than the content contained, formed, or under formation. Thus, even the young Hegel criticizes K. L. Reinhold for attempting to “reduce philosophy to [formal] logic,” and for presupposing that the “absolute in the form of truth is not the work of reason because it is already in and for itself something true and certain, that is something cognized and known” (D, 181, 1840). There is only a surface-level movement in formalism for Hegel, where cognition is conceived as an external apparatus for arranging our representations according to an already known truth. Hegel also criticizes a variant of this view of cognition in PG §§ 73-76.
proposition (i.e. its content) neither the subject nor the predicate nor even the “attachment” of the predicate to the subject in the copula, but rather the unitizing movement between the two. “The solid ground which argumentation has in the passive subject is therefore shaken, and only this movement itself becomes the object” (PG § 60). It is the very process of reading and comprehending how e.g. “The truth of being is essence” expresses a movement by which the term “being” finds its truth in the term “essence” while the trajectory of the concept of being results in the emergence of the concept of essence. Hegel describes the initial experience of reading and tracing a speculative proposition’s “movement” from subject to predicate:

Starting from the subject as though this were a permanent ground, it [i.e. the reader] finds that, since the predicate is really the substance, the subject has passed over into the predicate, and by this very fact, has been sublated [aufgehoben]; and, since in this way what seems to be the predicate has become the whole and the independent mass, thinking cannot roam at will, but is impeded (PG § 61).

The subject, because e.g. “universal” is not empty but has determinate content, finds itself unable to simply subsume the predicate under the subject, which would remain unchanged. Instead, the subject “suffers, as we might put it, a counter-thrust” (PG § 60). This is the first movement of speculative reading, which finds a determinate content (e.g. “essence”) in the predicate and a check on its left to right movement as the process of subsumption within the subject. Rather, the subject is checked by the predicate.96

But the movement is not complete; this is only one “moment” of speculative reading. In

96 In this case, Hegel follows Fichte in emphasizing the importance of an external check on the action of the subject, which leads the subjects to reflect on the nature of its own activity and process of knowing. For Fichte, the self at issue in his science of knowledge is transcendental and not empirical, whereas for Hegel subjectivity takes many different forms, developing dialectically depending on what epistemic object it strives to know. For one of Fichte’s accounts of this check (Anstoß) and the clash between subjectivity and this external limit whose interplay gives rise to the imagination, see The Science of Knowledge, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970; 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 189-194.
reaching the counter thrust of a particular term in the predicate, one moves back from the
determinate predicate and pushes the determination back onto or into the subject. The subject
becomes determined essentially by the specific content of the predicate, whether it marks an
abstract concept (e.g. universal) or a more determinate one (e.g. civil society). In the case of
“God is being,”

‘Being’ is here meant to be not a predicate, but rather the essence; it seems, consequently,
that God ceases to be what he is from his position in the proposition, viz. a fixed subject.
Here thinking, instead of making progress in the transition from subject to predicate, in
reality feels itself checked by the loss of the subject, and, missing it, is thrown back onto
the thought of the subject (PG § 62).

In a more determinate case like “The truth of being is essence,” the reader might first attempt to
attribute the concept of essence to the subject, the truth of being. But actually, the proposition
specifies that essence is not merely an attribute of truth or of being but being’s true
determination, the outcome of its conceptual development. In reaching the end of the sentence
then, the reader is forced to retreat and fill the subject with the content of the predicate
“essence,” which will then be explicated as the outcome of the trajectory of being instead of
merely posited as a separate concept or representation. “Being” and “essence” are thus shown to
be stages or moments of the same movement within or of the proposition, which creates between
the two a kind of harmonic interdependency. This is precisely what occurred in our reading
above of the proposition, “Perception takes what is present to it as a universal.”

Formally, what has been said can be expressed thus: the general nature of the judgment or
proposition, which involves the distinction of subject and predicate, is destroyed by the
speculative proposition, and the proposition of identity which the former becomes
contains the counter-thrust against that subject-predicate relationship […] Rhythm results
from the floating center and the unification of the two. So, too, in the philosophical
proposition the identification of subject and predicate is not meant to destroy the
difference between them, which the form of the proposition expresses; their unity, rather,
is meant to emerge as a harmony (PG § 61).
The rhythm of speculative reading results from a unifying movement of difference (in the division of the judgment) and a differentiating movement of a unity, the concept, whose initial determination (truth of being) is both distinguish from and united with the second determination (essence). Both moments of the movement of the proposition are crucial, and the resistance that each offers to the other mirrors the efforts of Geist as a whole to overcome its limitations and transform itself.97 It produces rhythmic movement.98 What is overcome in this mode of reading is the fixity of subject and predicate and therefore any fixed representations of what those terms may be taken to signify. Finite representations or meaningsdialectically “pass over [Übergehen] into their opposites” (PG § 81).

Hegel explains similar interpretations of “the actual is the universal” (PG § 62) and one of his most infamous claims: “What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational” (GPR Preface, 20).99 If one reads this latter proposition in a “regular” way by attributing relatively common meanings to its terms and presupposing it as a simple truth claim, there is great temptation to dismiss such claims as obviously false or worse, downright nonsense. The same goes for seemingly contradictory claims, such as “Pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same” (SL, 82), or “Difference possesses both moments, identity and difference; both are thus a

97 Resistance is a crucial element that not only representational meanings, but the propositional form present for reading speculatively. In fact, speculative thinking needs resistance, the negative, a limit or problem, in order to overcome its static, finite forms—just to be speculative. The resistance of negation or the negative—the not-I, the other, the different, the alien, the foreign, the constraint—is the motor of Hegel’s philosophy, its dialectical moment. “The dialectical constitutes the moving soul of scientific progression” (EL § 81 Remark). In modernity for Hegel, this resistance often comes in the form of representation. On the large role of resistance in Hegel’s philosophy, see Bart Zantvoort and Rebecca Comay, eds., Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).
99 The derision these claims sometimes provoke we can now see is a product of their not being read speculatively. Hyppolite also provides a speculative reading of “The world is finite” in Logic and Existence, 147.
positedness, a determinateness” (SL, 418).

Such claims may seem outright contradictory, vague, or even non-sensical, but we can now make sense of Hegel’s claim that “In the form of the proposition, therefore, in which identity is expressed, there lies more than simple, abstract identity [...] The propositional form can be regarded more as the hidden necessity of adding to abstract identity the more of that movement” (SL, 415-416). We already saw that the “more” of this movement is already suggested by reconceptualizing Hegel’s conceptual terms: grasping them not as representational words or names, but abbreviations of movement. Their movement is made more apparent and explicit, or we might say, more legible, once they are expressed in propositions and once we begin to (re-) read those propositions speculatively.

Therefore, the propositions of Hegel’s system are misunderstood if they are taken simply as transmitting knowledge or depositing his insights and arguments into the minds of his readers. Rather, a proposition’s form repeatedly offers resistance, limits, and blockages that speculative reading must overcome to produce plastic subjects qua readers. And that form is not eliminated by a new type of proposition. In fact, propositions are multiplied in Hegel’s system such that the resistance they offer to the reader is perpetually encountered, both anticipated and always already accomplished by the truly speculative reader. Yet if this resistance sometimes frustrates the reader and leads them to remain passive and to fall back on familiar meanings

100 It is here that Hegel’s notion of the speculative proposition intersects with his repeated association between grammar and education. Grammatical lessons, as Hegel points out in his 1809 Gymnasium address, are important for learning to think abstractly (ETW, 328-330). But the speculative importance of grammar is not exhausted by this educational benefit. The grammatical form of the proposition also presents a formal barrier and fixed limit to reading speculatively, a problem which must be repeatedly overcome in encountering each new proposition.
associated externally in the form of the proposition, the only recourse is to reread and attempt once again to retrace and re-expose the movement of the proposition.

As we saw in Parts I and II, language serves as a tool for subjective and objective Geist, which through its use produces its own subjectivity and the objective, social world. Speculative reading goes further by its aufheben in process of the distinction between subject and object, between reader and text, such that the subjective struggle to comprehend Hegel’s texts speculatively becomes inseparable from the objective struggle in language to express the movement of the speculative. The difference between the thinking subject (i.e. the reader) and the grammatical subject become indiscernible in speculative reading, which attempts to “penetrate it and bring it into its own form” (SL, 585). Speculative reading thus not only enables the subject to produce themselves but to produce themselves as plastic, as irreducibly (self-)transformative, that is, as absolute Geist. Plastic readers are not abstract egos that merely create signs nor are they simply persons that create and represent their social bonds by expressing themselves publicly. They are thinkers that transform their own subjectivity and mode of thinking through their encounter with Hegel’s difficult texts—the recurring negative—which can never be grasped definitively or “once and for all.”

Moreover, it should be clear that such propositions alone are insufficient. Though this

101 Chong-Fuk Lau claims that in the speculative proposition the grammatical subject is replaced by the thinking subject. See “Language and Metaphysics: The Dialectics of Hegel’s Speculative Proposition” in Hegel and Language, 66. I find this way of expressing the process of the speculative proposition misleading, for it implies the proposition becomes strictly subjective instead of expressing the unifying movement of subject and object, of reader and text. For speculative reading entails that the reader no longer stands outside the text, moving from subject to predicate and vice versa, but instead participates in the speculative movement of the text. This participation becomes explicit in the demand that the reader undertake a speculative exposition of these propositions.

102 Malabou, The Future of Hegel, 185: “One never learns Hegel once and for all. He is not to be possessed like a body of doctrine to be known by heart in all its operations and concepts.”
speculative reading enables one to grasp the movement at work in such philosophical propositions, Hegel nonetheless claims that the form of the proposition itself entails that in itself, or by itself, a proposition is incapable of expressing this movement that constitutes its truth.

In any case, the form of the proposition, or more precisely that of the judgment, is incapable of expressing what is concrete (and what is true is concrete) and speculative; because of its form, the judgment is one-sided and to that extent false (EL § 31 Remark).

Speculative (readings of) propositions are necessary, but they require elaboration, a philosophical exposition and presentation of the movement of terms to demonstrate the developing relations and movements between concepts.

The sublation of the form of the proposition must not happen only in an immediate manner, through the mere content of the proposition. On the contrary, this opposite movement must find explicit expression; it must not just be the inward inhibition mentioned above. This return of the concept into itself must be presented [dargestellt] (PG § 65).

Hegel does not jettison the proposition’s place or significance in speculative philosophy despite its insufficiency, for it not only expresses the self-division of the concept but also provides the resistance necessary to force the reader to read and think speculatively. As Jean-Luc Nancy claims, “For it is, precisely, the subject as such, and what necessarily accompanies it, the predicate and the copula, in other words, the parts of discourse that, in the proposition, create an obstacle or a threat to philosophy.”103 The resistance to undertaking the speculative movement upon oneself is provided by the form of the proposition and is necessary for the movement itself to occur, for otherwise the speculative unity of subject and predicate would be grasped immediately and as fixed. Because of its reliance on the propositional form, philosophy is always at risk of falling back into or being mistaken as representing a fixed and final stage of “absolute

103 Nancy, The Speculative Remark, 78.
knowledge” instead of the geistig movement it is.¹⁰⁴

So “the dialectical movement likewise has propositions for its parts and elements; the
difficulty just indicated seems, therefore, to recur perpetually and to be inherent in the very
nature of philosophical exposition” (PG § 66). The resistance that propositions provide to
expressing the movement of truth is not eliminated or ignored but must be overcome and
preserved by the act of speculative reading but also reanimated in the speculative exposition of
propositions. Overcoming the form of the proposition is expressed paradoxically by the
production of even more speculative propositions in an exposition, which cannot but produce
continued resistance to and for speculative reading.¹⁰⁵ This continued resistance to and for

¹⁰⁴ A recent commentary argues that absolute knowing, the final stage of the Phenomenology of Spirit, is not
only a movement but a turbulent flow constituted by myriad blockages and interruptions, which are often
signified by Hegel’s frequent use of dashes. See Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, The Dash—The Other Side of
Absolute Knowing (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018). This provocative interpretation of the significance of the
dash in Hegel’s texts points to the ever-present need of readers of Hegel to struggle against purportedly
“common sense” or widely held readings of his system and those interpretations that would overlook the most
minute, bizarre, or controversial parts of his texts (e.g. crystals in the Philosophy of Nature or the role of women
or stateless peoples in the Philosophy of Right). Such avoidance would forego the opportunity to become plastic
readers by resting content with our interpretation of Hegel or believing we had grasped his philosophy once and
for all, instead of undertaking to examine and expose the minutiae and lacunae of Hegel’s presentation of this
movement. The reader must not “shrink from death and keep itself untouched by devastation,” but must tarry
with the negative, even if the details of Hegel’s own presentation constitute an obstacle (PG § 32).

¹⁰⁵ See Nancy, The Speculative Remark, 80, 82: “What is at issue is therefore nothing but to annul the
Aufhebung—to make it come full circle, to posit it, by suppressing the erratic dispersion of the word, or to
accomplish the return of all these returns of the aufheben, which, according to its Remark, “repeatedly occurs.”
[...] In the proposition—as far as meaning is concerned—it is right that the difference be suppressed, but as far
as syntax, the propositional form itself, is concerned, it is no less right that it be preserved. The Satz therefore has
exactly the same content or the same property as the aufheben; but it loses them immediately inasmuch as it is
not the property of the unity that it states: there is not one but many propositions, therefore their exteriority, and
it is as such that it has aufgehoben itself.” Nancy’s point is that the attempt to sublate and overcome the limited
form of the proposition yields only ever-new propositions, not a rejection of the propositional form. Malabou
makes the same point in The Future of Hegel, 180: “For Hegel, the movement from the ordinary to the
philosophical proposition doesn’t mean that the propositional form is abandoned, but that new statements
must be created. Each time, the dialectical movement of the proposition must manifest three aspects of each and every
philosophical statement: a shared form, the suppression of that form, and the presentation in return of the
cancelled form.” I agree with this interpretation of Hegel’s view of propositions, though the attempt to overcome
propositional form gives way to what he calls “speculative expositions,” which Nancy and Malabou only briefly
mention. Later, in Nancy’s The Restlessness of the Negative, he emphasizes the necessity of philosophical
expositions more directly, which manifest the inner movement that operates throughout his philosophy. On the
speculative reading produces plastic readers, where, according to Catherine Malabou, “progressively, in the course of reading, the reader's subjectivity is formed into a substantial accident, a style, a plasticity.” In other words, the outcome of the practice of speculative reading is to make of the reader a knowing participant in the movement of truth.

What is required is to extend and unpack the movement of, e.g. “God is being,” by its exposition and presentation: a thorough accounting of the concept of being (as in the opening of the Science of Logic); of the form of the judgment and syllogism and the ways they link and mediate subject and predicate (SL, 623-704); the various forms God takes for us (as Hegel presents in his lectures on the philosophy of religion), and how exactly being is an essential determination of God. It is as if propositions in themselves possess an internal intensity and latent rhythm once its conceptual terms are understood in the manner we described in 4.3, as abbreviations of movements or abbreviated movements in themselves. Speculative (readings of) propositions not only express and make explicit the internal division of a concept into a judgment, but also suggest to the reader the self-movement implicit in the static form of the proposition, particularly in the intensity of the copula that unifies conceptual determinations and the back-and-forth movement of speculative reading.

As Jim Vernon claims, “the philosopher’s goal […] should be to teach others how to
Indeed, this is the explicit aim of Hegel’s Encyclopedia, which he designed as a teaching manual to be supplemented by lectures and new expositions. But “a plastic discourse demands, too, a plastic receptivity and understanding on the part of the listener” (SL, 40). It is thus up to the reader to decide to read speculatively, to elaborate and trace the movement of conceptual thought implicit in propositions. The actuality of speculative philosophy begins with the contingent decision to read and re-read Hegel, keeping this speculative conception of the proposition in mind, and the reader must then decide to unfold, exposit, and present the movement of and through Hegel’s propositions to enact the truth.

4.5 Conclusion: Speculative Presentation of Syllogisms as Truth

The movement of speculative (readings of) propositions is only implicit in the static form of the proposition, so Hegel can only suggest in prefaces and introductions how the propositions of his philosophy should be approached. To actually trace and present the speculative movement that both conceptual terms and their division in propositional judgments merely indicate intensively, speculative propositions must be unfolded into an extensity in a speculative exposition (Auslegung) or presentation (Darstellung). Again, “this return of the concept into itself must be shown [dargestellt],” its movement “pronounced [ausgesprochen]” and its “utterance [Aussprechen]” carried out (PG § 65). The unfolding and explication of the propositional judgment constitutes the syllogism (Schluß) for Hegel, where “the conceptual determinations are

107 Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 133. John McCumber comes to a similar conclusion: “It thus takes two, for Hegel, to philosophize; the philosophical community contains two roles, teacher and student” (The Company of Words, 328). See also John Russon, Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology, 81, where he points out that encountering and interpreting Hegel’s texts require the reader to shape their own identity.

like the extremes of the judgement, and at the same time their determinate unity is posited” (SL, 664). Like the judgment, the syllogism is no abstract logical form for Hegel. “The syllogism is what is rational, and it is everything that is rational” (EL § 181).

To conclude Part III, we return to Hegel’s conception of truth. As we have seen, truth is not the correspondence between a proposition and state of affairs or between a concept and its object. Hegel sometimes glosses truth as the correspondence between concept and object, yet he reminds us that this is only one representation of truth and thus cannot actually be true (Wahr) in his sense of the term. Now we can see more clearly why truth for Hegel cannot be the correct correspondence of a proposition with a state of affairs because of the one-sided form of the proposition. The form of the proposition is not the form of truth.

Instead, I have attempted to show that truth for Hegel has the form of a movement, of Bewegung, and further that we participate in truth by reading speculatively. Truth is implicit in Hegel’s conceptual terms, which do not signify meanings, but mark particular trajectories and segments of conceptual movement into and through other concepts. We first begin to grasp (fassen) this movement of truth by tracing the speculative movement of the proposition, by speculative reading. This involves suspending ordinary ways of understanding the meaning of terms and of interpreting propositions. A proposition must be understood as expressing both the internal division of a concept and the movement between its determinations. Grasping the

109 “If the object, as the product of this passage, is put in relation with the concept […] then the result may be correctly expressed by saying that the concept (or even, if one prefers, subjectivity) and the object are in-themselves the same. But it is equally correct to say that they are diverse. Precisely because each statement is as correct as the other, each of them is as incorrect as the other; expressions of this kind are incapable of presenting the genuine relationship. […] As is always the case, the speculative identity is not the trivial one, that concept and objectivity are in-themselves identical” (EL §193 Remark). Again, this distinction hinges on the difference between truth (Wahrheit) and mere correctness (Richtigkeit). See Robert Stern, “Did Hegel Hold an Identity Theory of Truth?” Mind 102, no. 408 (Oct., 1993): 645-647.
fluidity of propositional judgments requires work and practice, reading and re-reading the propositions of Hegel’s system speculatively to trace conceptual movements and become plastic in one's reading and thinking.

Furthermore, Hegel’s truth necessitates that his propositional judgments be unpacked and explicated in syllogisms (Schlüsse), which are not abstract, argumentative forms, but rather the concept moving to conclude (schließen) itself into a demonstrated, explicit unity of its determinations.\(^\text{110}\)

The syllogism is the unity of the concept and the judgment; it is the concept as the simple identity into which the form-distinctions of the judgment have returned, and it is judgment insofar as it is posited at the same time in reality, i.e., in the distinction of its determinations (EL § 181).

Syllogisms make explicit the determinations becoming unified in a concept, and Hegel plays on the meanings of the conceptual term Schluß to indicate the affinity between the syllogism and the process of a concept bringing its movement to a close. This is what we tried to show above with our speculative interpretations of “Perception takes what is present to it as a universal” and “The truth of being is essence,” which necessarily gave way to brief speculative expositions of these propositions. Hegel’s dialectical tracing of the syllogism, its conceptual trajectory, is quite detailed and traverses many forms of syllogism that we cannot delve into, nor can we trace the complex turn of how syllogisms become objective mechanisms.\(^\text{111}\) However, it is crucial to point out that the syllogisms of speculative philosophy are for Hegel expressed in speculative

\(^{110}\) I want to thank Jim Vernon for helpfully pointing out to me that my account of Hegel’s theory of syllogism suggests that a speculative reading of Hegel’s propositions can be further justified by their role in syllogisms. That is, speculative propositions are demonstrated to be truly speculative (and they should be read speculatively instead of representationally) by their being unpacked and defended through syllogistic reasoning.

\(^{111}\) For an account of this turn, see Richard Dien Winfield, *From Concept to Objectivity: Thinking Through Hegel’s Subjective Logic* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 128-130.
expositions and presentations (Darstellungen). Language provides the medium whereby we encounter the text, read it speculatively, and through which attentive, open readers can then inscribe, present (darstellen), and manifest anew the restless movements of conceptual thought in further speculative expositions. We can see one attempt at such a speculative exposition of Hegel’s theory of language in this very dissertation.

Therefore, the actual and not merely implicit participation in truth requires more than speculative reading; it requires speculative presentations that express this restless movement in new speculative uses of language. Otherwise, the linguistic expression of truth remains outside truth itself, outside the processual movement of truth, which for Hegel would entail that language remains merely an external appendage to the self-unfolding of conceptual thought, an extraneous way of conveying the nature of this movement but itself not part of the movement—a false representation of truth. But the truth is its presentation, its self-manifestation. “The power of spirit [Geist] is only as great as its expression [Äußerung], its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition [Auslegung]” (PG § 10). Indeed, I already began to express the course of these movements in our discussions of particular terms and propositions, if only to explain and unpack the latter’s implicit movement. At stake in philosophical texts for Hegel is not only the means for grasping what thinking is—a self-transformative movement—but also the means for becoming plastic and self-transformative in our own thinking. At stake in philosophical presentations of syllogisms is the demonstration and proof of the self-

transformative power of mind. Truth is the actual manifesting of this power in language.

While we cannot explore here the forms of the syllogism Hegel examines in his logics, we can point out two additional aspects of his theory of the syllogism, which, as we saw with his theory of propositional judgments, diverges significantly from its ordinary definition. First, to understand a syllogism merely “as a subjective form [of argumentation] and without any connection being demonstrated between this form and any other rational content” is to mistake the unfolding movement of a concept’s content for an external form imposed upon a particular content, which is indifferent or unrelated to that form. A syllogism is for Hegel the process of unfolding the necessary connections between the particular determinations of a concept, which are first presented in a propositional judgment. The syllogism thus demonstrates the process by which a concept first divides itself into its particular determinations, which are separated explicitly in the subject and predicate of a judgment, and then, by relating and gathering these determinations, how it reunites with itself. For the terms of a syllogism, as I previously argued, mark moments or stages in the very same movement of the concept.

Second, the form of a syllogism accordingly has a much broader applicability for Hegel than in ordinary understandings of this term. He relates not only individual conceptual terms in syllogisms, but also whole stages of his philosophy, for again, they too are constitutive stages and moments of the same speculative movement. In the final three sections of the Encyclopedia, he proposes that his entire tripartite system of logic, nature, and mind can be understood as three related syllogisms, depending on which stage is taken as the mediating term of the syllogism—

113 For a more thorough account, see Vernon, Hegel’s Philosophy of Language, 101-114. See also Richard Dien Winfield, From Concept to Objectivity: Thinking Through Hegel’s Subjective Logic, ch. 7.
whether nature mediating the relation between logic and mind (EPG § 575); mind mediating the relation between nature and logic (EPG § 576); or logic mediating the relation between mind and nature (EPG § 577). Hegel’s use of “syllogism” here is not metaphorical, for “the essential feature of the syllogism is the unity of the extremes, the middle term which unites them, and the ground/reason [Grund] which supports them” (SL, 665). Hegel typically provides the exposition and presentation of syllogisms (and concepts and judgments) in the sections between when he introduces new terms, sometimes even in his added remarks (Anmerkungen), for these presentations express the passages between and through concepts, or rather they express the syllogistic passages that concepts implicitly are.

Therefore, participating in the movement of truth, as I have expressed it, beckons the reader not only to read and trace Hegel’s own expositions and presentations, but also to create new commentaries and expositions of the stages and transitions of his system. The speculative reader must become the speculative commentator or interlocutor, who exposes the speculative by relaying and extending its movement. Hegel’s system, broadly construed, includes not only the process of its being read and interpreted speculatively, but also its being re-marked, marked again, and explicated anew as a growing, self-overcoming system. This very dissertation I hope participates in this movement insofar as it traces particular stages of the trajectory of Hegel’s system to more fully disclose the role of language as a tool constitutive of Geist.

This concludes our analysis of Hegel’s speculative problematic of language. Representation emerged as a problem for doing philosophy, in particular the view of language as a representational tool. For such a tool would arrest the movement of conceptual thought in order to represent it linguistically. To overcome this problem, Hegel uses conceptual terms as
abbreviated movements and develops a theory of speculative propositions and reading that surpasses a representational understanding of meanings. He highlights the importance of his readers’ attitudes and dispositions and the necessity of remaining open to self-transformation when encountering the text, sustaining a willingness to extend and expose the movements of its propositions. For one cannot become a speculative thinker by passively absorbing the words and arguments of Hegel’s text, as if we were mere spectators to his philosophical acrobatics. One must participate in the frustrating turbulence of the text, one must actually do philosophy with the text, deciding at once to open ourselves to the text as a mediator of self-transformation and actively extending it by re-inscribing its movement in our own words.

On the whole, our interrogation of Hegel’s problematic of language has not only traced the appearances of Sprache, but also attempted to locate gaps and unresolved problems in his account of language, where he seems either to have not fully exposed or to have strayed from the movement of the concept and the role of language therein. Hegel himself acknowledges the shortcomings of his published works and asks for “the indulgence of the reader” due to the “imperfection” of the treatment “of the subject matter and of its exposition” (SL, 31). He references “the story that Plato revised his Republic seven times over” and expresses his own wish that “leisure had been afforded to revise [his works] seven and seventy times” (SL, 42). Though Hegel died soon after writing these words, the parasitic discourse formed by interrogating his text assumes this mantle by participating in the truth of its ongoing revision, exposition, and extension, its open closure, which aims not to produce “true” statements but to create plastic readers who can think speculatively and trace the movement of truth. “To read

Hegel’s text is thus, if not to rewrite it, at least to repeat its exposition *plastically*.”\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{115} Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, 13.
5 Conclusion

Logic exhibits the self-movement of the absolute idea only as the original word, which is an externalizing or utterance [Äußerung], but an utterance that in being has immediately vanished again as something outer [Außeres]; the idea is, therefore, only in this self-determination of apprehending itself; it is in pure thought, in which difference is not yet otherness, but is and remains perfectly transparent to itself (SL, 825).

Language is one of the most important concerns of Hegel’s philosophy; nonetheless, it remains relatively unique, at least among issues of considerable significance, in being discussed almost exclusively in prefaces to his texts or in published remarks appended to their main sections. Never did he lecture on language directly or publish a book devoted to the philosophy of language or even analyze the essence of language or language “in itself,” choosing to address it throughout his philosophical system in piecemeal discussions linked to analyses of particular forms of mind or spirit (Geist). As this dissertation has argued, language is for Hegel a necessary tool for us, for recognizing the nascent freedom of our own embodied intellect, for delineating the specific intersubjective relations we cultivate with others, and for freeing our conceptual thought from its own imprisonment within representational depictions of thought. Thematized in this way, Hegel subordinates language to mind, to the conceptual development of mind into and through different forms (e.g. soul, consciousness, intelligence) on its path to epistemic freedom, even though language is necessary for specifying, recognizing, and overcoming the limits, obstacles, and problems mind encounters on its journey. Language in Hegel is a liminal phenomenon precisely because it appears at the boundary and borderline of certain forms of mind, facilitating the transition from one to another form by allowing mind to overcome the limits of its own circumscribed finitude.

Accordingly, I agree with Jere Surber when he claims, “the fact that he did not compose
such a work (or perhaps set of lectures) was neither an accidental omission, a matter of historical anachronism, nor a judgment on his part that language just was not a central philosophical concern.”¹ As a conceptual tool, Hegel positions language at junctures in his developmental system of philosophy, for the positionality of language is determined according to its logical relation to specific forms of mind, i.e. particular ways of understanding the mind and its activity, whereby language mediates the transition of mind to a higher form and richer way of knowing. Language for Hegel can never be treated “in itself” apart from a consideration of mind because its epistemic function is to elevate the mind above its form and enable its self-reformation; it acts at the limit and transitory border between forms of mind. Separating the mind from language in order to describe language in isolation would mean eliding its liberatory effects—its effects for and on the mind. Moreover, as we have seen, language operates at or between different, discontinuous “stages” of mind, and I have argued that each invocation of language, which serves to resolve a particular problem for Geist, is irreducible to the others. Hence, language in Hegel’s philosophical system cannot be accounted for if it is separated in general from the activities of Geist, nor can its philosophical importance be grasped by gauging its significance for only a specific form of knowing (e.g. intelligence). This dissertation has argued that Hegel’s philosophy of language can be presented by linking his scattered discussions of language according to the schema of its resolving problems for Geist.

Yet I depart from Surber’s interpretation of Hegel insofar as he argues that Hegel’s omission of a robust and clearly articulated philosophy of language “was a deliberate choice in

favor of a systematic conception of philosophy and against a project that would serve to disrupt the general economy of his systematic enterprise.”² By contrast, I see Hegel’s peculiar way of approaching and discussing language as indicative of the systematic place (or displacement?) it has for him—as irreducible to and inexhaustible by any one of its epistemic functions, whereby its multifaceted utility would be prematurely restricted to its psychological, social, or philosophical significance. Such a premature foreclosure would not only circumscribe the possible uses of language but would also restrict the use of language to particular, epistemic roles (e.g. conveying our knowledge to others), thereby divesting it of its liminal quality and liberatory thrust. Following Jim Vernon and John McCumber (though diverging from them methodologically), I have departed from Surber’s position in attempting to reconstruct and demonstrate the cohesiveness of Hegel’s philosophy of language.

By way of a brief summary, language for Hegel, I have argued, cannot be defined simply as a system of signs, an expressive medium, or a means for self-transformation. Instead, interpreting Hegel through the lens of a problematic, I have accounted for language as a complex technology necessary for (overcoming) a number of different forms of Geist, where in each case a new use of language is introduced, a new understanding of “language” (Sprache) becomes available for us, and a new dimension of freedom is revealed. Language is thus at once a creation of spirit and a tool for overcoming the limits and thresholds of its particular forms, even the form

² Ibid. I am not sure what to make of Surber’s imputation of certain deliberative intentions to Hegel, about which I am more reticent to speculate. But I do not agree that the “general economy” of his text would necessarily be disrupted by a treatise on language, but only that such a treatise would require an effort similar to my own of dialectically linking his numerous discussions of language. Indeed, an Hegelian treatise on language, as I have attempted to provide here, would comprise a different trajectory into Hegel’s philosophical system, akin to what the Phenomenology of Spirit purports to show by beginning with the epistemic position of “consciousness,” revealing its internal limits, and developing that position ultimately into “absolute knowing.” That said, I am not certain what Surber means by the “general economy” of Hegel’s texts and thus cannot fully respond to his claim.
of individual mind that created the linguistic sign: the subjective intelligence. For intersubjective forms of spirit, which as “objective” *Geist* strives to produce itself (i.e. social groupings characterized by a common “spirit”) in the actual world, language operates as a tool that both creates, mediates, and reveals the relationships we must form with others in order to become free thinkers, that is, individuals who know themselves to be free and willing participants in concrete social relationships, which they not only help to create but which in turn shape their own sense of self. To create and sustain social forms of *Geist*, like families, civil societies, and states, Hegel shows how language must serve as a communicative medium, which mediates the formation of intersubjective relationships and makes those relationships recognizable to the persons related and constituted by them. Speculative uses and interpretations of philosophical language, which Hegel maintains are necessary for grasping the movement expressed in his own philosophy, requires tracing his use of conceptual terms and their dynamic role in the propositions and syllogistic reasoning of his system. The reader thus follows the movement of speculative, philosophical thought as it encounters conceptual limits, overcomes them, and passes through and links discrete representations of logical concepts, natural forms, and determinations of mind and spirit. In so doing, speculative reading simultaneously exposes the truth of conceptual thought—its capacity for self-transformation and for overcoming its own epistemic limitations—and reveals the necessary role of language in undertaking and fulfilling the movement of truth in Hegel’s philosophy.

Ultimately, Hegel needs no meta-language—no “other” language by which to cite and analyze his own language use—for he demonstrates within his own distinctive use of German how precisely language expresses the movement of speculative thought, in turn justifying his
own style and way of using language. The creation, memorization, and deployment of linguistic signs; the formation of linguistic media of communication known and used by all; the speculative use and interpretation of words and their positionality in propositions and circulation in syllogistic reasoning—all reflect back to us our own spiritual nature, the trajectory and struggles of our own ways of knowing, which is why Hegel claims language is “the existence [Dasein] of spirit” (PG § 652). As the determinate existence of Geist, language serves as a mediator of spirit with itself in Hegel’s philosophical system—to mediate the process of our thinking encountering and overcoming its own limits—and this is precisely why language appears in the interstices and moments of transition of Hegel’s system, when forms of mind encounter their own limits and require a means, developed from their own subjective capacities, to overcome these limits.

Our account of Hegel’s philosophy of language qua problematic is, however, not comprehensive insofar as we have deliberately overlooked both certain comments Hegel makes about language and certain idiosyncrasies of his language use, both of which provide material for future investigations into Hegel and language. Still to be examined in greater detail are Hegel’s discussions of language in his lectures on history, art, and religion and how they compare with his contemporaries, which would provide rich context for understanding in greater depth his account of speculative language, particularly in contrast to the “representations” that art and religion provide.3 Examinations of the role of language in tragedy, comedy, epic and lyric poetry,
as well as the liturgies and utterances of different forms of religious worship would also provide
greater insight into Hegel’s differentiation of artistic works and religious communities. Apart
from Stephen Dunning’s decades-old study of Hegel and Hamann on religious language,
relatively little has been written on this topic.\footnote{Stephen Dunning, \textit{Tongues of Men: Hegel and Hamann on Religious Language and History} (Ann Arbor: Scholars Press, 1979). See also Deland S. Anderson, \textit{Hegel's Speculative Good Friday: The Death of God in Philosophical Perspective} (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 42-44.} Furthermore, though I have tried to elucidate the
import of many of Hegel’s invocations of language in the \textit{Philosophy of Right}, we skirted his
discussion of language in its second section, “Morality,” as well as its significant role in the
judicial system, both of which could use more scholarly attention. Overall, the \textit{Philosophy of
Right} as well as his earlier \textit{Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science} contain many
insights into language use that have yet to be unearthed and explored.

As to Hegel’s own singular writing style, Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda have recently
published a shrewd treatise on Hegel’s frequent use of dashes, which usefully highlights the role
of this punctuation mark (which Hegel appears so fond of) for linking parts of his system of
absolute knowing.\footnote{Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, \textit{The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing} (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018).} No one to my knowledge, however, has catalogued and examined Hegel’s
frequent use of \textit{italics} to see if any interpretive significance can be mined from such a study,
perhaps in blurring the line between speech and writing. Indeed, further analyses of Hegel’s
writing style (and perhaps also his vocal stutter) would be useful for grasping more fully his
conception of speculative language and what that would mean for philosophical writers and

\footnote{Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, \textit{The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing} (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018).}
readers today. As much as has been written on the topic of Hegel and language, there still remains much work left to be done.

On a final note, freedom as the process of self-determination through self-negation and overcoming, which I highlighted throughout this dissertation as the ultimate aim of Geist and the internal telos of his philosophical system, inevitably delimits how Hegel analyzes and accounts for language. The goal of freely knowing ourselves and the world likewise constrains how certain epistemic problems emerge in his system and how he characterizes and examines certain linguistic phenomena. For subsequent philosophers and linguists who do not esteem freedom as the goal of philosophy and of mind generally, different aspects of language that have little to do with its role in knowing can be explored, aspects Hegel either downplays or elides completely. Since his death and often to great effect, philosophers have broadened the scope of their examination into the multitudinous functions of language by sidestepping, dismissing, or criticizing this telos, which determines the normative structure and progressive development of Hegel’s philosophy.

With that said, we have seen that freedom in Hegel is not merely a metaphysical property or political attribute of a person or group and is only an ultimate aim for spirit in a very peculiar way; it is not an aim “outside” of or “external” to spirit but one constituted internally by its own effort and activity, its own process of making itself plastic. For freedom ultimately amounts to

7 The structuring function of this teleological limitation is precisely the focus of Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of Hegel’s account of signs and language in “The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel’s Semiology” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 69-108. To this end, I agree with the main thrust of Derrida’s deconstructive critique, even though he erroneously conflates Hegel’s philosophy of language, including the differentiation between speech and writing, with his account of signs.
the actual process of spirit posing and overcoming the internal limits orienting and structuring its epistemic activity, which constitutes the very praxis of speculative philosophy. To discard freedom as our ultimate aim thus opens new possibilities for examining ourselves and our use of language but only at the expense of foregoing a consideration of how language use can free us from the limits we find in our own ways of thinking. So while the decision to undertake the laborious effort of reading Hegel speculatively closes certain doors into the investigation of language, it also opens a path oriented towards the attainment of our own freedom and plasticity of thought. The reader of Hegel must of course choose for themselves which avenue to take, though bearing in mind that such a choice, itself necessarily a delimiting, structuring act, already constitutes a stage within the overarching development of his speculative, philosophical system.
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