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Hegel's *Offene*: Apperception, Absolution and the Absolute

Joshua Wretzel

Abstract

This paper offers a limited defence of two seemingly disparate interpretive approaches to free thought in Hegel's Jena *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On the one hand, I defend the view of so-called post-Kantian Hegelians, that Kant's synthetic unity of apperception is central to Hegel's account of free thinking in the *Phenomenology*. On the other hand, I argue that the notions of *das Offene* in Heidegger's *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* and *Ab-Lösung* in his 1930/31 lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology* are no less crucial to an understanding of free thought in Hegel's work. I show that absolution is a condition for the possibility of *das Offene*, which is a condition for the possibility of apperception in its reflexive capacity.

> 'Know ye now, Bulkington? Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore?'
>
> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

> 'We don't know yet what kind of an age the next one will be. Although I feel in my bones that it will be an age inimical to personal well-being and comfort, and that is what I like, personal well-being and comfort'.
>
> Donald Barthelme, *At the End of the Mechanical Age*

I. Introduction

This paper offers a limited defence of two seemingly disparate interpretive approaches to Hegel's account of the freedom of spirit in his Jena *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[1] On the one hand, scholars such as Brandom (2002), McDowell (1996),

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Pippin (1989), Pinkard (1996) and Sedgwick (2012) construe that freedom fundamentally in terms of *agency*, depending largely on a post-Kantian appropriation or 'completion' of the spontaneous, apperceptive 'I' constituted in intersubjective, rational space. On the other hand, scholars such as Dudley (2002), Houlgate (2006) and Maker (1994) defend what we may call a 'phenomenological' view, where the *PhG* ultimately reveals an 'open region'—akin, that is, to Heidegger's notion of *das Offene* in his *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*—allowing thought to proceed unabated by any presuppositions or prejudices.

I argue that the phenomenological view stands to the post-Kantian view as condition for its possibility. I show that, for Hegel, apperception is impossible without the sort of 'opening' that the phenomenological view articulates. I also maintain that, even though apperception is central to the project of the *PhG*, its role is fundamentally different than the one that post-Kantians assign it; and that even though the notion of rational agency is central to Hegel's thought, he spends more time in the *PhG* developing the sort of 'negative' freedom of the phenomenological tradition. So even though my position combines the other two, it takes rather more from the phenomenologists than the post-Kantians.

Ultimately, my interpretation attributes to Hegel a view developed by Heidegger in his 1930/31 lectures on the *PhG*: a construal of the standpoint of Absolute Knowledge as one of *ab-solution* [*Ab-Lösung*]. I hold that the Hegelian version of *das Offene*, which is the condition for the possibility of apperceptive activity, itself rests on absolution as a condition for *its* possibility. Thus, I contend that the culminating position of Hegel's *PhG* reveals absolution as a fundamental condition for the possibility of apperception.

My argument proceeds as follows: in II, I introduce Pippin's view of Hegelian apperception, the predominant post-Kantian view on the matter. I then (III) show that, while formally accurate, this reading misplaces the role of apperception in Hegel: while post-Kantians tend to focus on apperception as Hegel's account of the transcendental framework underlying cognition of objects, I show that Hegel instead assigns it a fundamental *systematic* function: it underlies the moment of so-called 'speculative' thinking, or the way new forms of thinking develop from out of old ones.

I then turn to the phenomenological reading in IV, developing a basic philosophical account of the notion of absolution. In V, I employ that account to argue that absolution underlies the standpoint of Absolute Knowledge in the *PhG*, when we interpret that final position as revealing the open region of thinking. Since the development of forms of thinking is just the role assigned to apperception, Absolute Knowledge articulates the 'space' where apperception may operate *freely*. I conclude with some final thoughts about the relationship between Hegel and Heidegger on the matter.

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II. Pippin on Kantian formalism, Hegel and apperception

As Pippin argues (1989: 16ff.), the four constitutive features of Kant's apperceptive subject are its (1) identity, (2) unity, (3) reflexivity and (4) spontaneity. In order for our experience of objects to be what it is, the subject must be (1) *identical* through time, since otherwise, it would not be able to (2) *unify* a manifold of intuition in the ways that it does. Moreover, Kant holds that these various forms of unification are rules that the knowing subject follows, as opposed to mere associations that just happen to it; thus, every unification must also contain an act, however implicit, of (3) *reflective* awareness that *I* am the one unifying the manifold. These reflective acts of synthetic unity are thus also (4) *spontaneous*, or the product of a distinctive kind of *agency* the subject has over the unifying it does: I unify the manifold in such-and-such a way by choosing, or exercising authority over, the rules that guide the unifying activity.

Hegel fundamentally accepts Kant's notion of apperception, calling it 'one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of Reason' (*WL*: 515/12.17–18). On the other hand, he also claims that Kant's 'subjective idealism' 'stops short' at the merely formal or 'empty' categories of the understanding (*EL*: §46/89, §45A/88, §43/86). These claims about Kantian apperception and Kantian formality set the boundary conditions of Pippin's interpretive approach to Hegel's idealism. He shows how cognition, in Hegel, fundamentally involves a spontaneous and rule-governed synthesis of objects that closely follows the Kantian account. But Pippin also shows how Hegel sees Kantian formalism threatening the intelligibility of the (a) *unifying* and (b) *reflecting* activities of apperception (facets (2) and (3), above).

(a) *Kantian formalism and apperceptive unification*: This concerns the opposition of content and form in Kant: i.e., the separability and distinguishability of intuition and concept. Kant maintains that the spontaneous applications of rules of synthesis—i.e., *concepts*—are nevertheless *subject to*, or rationally constrained by, the receptive deliverances of intuition. At the same time, since concepts are purportedly *within* the bounds of reason, and intuitions purportedly lie *outside* the bounds of reason, there is no way for that intuition to provide that rational constraint. This is a *necessary* constraint, since without it, the subject could just carve up the world according to her arbitrary use of rules; it would be, to apply McDowell's (1996) phrase, 'a frictionless spinning in the void'. Thus Pippin argues that Hegel must do away with the Kantian separation between form and content as a separation between concept and intuition: instead, he sees Hegel positing that the deliverances of receptivity are always already 'shot through' with spontaneity, or that receptivity and spontaneity are inseparably but distinguishably operative.

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(b) *Kantian formalism and apperceptive reflexivity*: Again, the 'reflexive' aspect of apperception involves at least an implicit awareness, in any consciousness of an object, of one's being *thus* conscious, i.e., of remembering, imagining, perceiving, etc. Kant also claims about this reflexivity that it is 'the mere form of any thinking, and not itself a thought' (Pippin 1989: 37). Hegel's complaint, here, involves a worry about *self*-knowledge in reflexivity, how apperceptive subjects could possibly *justify* this reflexive awareness. Now to be sure, Hegel's is not the Cartesian concern about some subject's deception about its dream-states and waking-states. It rather concerns the subject's ability to articulate what sorts of things it must be doing in order to *count* to itself as being in one state rather than another. Without that capacity, an agentive knower could not then count as having rational authority over her claims to know, for she would not be able to avow such claims as her own.

Kant demonstrates that any knowing experience relies, as a condition for its possibility, upon a number of subjective activities—of, e.g., the productive imagination and the understanding—and that as a condition for the possibility of *my* knowing, I have to be at least implicitly aware of *being,* at that moment, in a state of productive imagining or of applying the categories, etc. But as the reflective moment is, again, merely the *form* of a thought, and not *itself* a thought, this reflexive awareness lacks an epistemic status; as such, it is vulnerable to sceptical challenge.

In this instance, Pippin's Hegel solves the problem by situating self-conscious reflexivity within an intersubjective space. On this reading, the 'I' counts as an 'I' only in so far as it attains that status within a community of mutually recognizing selves. This means that there is no 'private' mind lying behind the communal status of the 'I', and so no mental activity that has any significance apart from the one it possesses *within* that intersubjective community. From this standpoint, the scepticism about reflexive capacity falls away: it is not as though, if one takes oneself to be judging, and others assess one as judging, one may yet be doing something else *in truth*. To have a certain capacity *just is* to be self-interpretable and intersubjectively interpretable *as* having that reflective capacity.

Thus, Pippin argues, the argumentative trajectory of the *PhG* is largely set by Hegel's solving these problems of Kantian formalism. The solution culminates in 'Absolute Knowledge', where spirit attains 'knowledge of itself' and 'the conditions of human knowledge are "absolutized"' (Pippin 1989: 168). That is, Hegel 'fills out' the formal knowing self by imbuing it with a *justificatory* content no longer subject to sceptical challenge in the ways described above.

So on Pippin's view, Hegelian and Kantian apperception both aim at the same end: the framework of cognition that underlies, as transcendental condition, the constitution of claims to know objects of experience. The dialectical

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progressions of the *PhG* and the greater *Logik* are, then, largely independent of apperception itself, and provide Hegel's preferred means of justifying that framework. So when Hegel refers to apperception as 'one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of [Pure] Reason' (*WL*: 515/12.17–18), Pippin takes this as an indication that Kant's 'profound truth' only needs completing, and that the dialectical procedure Hegel develops is the preferred mode of deduction of those elements of apperception, merely the systematic means for one's attaining absolute knowledge of one's apperception.

III. Apperception and speculative development

That apperception does not play the role that Pippin assigns it follows from a similar, laudatory passage about apperception in the greater *Logik*. Hegel writes:

> [Kant's] original synthesis of apperception is one of the most profound principles for speculative development; it contains the beginning of a true apprehension of the nature of the concept and is fully opposed to any empty identity or abstract universality which is not internally a synthesis. (*WL*: 519–20/12.22)

The key claim is the one tying apperception to speculative development. For this indicates that Hegel's progression beyond Kant involves assigning apperception a *systematic* role; it is not just a framework for the cognition of objects buttressed by a systematic framework, but *part* of that systematic development itself. Describing speculative development in the lesser *Logik*, Hegel writes:

> The *speculative* or *positively rational* apprehends the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the affirmative that is contained in their dissolution and their transition. (*EL*: §82, 131)

The speculative involves not just the construction of knowledge-claims in a Kantian fashion, though Hegel does seem to think of this, for instance, as belonging to speculative development in what we may call its 'intra-systematic' function. In the *Anmerkung* to the above passage, he claims that 'the mere logic of the understanding'—i.e., *intra*-systematic thinking that takes a certain form of thinking for granted—'is contained in the speculative logic and can easily be made out of the latter'. But as the 'mere' indicates, this is a relatively minor function of speculative thinking, especially since this kind of thinking comes about, Hegel says, when one omits 'the dialectical and the rational' (*EL*: §82, 131–32) or the capacity for thinking to criticize the system-level categories that one takes for granted in one's everyday, non-philosophical activity.

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This is to say that apperception is present at the foundation of *all* thinking, not just thinking related to the knowledge of objects. So it is correct that the *PhG* involves the task of buttressing apperception. But this buttressing must then involve not just the ability to better justify claims to know; it must also involve a greater *capacity* to know, as each new moment of speculative thinking overcomes the limitations of the previous one. In this sense, when Hegel says that Kant ceases thought 'at the level of understanding' he means that Kant ceases speculative development at the intra-systematic level, shying away from the renewal of thought that is the proper function of philosophical thinking.

We find the clearest formulation of the systematic function of apperception in the final chapter of the *PhG*. There, Hegel describes the thinking of a spirit that is aware of itself *as* spirit. In thinking about itself, it reflects on its own activity in a process that Hegel calls '*Erinnerung*' or 'recollection'. Here is how he describes it:

> The becoming [of spirit] exhibits a languid movement and succession of spirits, a gallery of pictures, of which each, endowed with the entire wealth of spirit, moves itself so slowly because the self has to run through [*durchdringen*] and assimilate the whole of this wealth of its substance … This knowledge is [spirit's] going-into-itself within which spirit forsakes its existence and gives itself over to recollection [*Erinnerung*]. (*PhG*: §808, 719; translation slightly altered)

The process begins with what Hegel mentions last: spirit enters into recollection when it forsakes its own shape, what Hegel calls spirit's 'externalization [*Entäußerung*]'. In 'going-into-itself', spirit realizes that what it took to be its own shape is in fact *not* its own, and so realizes that, whatever else spirit may be, it is *not that*. So what seemed to constitute the 'inner' shape of spirit was not actually the inner. It goes where it belongs, then, in truth: *outside* spirit.[2]

The forsaken shape then assumes a place in that 'gallery of pictures' which Hegel calls spirit's 'substance', meaning that spirit reconstitutes itself out of this collection of shapes. Spirit draws upon these shapes in the process of recollection or re-internalization (according to Hegel's '*Er-Innerung*' in *PhG*: §808). Recollection is therefore the other side of spirit's externalization of a particular shape, a *creative* activity in which spirit once again runs through and assimilates the previous shapes. This makes *Erinnerung* the process by which spirit reconstitutes itself *at each phase* of transition throughout the systematic progression of shapes in the *PhG*.

According to Pippin's own characterization of apperception, *Erinnerung* is itself an instance of it. This is to say that the process of *Erinnerung* fits neatly into the four features of apperception that we mention, following Pippin, at the outset:

(1) *Identity*: There must be, in some sense, a spirit that is identical through time. If spirit were somehow dis-unified, there would be some shapes

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or moments of development that would not belong to it. But spirit would not have been able to arrive at *this* recollective standpoint in the first place—whichever recollective standpoint it may be—had it not actually worked through those moments.[3] Thus, spirit must be identical through the various phases of that development.

(2) *Unity*: In *Erinnerung*, spirit must figure out how all the various shapes *could* or *do* hang together within its identical self (Hegel says in *PhG*: §797 that spirit must '*gather together* the individual moments' of spirit's development). This is a matter of spirit's self-articulation, how it figures out what it is now by thinking through what has come before. It must form a unified, coherent picture of a new shape of spirit from out of the old ones.

(3) *Reflexivity*: In this moment, above all others, the reflexive moment is necessary. For if spirit did not know it was recollecting, then it would not know that it was thinking about itself or articulating itself, as opposed to some other object of knowledge.

(4) *Spontaneity*: Finally, *Erinnerung* must be a moment of spontaneous activity; for if it were not, then this moment would not be a matter of self-determination, but precisely the opposite: the determination of spirit by something other than spirit. Much of what is shown through the course of the *PhG*, is that spirit is only determined by its own activity; even when spirit seems to be guided by something external, one merely finds spirit *assigning* the external thing—e.g., the claim that 'spirit is a bone' (*PhG*: §343, 303)—the significance it has.

It follows that apperception is a matter of systematic import for Hegel, part of the dialectical progression itself. And while Pippin is correct to argue that demonstrating the conditions for the possibility of apperception is a central task of the *PhG*, there is a further issue with Pippin's reading as concerns the foil or obstacle that must be overcome in its demonstration. For Pippin, that foil is Kant. But the problem that Hegel takes with Kant is merely one form of Hegel's broader worry about subjective attitudes and habits of thinking towards or about philosophical matters. Consider, for instance, the following description of apperception from the lesser *Logik*:

> [The] true nature [of what is thought] is also the *product of my* spirit as thinking subject. It is mine according to my simple universality as of the 'I' *being* simply *at home with itself*, or it is the product of my *freedom*. (*EL*: §23, 55)

Some familiar themes from Pippin's interpretation arise here: that what is true arises as a result of my own, self-determining thinking; that the kind of thinking

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I engage in is inherently reflexive, a product of my self-consciousness; and so the notion that truth is a product of subjective activity. This supports the notion that apperception is fundamentally an *agency*, a *self*-avowal of a claim to know, a commitment *of oneself* in rational space.[4] This tempts us to interpret the notion of freedom Hegel describes as fundamentally involved with agency, for instance, in the following *Anmerkung*. There, Hegel says that

> Thinking immediately involves *freedom*, because it is the activity of the universal, a self-relating that is therefore abstract, a being-with-itself that is undetermined in respect of subjectivity. (*EL*: §23, 55)

But that Hegel is speaking about this sort of positive freedom is not borne out by the rest of that passage. Rather, this sort of freedom belongs to 'an abstract "I", as *freed* from *all particularity*' (*EL*: §23, 55); it is a *negative* freedom that releases one's thought from its attachment to merely contingent or idiosyncratic desires or beliefs. From that standpoint, the 'I' of apperception 'does only what is universal, in which it is identical with all individuals'.

On the one hand, Hegel confirms that negative freedom is merely a condition for the possibility of rational agency, or that one's thoughts are not ultimately answerable only to the desires of the individual thinker, but also to a community of thinkers oriented towards the rationality of one's claimings. But on the other hand, Hegel's emphasis concerns the *attainment* of that space, its realization through and by spirit. In the context of apperception: Pippin's articulation of Hegelian apperception, emphasizing the thinking subject's self-avowing exercise of authority over or responsibility for rational claimings, takes for granted the capacity for a subject to let go of or surrender those proclivities or habits of thought that impede or corrupt that rational exercise.

Hegel focuses specifically on a kind of surrendering, a vulnerability or openness that one must *cultivate within oneself* as a condition for the possibility of the constitution of this rational space. In this regard, the closing passage of this *Anmerkung* is telling and, considering the phenomenological movement that would follow, rather prescient:

> When Aristotle summons us to consider ourselves as *worthy* of conduct of this sort, then the worthiness that consciousness ascribes to itself consists precisely in the giving up of our *particular* opinions and beliefs and allowing the *matter* to hold sway over us. (*EL*: §23, 55)

It is not as though just anyone, regardless of one's commitment to it, can just happen upon truth. Rather, it results from a rigorous self-cultivation and even

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purification[5]—the pure 'I' as thought *purified* of all particularity—and does not occur as a matter of one's mere biological maturation. Much of what makes one's self-cultivation so challenging involves the cultural forces that align against one's attempts at so maturing. Hegel speaks about two such forces in the Preface, and outlines the capacity for free thinking spirit to overcome them. The first is a tendency for one to cling to what is familiar in thought, merely by virtue of its familiarity:

> What is familiar and well-known as such is not really known for the very reason that it is *familiar and well-known*. In the case of cognition, the most common form of self-deception and deception of others is when one presupposes something as well-known and then makes one's peace with it … Thus, for a person to apprehend and to examine matters consists merely in seeing whether he finds everything said by everybody else to match up with his own idea about the matter, that is, with whether it seems that way to him and whether or not it is something with which he is familiar. (*PhG*: §36, 27)

The second concerns the irrational attitude that ensnares thinking when it is confronted with a so-called 'non-actuality', a violation or running aground of what is familiar. He calls one's encounter with non-actuality 'death' because the paradox occasioned by the encounter—it is a moment where one encounters, *as* actual, some heretofore inconceivable occurrence—can only be resolved by abandoning those familiar thoughts. Here is how he describes it:

> Death, if that is what we wish to call that non-actuality, is the most fearful thing of all, and to keep and hold fast to what is dead requires only the greatest force. Powerless beauty detests the understanding because the understanding expects of her what she cannot do. However, the life of spirit is not a life that is fearing death and austerely saving itself from ruin; rather, it bears death calmly, and in death, it sustains itself. Spirit only wins its truth by finding its feet within its absolute disruption. (*PhG*: §32, 28).

Finally, he describes the practice of thought that *allows* spirit to so confront its "death":

> Thoughts become fluid by pure thinking, this inner *immediacy*, taking cognizance of itself as a moment, that is, by pure self-certainty abstracting itself from itself … [I]t consists in giving up the *fixity* of its self-positing as well as the fixity of the purely concrete, which is the I itself in contrast to the distinctions of

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> its content—as the fixity of distinctions which, posited as existing within the element of pure thought, share that unconditionedness of the I. (*PhG*: §33, 29).

To pull itself out of its intellectual torpor, spirit must abstract from its certitude about what it is, and recognize that certitude for what it is: a merely subjective *attitude* towards what it believes, and not an indication about the fixed truth of things. Recognizing this certainty as only a moment, with a finite temporal duration, spirit returns to pure thinking about what it is. In other words, the recognition of the finitude of certainty is the reflexive feature of apperception allowing spirit to confront its own death. And this reflective feature requires a freedom from its own fixed limitations of thinking, its own preconceived notion of itself. On the view I am defending, then, the trajectory of the *PhG* is set by the need to demonstrate the conditions for the possibility of *this* moment of apperception: the possibility for spirit to reflect from a *pure*, unconditioned standpoint upon its own certitude.

IV. Absolution

My claim is that, following Heidegger's reading in his 1930/31 lectures, the notion of *absolution* [*Ab-Lösung*] is the condition for the possibility of the reflective moment of apperception. Here is Heidegger's initial formulation of the term: 'to be ab-solved from what is known does not mean "abandoning" it, but "preserving it by elevating it". This elevation is an absolving which knows; that is, what is known is still known, but in being known it is now changed' (Heidegger 1988: 15).

So Heidegger finds some relationship between the notions of absolution, knowing and '*Aufhebung*' or 'sublation'. That these concepts seem so distantly related raises a perhaps justified suspicion of the kind of interpolation for which Heidegger is so well known. It is not at all clear how one, in being absolved from *knowing* something, may then 'preserve and elevate' it. If I know, for instance, that the sun rose at 6 this morning, this seems to imply some fixity about the matter. If someone should correct me and tell me that the sun in fact rose at 6:30, then there is no 'preserving' or 'elevating' of what is known, and it is no 'changing' of the knowledge. It just turns out that I actually did not know in the first instance, and that first claim is just replaced by the second one.

This example belongs to what Heidegger would call a 'quantitative' knowing: it is one of a series of facts that one may adduce *ad infinitum*, which adduction may arise from a singular way of knowing, what we had called a 'shape of spirit'. These shapes carry with them, at a higher level, claims to know as well; but these are claims to know *about how* to know things or in what way to

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grab hold of knowledge. The shapes of spirit are thus forms of what Heidegger calls 'qualitative' knowledge.

In the realm of qualitative knowledge, it is relevant to talk about *Aufhebung* in a way it is not in quantitative forms of knowing. This is because, in the instance of quantitative knowledge, my thought was only directed at something else: the sunrise. But in the instance of qualitative knowledge, its rejection or replacement requires that I think about my way of thinking itself. I think about what is highest within me: who I am and how I relate to the world. If I may reflect freely and openly on my thinking—and again, this is a big condition that cannot be guaranteed as given from the beginning—then I arrive at a realization: that this way of knowing is actually not a way of knowing at all: it only obscures knowledge from view.

However paradoxical it may seem, that realization is itself a knowledge: in this moment, I come to know that this way of thinking is not knowledge-yielding, a knowledge at the 'second level' about the way knowledge works. And this is an elevation since, before I arrived at this conclusion, this way of thinking was merely an *apparent* knowing. However, in its rejection, it is *actual* knowing; it attains its *true* form: or, I see the appearance of knowledge *as* mere appearance.

We may then say that, when I have *aufgehoben* one way of knowing, I am *absolved* from having to know that way. But this seems, admittedly, a bit too liberal in its usage: for absolution is related, in its strict usage, to sin, and it is difficult to see just how the rejection of a way of knowing could require it. In this vein, then, let us recall that the way of knowing concerns what I take myself to be and how qI construe my relationship to the world. As long as I avow this way of thinking as my own, I carry myself in accordance with it, live according to its dictates. If I should then find that this way of knowing is a false one, I realize that I was *living* falsely, *acting* falsely: I was not being the kind of thing I am supposed to be. I know this even if I have not yet figured out the 'right' or 'true' way to be. To be wrong or untrue in this grand, systematic sense is just to live a life of sin.

Even at this point, however, it may not yet be clear just why I need to be *absolved* of my sin. For it may just be that, having recognized my sin, I resolve never to do that again and proceed to reformulate my way of knowing. But this sort of simple progression is not true to our lived experience of this kind of realization. When one discovers the falsehood of one's way of living, one begins, in Hegel's words, to *despair*. And there is much in this moment that, although it is left unsaid in the text, is only slightly hidden, and is a problem spirit must consistently confront in the course of its own self-development. For instance, recall the claim from *PbG*: §32, quoted above, concerning the need for spirit to 'find its feet within its absolute disruption'. If Hegel feels the need to demonstrate how spirit so stabilizes itself, this can only be because absolute disruption, the total loss of one's orientation to oneself and the world, is a real

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moment of experience for spirit and one that spirit does not yet know how to overcome. Lacking the ability to face that moment, Hegel sees, instead, a desire for spirit to run from the truth, to cling to what has come before, even if it is untrue. On this view, spirit tends to seek the stability or fixity of thought, or just seeks out those moments where it does know how to 'stand'. It can navigate this familiar way of thinking, or has a habitual way of conforming itself to it whereby spirit attains a feeling of relative ease.[6] In this case, the sins of that way of being are multiplied: not only does one live falsely, but one is *aware* of one's falsehood, and continues to live it out anyway.

On the other hand, we may imagine how one might see falsehood as falsehood, and yet still not fully 'stand' in the moment of absolute disruption: spirit may be filled with such bitterness or guilt from its sins that it is blinded to any genuinely new possibility of thinking. In this instance, one also gains a sort of stability, but it is still not one in which spirit truly frees itself from what has come before. We may rather call it a kind of stability by repulsion, the automatic, unthinking inversion of whatever came before. Spirit is, in this case, guided by mere 'reaction', not rethinking or re-creating, and so there is no way for a genuinely rational reformulation of spirit to come to light.

What spirit needs, for such a rational progression beyond what has come before, is to purify itself of these feelings and to ready itself for the re-creation of ways of knowing. This is something that absolution, in its genuine sense, provides. For what one needs, in order for one's reformulated self-conception to genuinely follow the dictates of reason, is for one's thinking to be free from any external or fixed *pre*-determination of one's self. In this sense, to be absolved of sin is to be *freed from it*. One no longer carries that sin with oneself, in the sense that one knows that those who have absolved one will no longer judge one according to it. This corresponds to a removal of limitations constraining one's rational, autonomous formulation of one's self-conception: one's sins keep one tied to the conception of one *as* sinner, and *as* one who has enslaved others, one who has alienated oneself from God, one who has objectified others, and so on. Therefore, as long as one counts as one who has enslaved others, or has not been absolved from that sin, one cannot recreate one's self-conception as one who *does not* enslave others.[7] One is thereby unfree to perform just the kind of reformulation of the self that one needs in order to overcome what has come before.

To be clear, however: absolution is not forgetting. One does not come to count as never *having* sinned. Rather, absolution allows one to see the sin as it is in truth—something that one ought not to do—and frees those absolved to form themselves anew, to internalize the experience of the sin in a way that allows that sin to serve as the ground for the further cultivation of the self.

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V. The absolute

The point I am working towards is that the 'absolutizing' of apperception in the *PhG* has less to do with a final articulation of the dynamics of human agency, and more to do with demonstrating the 'openness' of pure thought that underlies apperception. The condition for the very possibility of that openness, I am arguing, is 'ab-solution [*Ab-Lösung*]', a position that owes much to Heidegger's reading of the *PhG* in his 1930/31 lectures. But that this absolution, which I have described in a roughly Hegelian sense, is ultimately as central to the *PhG* as it is on Heidegger's view, seems at least questionable. For in spite of the centrality Heidegger accords to the term, it appears only three times—all in the verb form, *ablösen*—in the whole *PhG*. So it is not clear, at least immediately, how such a central concept may be used so infrequently.[8]

For one, the significance of a term Hegel employs does not always correlate with its frequency. For instance, the central concept of *Erinnerung* appears, by my count, only seven times; 'despair' (*Verzweiflung*) appears only twice, and 'mutual recognition' (*gegenseitig Anerkennung*) only once. Still, given that Heidegger associates *ablösen* with *aufheben* (a term that appears, seemingly, on every page of the work), we would expect some kind of correlation between the frequencies of use of those two terms, some explanation within Hegel himself of how they stand together. There are no such occurrences in the text.

Nevertheless, that the term appears so infrequently means that we can feasibly examine each instance individually. The term first appears at the end of the section on Antigone, where Hegel speaks of one who is *abgelöst* from the polity. Pinkard renders this 'banished' (*PhG*: §472, 415), which is true to the story being told there. It is thus not clear how one could fairly interpret Hegel, in that context, as meaning 'absolution'. One is not 'absolved' from the kingdom in this case, but 'banished'.

The second usage comes at the end of the section on self-certain morality. There, the 'pure' moral self finds itself turning over, through its contradictions, into the 'impure' or *acting* moral self. What drives this oscillation is, Hegel says, that each side 'displaces [*ablöst*]' the other. This happens to such a great extent, Hegel continues, that eventually the moral consciousness must simply 'give up' (*aufgeben*) its position altogether. Once again, this does not sound much like an absolution at all; for the *ablösen* of each side arises and continues only as long as a tension remains between their opposition, which is only resolved in the moment of *aufgeben*. So it seems that 'displaced' is a proper rendering, and that the additional sense of 'absolution' cannot be ascribed to it.

We find the third appearance of the term in the last paragraph of the text, not long after Hegel describes the practice of *Erinnerung*. There, Hegel provides one final articulation of the results of the *PhG*, summarizing the notions of the absolute concept, absolute knowledge, and the science of phenomenal experience.

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Depicting the 'scientific' arrangement of the various shapes of spirit that constitutes the text, Hegel writes:

> The realm of spirits, having formed itself in this way within existence, constitutes a sequence in which one spirit *ablöste* the other, and each succeeding spirit took over from the other the realm of that spirit's world. The goal of this movement is the revelation of depth itself, and this is *the absolute concept*. (*PhG*: §808, 720).

Pinkard renders '*ablöste*' as 'replaced', which does not quite give the right sense here. For instance, when one replaces the battery in one's phone, the new battery does not stand in any necessary relation to the previous one as its successor, at least not in the relevant sense here: the new battery does not 'take over' from the old battery in the same way that the new shape of spirit takes over from the old one. First, the new battery performs the same function as the old battery, and in the same way; and while the new shape of spirit may need to fulfil the same metaphysical, epistemological or moral self-conceptions, it must do so in a different way than all the other shapes have. Secondly, the new spirit must stand in a necessary and *negative* relation to the old spirit; indeed, the new spirit can only be what it is because the old spirit was what it was: they stand in that dialectical relationship of determinate negation to one another.

Similarly, it does not seem as though 'banished' or 'displaced', which Pinkard uses in the two other instances, are proper fits here. As to the former, one spirit's 'banishing' another makes it sound as though it would no longer be preserved for *Erinnerung*, which, according to the apperceptive criterion of identity, could not be the case. As to the latter, 'displacement' carries with it a connotation of force which, while appropriate for the unsettling oscillation between the pure and concrete selves, does not apply in this instance. For there is no conflict between the old and new spirits that drives the transition; rather, Hegel remarks, the progression involves the old spirit's 'forsaking' itself'' and 'giving itself … over to recollection' (*PhG*: §808, 719, trans. slightly altered from Pinkard's).

Why, then, might 'absolved' be the better fit in this instance? For one, there is the reference to Golgotha at the very end of the paragraph. For another, the themes of 'rebirth' in this last paragraph echo what we said about how absolution permits a *freedom from* what has come before. Hegel says that, 'within each new realm of spirit, it [i.e. spirit] needs to begin all over again in its immediacy and from its immediacy to rear itself once again to maturity'; and in a passage just after that, Hegel speaks of the new spirit as 'newborn'. Again, in order for this starting point to be a 'new' one, there must be a break of some sort with what has come before. Otherwise, as we said above, it is not a new beginning, but is still guided by what has come before. So while there is this necessary connection with the negation of what has come before, there is also a moment of

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self-determination, where spirit decides for itself what kind of significance the negation has for it. The *Ablösung* of each previous form makes possible that moment of self-determination.

This is what Hegel refers to when he says that the goal of this progressive *Ablösung* of spiritual forms is 'the revelation [*Offenbarung*] of depth' which Hegel calls '*the absolute concept*'. The point echoes what we said of absolution above: if one remains resentful of or embittered by what has come before, those previous forms hold an influence over one's thinking, precluding the possibility of free, self-determining thought. Any successive form of thinking would, thereby, still be determined by that old form of thinking, or would be rather superficial relative to the depth that one's thought might reach when freed from any reflective limitation towards what has come before. Therefore, spirit must *absolve* its old forms of their failings, so that spirit might determine itself anew in *das Offene* of thought.

VI. Conclusion

To this point, I have remained largely silent on the question of the relationship between Hegel's and Heidegger's versions of *das Offene*, and so have commented little on central differences that remain unresolved. And while the conclusion to a paper is hardly the appropriate place for that resolution, I would like to gesture towards the general structure that resolution might take.

I have sought, however subtly, a connection between the attitude of absolution and the notion of *ek-sistent Dasein* in Heidegger's *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*. In both instances, *das Offene* opens for one that, in a certain sense, 'readies' oneself for it. For Heidegger, the Hegelian version remains, in a fundamental sense, enclosed. Even in the standpoint of Absolute Knowing, Spirit remains *not yet ready*, or *in-sistent* upon or within a *particular metaphysical interpretation* of *Dasein* as Cartesian *Ego* from which Heidegger's *Dasein*, at least in principle, may free itself. But the ultimate dynamic that Heidegger offers between *das Offene*, *in-sistence*, and *ek-sistence* is presaged in Hegel's Jena *PhG* as I interpret it here.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely in the extreme that Heidegger would endorse the Hegelian relationship between absolution and apperception in his own work: the self-conscious 'I' belongs to that same, Cartesian interpretation of Being that Heidegger rejects. But I wonder whether such a thorough rejection may succeed in this instance, and it seems apt to speak, at least roughly, of what Pippin calls the 'persistence of subjectivity' (Pippin 2005). For in spite of all his protestations, Heidegger's retrieval of the Greek *logos* as 'gathering' still ties thinking inextricably to a *principle* of unity akin to the form of apperceptive speculation I have articulated at the core of Hegel's project. And even though Heidegger does not articulate 'gathering' in the transcendental terms of the German Idealists, there is

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still this similarity: gathering always involves a 'letting lie before' thinking, or is always a gathering of what *opens* itself to thinking.

In this sense, then, it seems as though there is still room to argue, *against* Heidegger, for a metaphysics of the self-conscious subject-as-willing. This is especially so when that willing appears at the root of thinking; for *die Sachen* cannot 'gather themselves', but require a 'gatherer' to *carry out* the gathering. On the other hand, this gathering requires a moment of *Gelassenheit*, without which *die Sachen* are not thinkable in all their depth. Thus, what I have argued here as the properly Hegelian view, combining agency and *seinlassen* as conditions for the possibility of apperceptive thinking, may turn out to have a philosophical viability defensible against both the Kantian and Heideggerian accounts of agency in thinking. But that is a matter for discussion on another occasion.

Joshua Wretzel
Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Germany
jwretzel@gmail.com

Notes

[1] Abbreviations:

PhG = Hegel, G. W. F. (forthcoming), *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2013 draft available at: https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/21288399/Phenomenology%20translation%20English%20German.pdf

WL = Hegel, G. W. F. (2010), *The Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Citations include first the page number in the English translation, followed by '/' and the page number in the relevant German edition.

EL = Hegel, G. W. F. (1991), *The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett.

[2] Nevertheless, the externalized spirit is 'outside' only in one sense. It remains 'preserved' as a memory; it is just something through which spirit no longer animates itself.

[3] Of course, there is a lot riding on this claim that even Hegelians tend to find implausible; specifically, the argument of spirit's 'identity' relies on the *completeness* of the series of shapes of which Hegel speaks.

[4] Perhaps this point requires some clarification, since it sounds as though I am overlooking much of what Pippin has to say about the necessary role of *intersubjectivity* in (his) Hegel's account of epistemic agency. The things I say about self-avowal, agency and self-commitment are, in this context, only one side of a coin. On the other side, there is one's *counting to oneself and others* as a variously avowing and committing agent. This is the intersubjective part and has to do with what I speak of in section II (b) above.

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[5] I am referring specifically to the passage in the Introduction to the *PhG* where he describes the progression as 'the path of natural consciousness which presses forward towards true knowledge, or … the path of the soul as it wanders through the series of the ways it takes shape, as if those shapes were stations laid out for it by its own nature so that it … might *purify* [*läutere*; also, 'reform'; emphasis mine] itself into spirit …'. (*PhG*: §77, 73).

[6] Even this 'ease' is, in a certain sense, illusory: again, Hegel says in *PhG*: §32 that clinging to 'what is dead requires only the greatest force'.

[7] As this example perhaps demonstrates, one cannot merely wait for the tide of history to deliver oneself from his sins. There is a responsibility, on the part of the sinner, to make himself deserving of that social status (the claim of 'worthiness' from *EL*: §23, resonates here). On the other hand, the social and political conditions that surround some sinners, e.g., contemporary American criminals, *preclude the very possibility* of absolution. In those instances, we should acknowledge a responsibility of others to recognize the absolved *as* absolved.

[8] See also Hodgson (2005) on the connection between the German *entlassen* and the Latin *absolvere*, 'to loosen from' or 'let go'.

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