doi:10.1017/hgl.2025.8 *Hegel Bulletin*, 47/1, 35–60
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On Gaps. Is There a Politics of Absolute Knowing?

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Abstract

The final pages of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* announce a particularly fraught transition. Hegel is describing a move from the concrete world of social and political institutions to the sublimated spheres of art, religion and philosophy—the transition from 'objective' to 'absolute' spirit. This transition is intricate, partly because, like all transitions, it works in both directions—in this case, from politics to culture and back again. Transition is always difficult to grasp in Hegel, not least because it takes such a variety of appearances: as an inexorable process, as an unexpected leap, or as an invisible movement that seems to take place behind our backs at moments of greatest stalemate. But this particular transition is especially challenging—not simply because it is so unprepared but also because it complicates the idea of the absolute as consummation of the encyclopaedic system. Hegel clearly explains why absolute spirit requires objective spirit. Art, religion and philosophy all depend on a world of pre-existing social practices from which they must nonetheless wrest a special kind of independence. But why the reverse? Why does objective spirit need to surpass itself in forms of spirit that overreach and may even, as we will argue, undermine it? What is the insufficiency in politics that requires the supplement of cultural practices that will destabilise it? Conversely, what is the specific autonomy that absolute spirit requires for its absolution, and what are the political stakes and risks of this autonomy?

I. Absolute transition

The final pages of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* announce a particularly fraught transition. Hegel is describing a move from the concrete world of social and political institutions to the sublimated spheres of art, religion and philosophy—the transition from 'objective' to 'absolute' spirit. This transition is intricate, partly because, like all transitions in Hegel, it works in both directions—in this case, from politics to culture and back again. Transition is always difficult to grasp in Hegel,

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not least because it takes such a variety of forms. It can sometimes appear—the 'textbook Hegel'—as an inexorable process in which we already know that an end is to come: even if we do not know exactly *what* is to come or *when* or *why* it must come, we are certain that *something* will come … and we trust (this trust is constitutive and explicitly built into the system) that we will also eventually learn the reason for its late arrival. But transition can also sometimes appear unexpectedly as a leap to a place that can be determined only through the leap itself, and where we feel caught in a peculiar, transitionless transition: something moves us but at the same time does not take us from one fixed place to another, from one time to another. And sometimes transition occurs invisibly, as if behind our backs, at moments of seemingly greatest stalemate or stasis. These are all disorientations we regularly experience when we engage in dialectical thinking. But this particular transition is especially challenging—not simply because it is so unprepared but because it will complicate the idea of the absolute as completion or consummation of the encyclopaedic system.

Why does the *Encyclopaedia* not simply end with the triumphant consummation of objective spirit as it completes its circular itinerary through world history (§§ 548–52)?[1] Why does objective spirit need this cultural supplement? Has the state not already accomplished the essential move from substance to subject—and of course vice versa? By Hegel's own reckoning, the modern state is the exemplary form of a social substance that has thoroughly subjectified itself. By providing itself with objective and perpetually self-correcting mechanisms of self-consciousness and recognition—from the law court and army, from the bureaucrats to the infamous 'I will' of the monarch's signature—objectivity has fulfilled and overcome itself by making explicit the ongoing claims of human agency: social substance can finally grasp itself as subject. Conversely, subjectivity has fulfilled and overcome itself by making explicit its own need for objective institutions: subject can finally be grasped as substance. But there appears to be something deficient in this reciprocal political transition between substance to subject. Why can objective spirit not complete its own work of self-subjectification? Why this need for an extra dose of subjectivity—a shot of hypersubjectification, in effect—and why is it the specific task of art, religion and philosophy to supply this? Is there not something oxymoronic in this notion of an *absolute supplement* which would reduce the absolute to the status of a supplementary appendage?

We can see the *architectonic* motivation for the move from subjective spirit to objective spirit to absolute spirit,[2] just as we can see the architectonic motivation for the move, within absolute spirit, from art to religion to philosophy; or for the move, within art, from symbolic to classical to romantic; or for the move, within religion, from natural religions to religions of spiritual individuality and to Christianity and finally within philosophy itself, from Greek to mediaeval

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to modern philosophy. The form of the encyclopaedic system consistently calls out for this self-replicating triplicity. But what is the *philosophical* reason for this move? Hegel has repeatedly explained why absolute spirit requires objective spirit—in a word, why culture both presupposes and must posit a concrete political setting. Art, religion, and philosophy all depend on a world of pre-existing material practices from which they must nonetheless wrest a special kind of independence.[3] By Hegel's own logic, absolute spirit cannot be spirited away from its objective social setting to the imaginary purities of l'art pour l'art, monasticism, or the ivory tower, even while its conditions and effects are never immediately political. This raises the question of how these superstructural institutions intervene in the social-political sphere that serves as its ground or 'basis'.

But why the reverse? Why does objective spirit need to surpass itself in forms of spirit that overreach and may even, as we will argue, undermine it? What is the insufficiency in politics that requires the supplement of cultural practices that will destabilise it? Conversely, what is the specific autonomy that absolute spirit requires for its absolution, and what are the political stakes and risks of this autonomy? What does it mean that the absolute forms of spirit can be neither absolved from nor contained by their objectively historical institutions?[4] In the modern age, these would be the church, the museum and the university, only the first of which gets any significant treatment by Hegel. Hegel's silence on the museum, and in particular the university, is all the more notable given that these modern institutions were both coming into prominence at the very moment and in the very city (indeed, in the very university) that Hegel is delivering his lectures on Absolute Spirit. In the last years of Hegel's life, Karl Friedrich Schinkel was commissioned by Friedrich Wilhelm III to build the new (now the 'old') museum.in Berlin. The original *Universität zu Berlin,* renamed the Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin in 1828, when Hegel was delivering his final lectures (and renamed the Humboldt University after WWII) opened its doors in 1810.[5] We will return to this startling silence.

The transition from objective to absolute spirit is also peculiar because it has an abruptness that is almost unique in Hegel's system. This abruptness is persistent from Frankfurt to Berlin, although it will take different forms as his thought develops. Each time Hegel moves between the two spheres of spirit, a gap opens up. The climactic move to the absolute sometimes appears as a leap, sometimes as a response to an impasse, sometimes as a simple regression, sometimes silently, as if there were no distance to be traversed at all, or as if the transition had somehow already occurred. Often, the move takes us to a destination that is elusive, indeterminate or underdetermined. But however we arrive at this endpoint, the transition itself is consistently indicated with breathtaking brevity. The gap itself points to a dissonance, discordance or interference between the political and the cultural—a dissonance that must conceal or muffle itself. Each time, Hegel

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will obscure, circumvent, efface and plug this gap, in a variety of ways. We will identify three different kinds of gaps, appearing at crucial instalments of Hegel's work from Frankfurt through Jena to Berlin, and will develop a typology of these gaps: fictitious cuts, conceptual and historical impasses, unexplained swerves, inconspicuous shifts and shuffles. What all these gaps have in common is that they each point to an unsettling and even dismantling of the objective social-political order. Culture intervenes in the objective world, not by constructing or adding something new, but rather by a subtraction, undoing or deconstructing of what is already 'done' or accomplished. We will therefore also have to develop a typology of these various modes of undoing.

II. Frankfurt, 1797 : 'We must even go beyond the state'

In the 'Earliest system-programme' of German Idealism' (1796/1797),[6] Hegel seems to want to leap away from the political domain altogether. 'We must… go beyond the State!' Freedom is not to be found in the political sphere, at least insofar as we identify this sphere with state institutions. To redeem the idea of humanity as a living, self-moving organism we need to conceive of a non-state collective. The idea of the human 'gives us no idea of the state, since the state is a mechanical thing' (*ESP*: 28)[7]—it treats 'free men as cogs in a machine' (*ESP*: 28). (Hegel is writing in the immediate aftermath of the French Terror, and the Schillerean resonances are palpable.) Freedom requires leaving behind the objective world of 'state constitution, government, legal system' (*ESP*: 28). We must abandon the non-world we inhabit to create a completely new world—'an entire *world*'—'the one and only thinkable creation out of nothing' (*ESP*: 28).[8] We must decreate the existent world and initiate a radically secular creatio ex nihilo. But how do we turn the objective social world into such a nothing? We unmake this world by unmasking it, by revealing its own nullity—'stripping it naked' (*entblösen*). This is a historical task: by working through the '*history of mankind*' (*ESP*: 28), we learn to 'strip naked the whole wretched human work of the state' (*ESP*: 28). We expose the artifice of the machine and thereby remove its veneer of natural legitimacy. This conceptual nullification clears the ground for the first creation proper. Art, *Dichtung*, in the broad sense, was to be the primary vehicle of this new *creatio,* and there is a hint of political promise. As 'the teacher of mankind' (*Menschheit*), art performs the collectivising function that (statist) politics has notably failed to deliver.

Curiously, Hegel's later, more well-known hierarchy of art–religion–philosophy reverses the sequence that we find in Frankfurt. Whereas in Berlin, thirty years later, art will be superseded by religion and religion by philosophy, in Frankfurt, art is privileged as the foundation for a new mode

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both of religion ('a religion of the senses') and of philosophy ('an aesthetic philosophy for the 'people [*Volk*]' and 'a new mythology of Reason' (*ESP*: 29)). After leaving the existing social world, we have to return to it in order to recreate it, somewhat like Plato's philosopher descending back to the cave. Only in this recreation or repetition is the world created in the first place. This is why there can be no common measure between the existing objective world and the absolute: we must depart from the objective world, but we cannot derive this move from this world itself. The relation between the objective and the absolute can only appear as a non-relation—a gap.

Gap production is thus the precondition for the creation of a new world. One has to undo the existing non-world and forget it ever existed—there is a leap to an unprecedented new reality. As the agent of this undoing, 'art' thus assumes a quasi-revolutionary function. But this leap itself is constitutively occluded: there is also a necessary suturing or smudging of the gap, in that the very capacity for this leap is grounded in the givenness of living nature. What enables and motivates the move from the objective world to its absolute recreation is *nature*—in this case human nature. Against the dead mechanism of the state, the idea of humanity is brimming with vitalist ideas of liveliness, intensity and organicity—an '*equal* development of *all* powers' (*ESP*: 29). We can reanimate and remake the world only on the condition that we liberate our own 'aesthetic power' (*Kraft*) and 'aesthetic sense' (*Sinn*) (*ESP*: 29). In this act of liberation 'no power shall any longer be suppressed …!' (*ESP*: 29)

III. Jena, 1807: 'going over to a different world'

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is registering a specific historical-political failure which opens onto a conceptual impasse. Unlike in Frankfurt, there is no talk of 'cogs' or 'machines' and the problem is not the state per se. The problem is rather that, from the perspective of the post-revolutionary present (that is, in Germany, the not-yet-revolutionary present), the state form has exhausted its possibilities. With this exhaustion the whole question of politics has become unthinkable. This exhaustion is both philosophical and historical, which is to say both that history is explicitly infused with meaning and that experience must explicitly incorporate the demands of its own historicity. This is why in the 'Spirit' chapter phenomenological development for the first time takes on a curiously chronological and geographical shape. Without naming names or places, the trajectory of Spirit can be transparently mapped onto the concrete history of (Hegel's patch of) the world: Greece, Rome, France, Germany … Hegel's historical purview, in 1807, is of course manifestly Eurocentric, as it will continue to be to the end,

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although he has not yet developed the conceptual apparatus to try to legitimise this racism. This will have to wait for Berlin.

The point is that by 1806, the moment he reaches the historical present of writing, Hegel will have rehearsed every political experiment that he is capable of thinking—from the ancient city state through Empire and the ancien régime to the French revolutionary 'reign of terror' and its counterrevolutionary fall-out—with no conceivable alternative in view. In 1806, Spirit's journey grinds to a halt without having reached its destination. There is no present to inhabit, no past to which to return, and no future for which to strive. With the revolutionary Terror, Spirit has arrived at a 'self-destroying reality' (*sich selbst zerstörende Wirklichkeit*) (*PhG*: §595). It is marooned in a political void, an *Unwirklichkeit* from which there is no conceivable exit or possible development. Having failed to work out its essential problem on its own terms, having failed to articulate the objective conditions of social existence—in short: having failed to concretely establish the speculative identity of the 'I' and the 'We'—Spirit has come to a halt. The narrative simply runs out of steam. History, as *Wirkungsgeschichte,* has not reached an end, conclusion or consummation—only a dead-end where Spirit finds itself out of work and unworkable. This impasse, for Hegel, is not a subjective failure, not an error in judgement, tactic or strategy, but an objective one. The dialectic is stuck in an endless negative loop, forced to keep remembering, repeating, reworking and unworking its own breakdown—to keep dismantling and undoing everything it has accomplished and elaborated, including even the form of its own self-undoing.

What happens next? There is a transition—abrupt, unexpected and all the more perplexing in that the move seems to take us from nothing to nothing, from nowhere to nowhere, from one unreality to another. Spirit transits from the realm of failed politics to the 'other realm' of (Kantian) morality, where, in a last ditch effort at self-affirmation, it will attempt to inscribe its experience of failure into the very form of subjectivity itself. Morality is the embellishment and absolutization of political failure—a continuation of (un)politics by other means. Nothing in the coda of the 'Spirit' chapter will resolve the problem bequeathed by the Terror. With the passage to Morality, Spirit rather slides from one *Unwirklichkeit* to another, it 'goes over to another land'—from the killing fields of France to the anaesthetized world of German philosophy—the 'non-actuality' (*PhG*: 347, trans. modified) (*Unwirklichkeit*) where the unconditional moral will resolves to negate or suspend the world in an act of self-sabotaging self-assertion. In the historical muddle that follows (post-Kantian idealism, Fichtean conscience, romantic genius) and its seemingly more organised successor forms (art/religion, absolute knowing), Hegel is rehearsing aversion of absolute spirit in which we can see an early prefiguration of the Berlin triad. But this new world is already unsettled by the same lack, the same unreality, that had been perturbing objective

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reality. The absolute is already undone, and undoing will be made absolute. This is perhaps why Hegel will end the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* with a whiff of Nietzschean-style active forgetting: Spirit must articulate itself 'as if it were to have learned nothing from the experiences of preceding spirits …' (*PhG*: 466) Philosophy is left with the infinite task of registering its own undoing—a task that must, however, shed its appearance of the Kantian bad infinite.

IV. Berlin, 1820

In contrast to Hegel's Frankfurt account, where the state appears as a machine to be escaped, and in contrast to the *Phenomenology*, where the state has exhausted its capacities without any evident alternatives, the state, in Berlin, becomes the essential form in which history explicitly completes itself. History is still taken to be the manifestation of freedom but freedom itself is no longer defined as the undoing of objectivity: it is no longer identified with freeing itself of all that determines freedom, including the very form of freedom. It is identified rather as a collective doing, *Tun*, an ongoing production and reproduction of the institutions organising the public sphere. History is therefore explicitly defined as state-history. And the *state* (*Staat*) is organised into *estates* (*Stände*) within which the members of the state learn to act—to self-consciously stand (*stehen*), to take a stance, and to stabilise this stance so as to confirm and legitimate their collective actions. But the state as such, any individual state, cannot be the last word. *Omnis determinatio est negatio*: the state's spatial and temporal limits must be marked, its borders established, every state must contend with a plurality of states, each with its specific geographical and historical boundaries. This is why the exposition of objective spirit culminates in the concept of 'world history' [*Weltgeschichte*]. That there can never be only one state, and that no one state can be the final state, *even though every state will inevitably appear to itself as such*, is the principle of world-history. This is why the history of the world is the history of war.

World history is the last moment of objective spirit in both the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Philosophy of Right*. As such it functions as the hinge between objective and absolute spirit—it both bridges and effaces or plugs that gap. Universal history plugs the gap it opens up by presenting itself naturalistically as the chronological-geographical-cosmological progression of the ages of the world: from youth through adulthood to old age, from primitive to advanced societies, from east to west. World-history transforms the contingency of spirit's movement through space and time into a retroactive necessity that has the inexorability of a natural process. History is thus another name for nature. Thus Hegel's notorious idea of the historical trajectory of civilization progressing from the Orient through the Greek and Roman to the 'absolute west' of Hegel's day. Needless to say,

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only a portion of the world is granted even this problematic historical status. Hegel stuffs the gap between objective and absolute spirit with a naturalised, even biologized, form of historico-structural progress. Even though universal history, as the history of freedom, is an explicitly subjectivized history, it relies on an objectified form of movement—steps, stages, the succession of state after state. Historical time is chronology and chronology is geography: time as such is doubly spatialized. This naturalism will also invade the structure of absolute spirit itself, as we will see.

The encyclopaedic texts are different in form from their predecessors and are products of a peculiar form of collective authorship. Hegel's assistants were rewriting and editing parts under Hegel's supervision[9]—a kind of bureaucratic collectivity that embodies the conditions and structure of the university discourse. The presentational form reflects this discursive structure: the *Encyclopaedia* is organised in paragraphs—even though in later editions, additions and Hegel's own handwritten remarks will spill into the spaces between the paragraphs—without attempting to derive or conceptually account for the specific transition from one paragraph to the next. Tethered to the sequence of natural numbers, we are steadily on the move, but each step is indifferently measured and the interval between each paragraph and each section is formally interchangeable with every other interval. The *Encyclopaedia* presents an ordered form of '*Nebeneinander*'—a juxtaposition of contiguous paragraphs analogous to the externality that Hegel identifies with the most elementary determinations of nature.[10] The climactic transition from objective spirit to absolute spirit—technically, the transition from §552 to §553 in the last edition of the *Encyclopaedia*[11]—is formally unmarked. On the page, it looks like just one more step, subsumed, like every other transition, under the naturalistic regime of number. From a numerical perspective, the transition to absolute spirit is formally the same, of no greater or lesser import, than any other transition—indeed if it can still be understood as a transition at all. What accounts for such a levelling of categorical distinctions?

Something has shifted from Jena to Berlin. In his earlier writings, Hegel had stressed the paradoxical motionlessness of the final move to the absolute: 'the progression that has been going on comes to a halt' (*JS*: 173).[12] This transitionless transition was different from all other transitions—a gap explicitly appeared. By the time of the *Encyclopaedia*, this gap has been formally glossed over: progression is continuous, homogeneous, with each transition equivalent to every other transition. This appearance of ceaseless process has contributed to Hegel's reputation as a philosopher of 'mobilism' (to use Gérard Lebrun's phrase) (Lebrun 1972: 112). The paragraph structure of the *Encyclopaedia* makes transitional gaps at once hyper-visible and invisible: they become the structuring principle of encyclopaedic representation—at once highlighted and occluded by

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the same logic. The discourse manifestly hops from paragraph to paragraph, from one number to the next; the discontinuity is underscored, and yet, for this reason, every gap becomes indistinguishable from any other gap. Difference is reduced to a numerical distinction. The specific difference of every transition—the gap between the gaps, so to speak—is homogenised or invisibilized. At a formal level, Hegel plugs the gap with gaps.

At a substantive level, the formal aspect of this encyclopaedic practice of gap-filling is paralleled by the conceptual inflation or overdoing of what is or has been, in fact, objectively accomplished. In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel presents something that is more or other than is simply 'objective' or 'real' (in the ordinary or non-speculative sense): he systematically depicts a state that did not historically exist at the time of writing. Yet this is not a blueprint for a future state: the owl of Minerva is not in the business of presenting prescriptions, predictions or otherworldly or utopian aspirations. Rather, Hegel presents a kind of a hyper-objectivity wherein too much, much more than actually exists, is presented as if existent.[13] This political form, as Marx will later say of the Paris Commune, is identified with a specific model of the state that does not in fact correspond to the existing historical state of Hegel's day.[14] Few of the institutions identified in the *Philosophy of Right* existed in Prussia at the time of writing: bicameral parliament, jury system, freedom of the press, even constitutional monarchy…

This is a reminder that we are reading the *philosophy* of objective spirit, rather than a journalistic report on current historical affairs. The philosophy of objective spirit overdoes or outdoes itself in producing excessive forms of objectivity that override the antithesis of 'is' and 'ought'.[15] This also gives us an insight into the modal complexities of Hegel's famous *Doppelsatz* regarding the speculative identity of the actual and the rational.

This overdoing is reflected in the form of the *Philosophy of Right* itself—a supplementary textbook that seems to have been extruded from the 'objective spirit' section of the third and final volume of the *Encyclopaedia*, to have broken free from that circle and taken on a life of its own. It is notable that *Philosophy of Right* was the only instructional material from Berlin to be published as a stand-alone textbook alongside the *Encyclopaedia*. For all Hegel's other courses, students were supplied with only the highly abridged text of the three-volume *Encyclopaedia*. Some parts of the *Encyclopaedia* are conspicuously more abbreviated than others—nowhere more so than the concluding section of the *Encyclopaedia* on Absolute Spirit (§§ 556–77). The students in Hegel's courses in the *Philosophy of Art* or *Philosophy of Religion* or the *History of Philosophy* were equipped with only a few summary paragraphs to guide them over the course of the entire year—by far the skimpiest textbook material supplied by Hegel for any of his courses. Only the objective spirit section of the *Encyclopaedia* received such a detailed textual supplement,[16] and only the (immediately adjacent) absolute spirit

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section is presented in such elliptical form. This expansion and this contraction are equally startling, and they are connected: Why did Hegel decide that this one section of the *Encyclopaedia* needed such gargantuan expansion and that the following section called for such intense miniaturisation? Is there a deficiency in the encyclopaedic form that makes it both insufficient for political philosophy, requiring such endless expansion and supplementation, and either redundant or impossible for the exposition of culture, requiring such severe abridgement? The students in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* lectures are loaded with an abundance of reading matter to guide them through their studies, while those studying art, religion and philosophy are basically abandoned to their own devices, left to navigate without a map or compass. The students are left to make sense of the lectures on their own, with only their own transcriptions to rely on. Why does Hegel supply no written guidance to help his students navigate the climax of the system? Is there something about the absolute that eludes university discourse?

It is also notable that the *Encyclopaedia* section on art-religion-philosophy is not only abridged but poorly correlated with the materials of the corresponding lectures on art, religion and philosophy: there is a puzzling discrepancy between the textbook and the classroom lectures for which the textbook is ostensibly to serve as guide. A discrepancy between map and territory, between writing and speech. The distinction between classic and symbolic art, for example, which fill hours upon hours, weeks upon weeks, of the *Aesthetics* lectures, is announced in a single sentence in the 1830 *Encyclopaedia*; the religion section lacks the historical purview of 'world religions' offered in the lectures on *Religion* and is devoted to Christianity only; and the section on philosophy is essentially preoccupied by the (religious) problem of pantheism, a relatively minor problem in the *History of Philosophy* lectures.

Equally significant is the lack of disciplinary discreteness in the encyclopaedic account of absolute spirit—and in particular the inordinate role religion plays in each of its three spheres. Just as religion is not confined to the category of absolute spirit, but also occupies a foundational institutional place in objective spirit—the Church, both visible and 'invisible', uniquely straddles the boundary between objective and absolute spirit—so too, within the realm of absolute spirit, religion itself is not contained by the discrete category of 'religion'. Religion is not circumscribed as simply one of the three stages of absolute spirit; it exceeds its own boundaries, spilling backwards and forwards into the adjacent spheres of art and philosophy, both negatively defining their terms and limits and flooding them with its own content.

In the *Encyclopaedia,* art is essentially framed as not-yet religion, and philosophy as essentially religion in another form. (This startlingly undialectical separation of 'form' and 'content' is already latent in the transition to Absolute Knowing in the *Phenomenology*, where philosophy is said to express the identical

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content of religion in a superior form. The issue of course will continue to fuel the endless debates over Hegel's existential and professional commitments and to his status as an essentially Christian philosopher.) The trichotomy of intuition–representation–concept (*Anschauung–Vorstellung–Denken*) underpins this triadic structure of Absolute Spirit.[17] And yet religion does not stay in its place as the middle-term of the triadic absolute. Far from being a 'vanishing mediator', it invades and infects the adjacent forms of absolute spirit, overwhelms and occupies too much space throughout the exposition of the absolute. It is exorbitant both in its own sphere and in the surrounding spheres. Philosophy, in contrast, which of course is assigned the privilege of being the final stage of the absolute, is conspicuously given the shortest shrift and occupies the least amount of physical and conceptual space. Even when it appears under its own name, as the finale of the system, it is given the least room to articulate itself: it is invaded by para-philosophical (i.e. religious) questions and beset by the problem of distinguishing itself from religion. Hegel devotes most of the section nominally dedicated to philosophy obsessing about pantheism: only in the very last paragraph does he return to the true 'concept of philosophy' as the 'self-thinking idea, the knowing truth, the logical …' By the time of the final edition of the *Encyclopaedia*, the exposition of 'philosophy' proper has shrunk to essentially one page.[18]

How are we to understand this formal and substantial diminution of the absolute, and how are we to understand the specific shrinkage of philosophy within the sphere of the absolute itself? What accounts for this redoubled brevity? If objective spirit is, as we have argued, characterised by an *Über-tun*, both an overdoing and an overdoneness, the task of absolute spirit will be to reverse this excess by the practice of a systematic *Abtun*—an undoing that will be reflected in the increasingly shrunken form of absolute spirit itself. How do we transition from the inflated over-abundance of objective spirit to the diminished and diminishing sphere of absolute spirit? As we have seen, at the level of content, the move from 'objective' overdoing to 'absolute' un-doing was enabled by the deeply problematic concept of universal history (*Weltgeschichte*). Is there an equivalent to this gap-filling operation at the level of form?

V. Overdoing and undoing

What and where are artists, priests, philosophers objectively? In the *Philosophy of Right* objective spirit is organised into a series of estates [*Stände*]: 1. the immediate or substantial estate that is dedicated to the cultivation of its own land— its real estate—and which is dependent on the products of nature; 2. the reflective or the formal estate that brings the formed natural material into relationship with the

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needs and works of others and therefore subdivides into the estates of artisans, manufacturers and businessmen; 3. the general estate that relies on private assets or state sponsorship and fulfils political-representative functions. Where are the artists, priests and philosophers? If the *Stand*, the estate, organises and partitions the appearance of objective spirit, what does it mean that the institutions of absolute spirit do not form an estate, and as such cannot appear within objective spirit? Why are the professions of absolute spirit not integrated into the universal estate? Conversely: What is a universal estate which is not an absolute estate? what is a universality that stops short of the absolute? And what is an absolute that exceeds, undoes or falls away from the universal?

We noted earlier that Hegel does not provide any detailed account of how the state organises the institutions of absolute spirit—excepting that of the church. Even though he remarks that in modernity 'the universities are our churches', and more flippantly that reading the morning newspaper is 'our' (or his) daily prayer, he is remarkably silent about the newly founded university (where he taught) and the new Schinkel Museum (which he certainly visited). That such an account is missing is in itself philosophically significant, but it also makes it difficult to determine how these 'absolute' processes of undoing might be objectively realized. We could say that the practices of absolute spirit do not form a (objective) *Stand* but rather allow for an *Ab-Stand*—an Absolute *Stand* which is also a non-*Stand*, an unstable and negative stance that instals a distance (*Abstand*) from the objective conditions of existence—a distance, that is, from the state. The function of this non or un-estate is not to do something or to act in common (as the estates operate), but rather to undo things in common, *abtun*—to undo common things and to redefine the meaning of the common. The absolute is the *Abstand* and *Abtun* that moves away from and undoes state institutions that have, by definition. naturalised themselves: an institution is the essential medium of spirit's self-naturalisation.)

According to the famous allegory of the Owl of Minerva, absolute spirit in its highest guise as philosophy arrives at the scene 'only when actuality has completed [*vollendet*] its process of formation and attained its finished state' (*PR*: 16). Objective spirit's ultimate institution, the state, is expressed conceptually as 'the fully developed [*vollendete*] idea of the will' (*PR*: 53). Free individuals collectively create a world which they understand as the expression of their own freedom, and therefore 'a mature [*vollendetem*] state … knows what it wills and knows it as something thought (or conceptualized [*begriffen*]' (*PR*: 254).

Ethical life in the state [*Sittlichkeit*] is 'the completion [*Vollendung*] of objective spirit'. It is 'self-conscious *freedom* having become *nature*' (*VRPH1*: 183).[19] The state is the 'natural world of spirit' [*Naturwelt des Geistes*] (*VRPH3*: 743), in which all its members are autonomously developed but at the same time exist within the unity of the state as 'the complete organism [*vollendeter Organismus*]'

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(*VRPH4*: 635). The state is the self-conscious institution that reminds us of the fact that freedom not only emerges *out* of nature, simultaneously as a natural capacity and as a cancellation or overcoming of nature, but can only become what it is by transforming nature into second nature. All nature, *for spirit,* is—structurally—second nature: our freedom consists in grasping this. The state is freedom naturalised. This is why the philosophy of the right from its earliest (even pre-publication) conception has always been a philosophy of *natural* right. The published *Outlines* are a '*Naturrech*t oder Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse': fundamental floor plans of a state in which rights—the law as such—cannot but appear as *natural* rights. What does this imply for the nature of absolute spirit?

Our hypothesis is that the task of absolute spirit is to denaturalize the state and thus to destabilize and reorient the terms of freedom. Absolute spirit is the 'unfinishing', *Unvollendung*, of the established (objective) *Vollendung*—an active incompletion or undoing of what is complete, finished or 'done'. Not only does absolute spirit arrive too late to make a constructive contribution to political reality. It actively undoes this reality by showing that this is *not all* there is: it subtracts the state's semblance of totality—and it does so by affirming that there *is* a not-all in actuality.

Philosophy is in this sense 'the Sunday of life' (*KR*: 412)[20] where man desists from and undoes all worldly business [*der Mensch sich dieser Geschäfte abtut*]. (*KR*: 412) Echoing Aristotle, Hegel calls this a form of luxury,[21] *Luxus*, but this is a luxury profoundly different from the one he identifies in objective spirit as a symptom of decay or decadence, and which is exemplified by the excesses of wealth. It is rather a peculiar type of negation—not a surplus or addition but rather a subtraction that negates the forms of activity that dominate the existing objective world. It adds a minus that dashes to pieces the apparently natural objective necessities. After the deed, the *Tat* and *Tun,* comes the de-activating or absolving *Abtun.* The practices of absolute spirit are all practices of undoing or *Ungeschehenmachen*—a form of destruction or even deconstruction (*Abbau*). They can in this sense be classified as 'para-practices'—even as parapraxes—occurring adjacently to the objective world in a kind of Nebenwelt or para-world, even a para-dise. *Para-dies* in German, punning slightly, is a 'beside-this', strictly speaking neither a *Diesseits* or a *Jenseits*. This might force a revision of the standard reading of the 'this' of sense-certainty. Philosophy establishes *next* to the 'realm of the world (*neben dem Reich der Welt*)… the free rational world of spirit' (*VGESCHPH1*: 12). After the state makes world-history, absolute spirit unmakes it. But absolute spirit cannot do this only once, or in only one form: it must perform this action or 'inaction' it three times over: art, religion, philosophy. After the doing, we undo—in three different registers. Three forms of para-practices—practices

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beside or at the side of objective spirit, beside the point, even missing the point precisely.

Why this repetition? Why is one time not sufficient? We have to actively negate, forget or undo three times and absolute spirit is the activation of this repetitive undoing. The structural issue that recurs in each sphere of the absolute is that its own practices of undoing need to be undone. Each denaturalizing practice, each absolute undoing, tends to renaturalize itself, thus undermining its own absoluteness. This resurgent naturalisation forces each sphere to continually undo and redo the practice of its own undoing, and ultimately to 'pass over' to another mode of self-undoing practice. There is no form of undoing that is not un-undoable: positivity keeps creeping into the highest echelons of the absolute. This accounts for the instability of each mode of absolute spirit.

The most immediate symptom of this re-naturalization is the tripartite sequence of absolute spirit itself, in which art precedes religion, which precedes philosophy, as if their structural hierarchy was pre-established from the beginning.[22] What accounts for this hierarchy within the cultural sphere? Why does the absolute need to divide and rank in the first place? And why are some forms of the absolute 'more' or 'less' absolute than others? How can there be degrees of absoluteness? Is it possible to intensify absoluteness without bringing in a kind of quantification? A kind of naturalism also creeps into the developmental history that organises the presentation of all three spheres: the system of the art forms proceeds from symbolic to classical to romantic, just as the history of religion proceeds from sublime to revealed (Christian) religion and the history of philosophy from Thales to Hegel. As historical phenomena–like the state itself–art, religion, and philosophy each follow the course of the sun, progressing from east to west.[23] This is why all of these practices will have to undo its own naturalisation, each in its own unique way. Art undoes differently from religion, and philosophy undoes differently from both.

How does art undo objectivity? By making a different use of the objective material and the meaning we assign to this material (it may be a urinal, it may be a white square). Art thus defamiliarizes the material of objective reality by undoing and rearranging the principle on which its organisation relies; this disorganization and reorganisation manifests itself in objects that are different from all other objects in the world. Art thereby demonstrates in each of its manifestations that for spirited beings, there is no natural givenness of the organisation of the material with which we make the world. We are thus free to rearrange and remake, put together in new ways and transcend what can appear to be the natural limitations of any given matter at hand. Music, for example, does something to the natural experience of time: it can make time audible. If we experience through art that we can remake any matter in entirely new ways, that anything

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can matter to (us through) art and that we do not have to respect any organisation of matter to be a given, the political implications ought to be apparent: any political organisation of (whatever) matter that presents itself as natural and the only possible one, it can be undone and remade it. This negative insight seeps into material life and itself can change the ways in which we relate to the state of things. Religion undoes differently. If art takes its material to be a natural given that is then taken apart and reworked, religion shows that not even the material of which the world is built can be taken to be a given. The world must be conceived of as having been created from the ground up. Philosophy's task will be to undo the forms of space and time themselves.

But the status of religion is peculiar.[24] The church is the only institution of absolute spirit that is crucial for the constitution of objective spirit: there can be no state proper without religion. In distinction from the university or the museum, the church is the only cultural institution that has foundational relevance to the state, and for this reason is the only form of Absolute Spirit that demands a philosophical account of its own objective institutional existence. This is why the church is the only institution treated at any length by Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*. The state needs *religion as* an institution because the church allows its members to learn how to collectively believe in something that they create through the very practice of believing. Such a 'spirit of trust' is essential to political life. The duties towards the state, writes Hegel, 'must be based (*beruhen*) on religion, because only in religion the security of attitude' (*Sicherheit der Gesinnung*) is absolute' (*VPHREL1*: 103). The task for both politics and religion will be to purge this trust from blind obedience. This raises the question of why religion is an 'absolute' as well as simply an 'objective' institution, Conversely: given the institutional prominence of religion, why does the absolute require more than religion for its own completion?

Religion is the only form of the absolute charged with establishing absolute spirit's objective condition of possibility. In this sense, from an objective perspective, it is the most 'absolute' form of absolute spirit, even though from an absolute perspective it appears in second place and therefore as incompletely absolute.[25] Religion straddles both the objective and the absolute and makes the transition between them possible. On the one hand, religion formalises our departure from the finite;[26] yet, on the other hand, it appears in the form of a concrete finite institution through which we form our own finite relationship to the absolute. Religion provides the subjective experience of an unconditional duty that allows us to form a relationship with the infinitude of the state—this earthly absolute—through the mediation of finite institutions in which we enjoy the experience of trust or belief. This inevitably appears to absolutize the state, which appears as a worldly divinity and the object of veneration. Hegel's much mocked reference to the state as the *Gang des Gottes*, often translated as

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the 'march of God',[27] does nothing to discourage this impression (although we have elsewhere proposed a different—radically finitizing—interpretation of this peculiar '*Gang*' or 'going').[28]

But religion is also constitutive for objective spirit for other reasons, not least the fact that it implements an organisation of time: the week, divided between workdays and sabbath; the hours of the day, divided between domestic time, prayer time and work times; the days of the year, marked by the holidays that punctuate the natural course of seasons. Religion thus effectuates an undoing of the natural temporal order. But this undoing is ambiguous. Within the sphere of objective spirit, the dismantling of natural time is instrumentalized by the state for the purpose of enabling the reproduction of labour by the imposition and restriction of 'free time'. And yet this very undoing also enables—it makes time for—another kind of undoing of natural time that cannot be hijacked by the state. Religion is thus uniquely ambiguous: it is both an *Übertun* and an *Abtun* at once, spilling back and forth between objective and absolute spirit.

This is different from philosophy's way of undoing time: philosophy annuls, *tilgt*, temporality tout court, and considers all history *sub specie aeternitatis*—from the perspective of the creation of eternity (in time). Such a creation can only be philosophically identified from the perspective of the end, after all that is only historical is done away with. Therefore, philosophy's undoing is linked to the wager that the objective shape of spirit that it presents is one that actually has grown old (*veraltet*) and 'cannot be rejuvenated'. It is a wager, since with historical entities it is difficult to determine the precise time of their senescence, *Veraltung*. When is the right time for philosophy's belatedness to be registered?[29] Why, given that this belatedness is constitutive, does it need a punctual moment to manifest itself? Philosophy denaturalizes the meaning of old age; it reveals the artifice of what cannot but appear as the most natural, universal and irrefutable facts of birth, decay and death. This does not just mean, trivially, that philosophy's task is to remind us of our own finitude, or of the finitude of our social world—that everything has a beginning and end. It makes us reconsider what it means to begin and end.

Hegel's student Eduard Gans suggested that the future of Hegel's entire philosophy stands or falls with *Philosophy of Right*—a success or failure measured by objective spirit's capacity to transition [*übergehen*] into collective 'imagination and general consciousness' i.e. into absolute spirit in a broad sense. But this complicates things. If philosophy is 'done' objectively, and realises itself by changing our understanding of objectivity, philosophy is effectively, according to Gans, able to transform objectivity, by transforming what objectivity thinks of itself. Philosophy, then, creates new ways of thinking about the world, new reference-frames. It is exactly 'then [that] its time has philosophically come to an end and

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it belongs to history'. Hegel's philosophy is, by this account, facing a transition-task. This is why the Owl-of-Minerva-dynamic does not reduce philosophy to a museal embalming of a defunct political reality. The 'transition' for Gans would allow for 'a new progressive development of philosophy 'based on 'fundamental [Hegelian] principles' (Gans 1833: 599): Philosophy enters history—it truly 'belongs to history'—by transforming itself in such a way that it transforms actuality. It transforms the world by entering into it and becoming part of it—a crucial trope for the early Marx. Philosophy undoes itself as (mere) philosophy: interpreting the world becomes a way of changing it. This is one way to understand the essentially political nature of absolute spirit.

VI. Coda: reading protocols

At the very end of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel offers an account of three different but systematically connected 'syllogisms' that structure the encyclopaedic system. We want to end by suggesting that this account offers the resources for a self-critique of the naturalism that pervades the encyclopaedic system and even seeps into the exposition of absolute spirit. We find Hegel's text here doing its own symptom diagnosis. In closing the book, Hegel offers strategies for other ways of reading the system that has just been established. We will elsewhere go into the details of the three syllogisms and their enmeshment. For now, we want to propose that the syllogisms can be taken as three different reading protocols, three different ways of approaching the system and the gaps on which it runs. Syllogism (*Schluss*), for Hegel, is the way in which the development (*Entwicklung*) of the encyclopaedic system appears (*erscheint*) and brings itself to a close (*Schluss*). What Hegel has provided to his students in published form is only the 'first', the most immediate, presentation of the system. 'The logical becomes nature and nature becomes spirit' (*PM*: §575: 267): this is how the three volumes of the *Encyclopaedia* are published and manifestly ordered: Logic, Nature, Spirit. As the 'middle term' of the first syllogism, Nature mediates and binds everything together. Naturalisation is thus immanent to the encyclopaedic discourse—at least on first reading.

What does this do to absolute spirit? It appears as hierarchically structured and the transitions within it take place in the form of quasi-natural progression. We move from the lesser absolute practice to the more absolute practice: art is less absolute than religion, religion less absolute than philosophy (even though, as we've seen, it manages to invade philosophy and take up most of its space). This hierarchy seems naturally inscribed into the constitution of each moment of the absolute. Art depends too much on the existence of given natural material

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and on the natural form of intuition (*Anschauung*), religion depends on assuming the existence of a creator of nature (including our own creator) and thereby on the natural representation (*Vorstellung*) of creation as being detached from our own being and doing. In this naturalised view of absolute spirit, only philosophy liberates itself from natural forms and contents tout court by highlighting that the (non-natural, i.e. created) presupposition for both, creation and nature, is the concept (of both) which have been formed in the history of philosophy and culture more broadly. The naturalising reading thus leads to identifying a hierarchy of denaturalizations in absolute spirit, even though each of its practices make us (at their respective beginnings: naturalistic art, natural religion, nature philosophy) think naturalistically.

But Hegel closes the *Encyclopaedia* by suggesting that other readings are necessary. If we take the second syllogism as an alternative reading protocol, everything changes. We now read according to the sequence: Nature, spirit, logic. This is not just a matter of rotating the circle, and simply starting with the second volume and going around and around the circle as if nothing else has changed. Everything changes with this change in starting point. In starting with the *Philosophy of Nature*, we explicitly confront the fact that nature presents itself, as the first term, as simply presupposed or given. But who or what is positing this presupposition? The appearance of givenness needs to be accounted for and dismantled: in other words, nature must be denaturalized. This is the task of Spirit as 'middle term' of the second syllogism. Givenness is no longer a given: it is itself a product or creation. In moving from a naturalised to a spiritualized reading, the logic of transition is also put into question. Gaps are no longer effaced by being inserted into a sequence where we simply move from one point to the next, from one paragraph to the next, or even from one 'stage' of absolute spirit to the next, without being able to ask how we got moving in the first place or to question the inevitability of the destination. Rather, we now see that there is no such thing as a natural gap: nature really does 'abhor the vacuum'—*natura non facit saltum*—and will do everything to efface it. Every gap is a historical product generated by cultural and spiritual practices. That spirit appears as a gap in nature—a leap from nature—is one symptom of this denaturalization.

But this denaturalization of nature is still insufficient. For Spirit, too, has a tendency to naturalise itself. It reifies its own activity as an unquestioned givenness and obscures the specific contingencies and discontinuities of its own historical appearance. This is what is meant by second nature, which for Hegel is synonymous with 'habit'.[30] This too must be denaturalized: even the most profound dismantling and recreation of what we take to be (first) nature leads back to a transformed, second form of nature which will in turn need to be denaturalized. It is a new nature we get used to and a new way of getting used

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to nature. The practice of denaturalization becomes second nature, and spirit is born and born again in an endless looping from one nature to the next. A familiar example of such looping is ideology-critique, which Hegel had examined, in the *Phenomenology*, as a form of the dialectic of enlightenment.

This has specific political implications: 'habit is part of ethical life' (*PR*: 191). Through habit we replace the first 'merely natural will' (*PR*: 97) with a willing of a different kind. Objective spirit constitutively relies on the formative activity that is habit; Hegel describes this as the task of 'practical education' (*praktische Bildung*): 'practical education is precisely education in the habit (and need) of being busy [*praktische Bildung besteht eben in der Gewohnheit und in dem Bedürfen der Beschäftigung*]'; *PR*: 191). Busyness becomes a habit, business as usual, activity becomes automatic and unthinking. Human nature is transformed into 'into a second, spiritual nature, so that this spiritualization becomes *habitual* [*so daß dieses Geistige in ihm zur Gewohnheit wird*]' (*PR*: 159, trans. modified). Through this habit of naturalisation, spirit obfuscates its own historicity and unthinkingly registers its own constructedness as given. This is why we are necessarily 'ethical[ly] unconscious of ourselves' (*PR*: 154, trans. modified). Unconsciousness itself is, of course, the very symptom of 'natural' existence. According to the spiritualized (second) reading, absolute spirit's structure is not a natural given but rather a result of spirit's own activity. The problematic historicism of the first mode of reading is left behind when history is denaturalized and appears as spirit's own self-creation. Yet Spirit naturalises its own capacity to denaturalize; liberation from nature becomes a habit, another natural process, and the circle of denaturalization and renaturalization endlessly continues.[31]

Ultimately, we will have to move to the 'third syllogism': Spirit, logic, nature. With logic as the middle term, the endless oscillation between spirit and nature—the denaturalization of nature and the secondary naturalisation of spirit and—is disrupted, and a gap opens up between the two. There is no smooth transition from nature to spirit—spirit is not deducible from nature but we nonetheless have to confront the paradox that (the concept of) nature logically presupposes that of spirit. The third syllogism, with logic as its middle term, demonstrates this gap. It does not enable us to move from one sphere to the next but rather makes visible what the transition itself relies on: on gaps. The *logical* reading thus rips away the plug concealing the constitutive gap between nature and spirit. It makes visible the leaps that we have to take, and that we had always already taken without noticing, in the previous two syllogisms. It brings to the fore what can hardly be made visible by intuition (*Anschauung*) and representation (*Vorstellung*). This also forces us to look at the objective world differently. One can see what is missing or invisible in the constitution of the objective world: a relation between antagonistic classes, for example, or a relation between base and superstructure. But it also makes us ask again why, with the notable exception of the church, the

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institutions of absolute spirit are missing from Hegel's account of the objective world. The third syllogism shines a spotlight on this missing.

Absolute spirit's hierarchy also appears in a different form, as we move from the procreation of nature to the creation of art (spirit's second nature) and religion, and finally to the re-creation in the Sunday of life of philosophy. This makes the very hierarchy we seem to have been following inoperative, by complicating the very idea of (closed or even porous) units of the absolute. With the third syllogism we encounter a reading protocol that undoes the encyclopaedic form itself by presenting the gaps that pervade it. We think from the position of the gaps, from the position of what is missing, from the missing link between spirit and nature. This means that when we think from the perspective of what is almost erased from absolute spirit and that has no institutional place in the objective world, we understand that what absolute spirit lets us see, believe in and conceptualise are gaps, inconsistencies and missingness.[32]

This is why grasping the difference between these three reading protocols will have consequences for any understanding of the philosophical system and of its dissemination both inside and outside the classroom. In this essay, we have taken the form of the *Encyclopaedia* at face value, as Hegel invites us to: we adopted a 'natural attitude' and read naturalistically, paragraph after paragraph, following the protocol of the 'first syllogism'. But he instructs us also that the first reading has to be followed up by a second and a third. This will have consequences for the very form of presentation of the system—an answer to the question of how to 'teach the unteachable' (Klossowski 2004: 84).

One consequence of reading the system according to the third syllogism is that even numbers might be de-naturalised—twice: both as 'natural' and as 'second-natural'—and finally assume its proper spiritual significance. The sequence of paragraphs might appear to move in discrete steps or stages—we have become habituated to reading textbooks this way—but the very idea of the step (*Stufe*) is a human construction: spirit, not nature, supplies the measure. But what is speculative counting? Hegel had stressed in the *Phenomenology* that the form of philosophical grammar must be defamiliarized: we need to learn how to parse a sentence speculatively. This does not mean writing ungrammatically or creating a new grammar: we still read and write in the conventional form 'S is P'. The 'speculative sentence', Hegel's term for his new philosophical writing, does not appear at face value to be different from an ordinary sentence. But the propositional form itself becomes shockingly unfamiliar to us when we confront its peculiar rhythm. The subject, which we are trained or habituated to take as a stable basis for predication, repeats in the predicate, throwing us back again to the beginning, and the seemingly stable relationship between subject and predicate is fundamentally disturbed. One of Hegel's favourite examples is: 'God is being'. Neither subject nor predicate are what we took them to be: we

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thought we were moving from subject to predicate, but we have not moved at all, and this arrested or inhibited movement, which shakes our natural assumptions about subject and predicate, becomes the proper object of thought. Our own disorientation becomes the object of thought: the transformation of the grammatical subject is for this reason a transformation of subjectivity itself. We read speculatively when we understand that we can read any sentence as if it could be a speculative sentence. This is not to say that all sentences are necessarily 'speculative', but just that the speculative is not empirically marked: it does not come bearing a special label. To bear this uncertainty is precisely to move from a naturalistic to a speculative reading.

What might such a reading do to a thoroughly naturalised form of discourse such as an Encyclopaedia—the essential form of university discourse—a discourse emerging in this case from an institution that cannot or will not give an account of itself? Hegel's enigmatic remarks on the 'three syllogisms' give us a bare hint. We will postpone further exploration of the defamiliarizing logic of the three syllogisms to the next instalment of this project. For now, one thing is clear: Philosophy becomes philosophy only when it is ready to give up or to undo the form of what we take to be philosophy. This may mean reinventing the encyclopaedic form itself.[33]

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Notes

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, we will be citing from the final (1830) edition of the *Encyclopaedia*.

[2] It is noteworthy that in the *Encyclopaedia* the category of 'objective spirit' is subsequent to 'subjective spirit'; this seems to invert the habitual movement from 'substance' to 'subject' that we see everywhere else in Hegel—for example, the move from objective logic to subjective logic in the *Science of Logic*, or from 'consciousness' to 'self-consciousness' in the *Phenomenology*. (We can observe a similar reversal 'from subject to substance' within objective spirit itself in the transition from morality to ethical life.)

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[3] In his inaugural lecture in Berlin, for example, Hegel indicates that philosophy effectively disappears when 'the neediness of the time [*die Not der Zeit*]' establishes the priority of both the 'small interests of daily life' and 'the great [*hohe*] interests of actuality'. These necessities exhaust 'all capacities of spirit': world-spirit is so 'torn outward (*nach außen gerissen*)' that it lacks the energy to 'turn inside'—to philosophize or reflect on what is happening. Cf. *KR*: 399.

[4] Cf. Althusser 2014.

[5] Admittedly, the new museum—the first of its kind in Germany—was not built in time for Hegel to have visited before delivering most of his lectures on art, or to be integrated into the first editions of the *Encyclopaedia*. Nonetheless, he would have been aware of the intense discussion leading up to the founding of the museum, and the organisation of the *Aesthetics* lectures certainly reflects the new, historically informed way of representing and thinking about artworks that the modern institution enabled. But his silence on the university is even more noteworthy, given that the very form of the *Encyclopaedia* and the affiliated lecture series is a direct product of this institution and unthinkable without it. Equally notable is that Hegel may have been the only prominent thinker of his time who did not contribute significantly to the intense discussion of the modern university (in contrast to Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Humboldt and others).

[6] The authorship of the text continues to be the subject of endless debate. While the text was found in Hegel's handwriting, many scholars have attributed it to either Schelling or Hölderlin, while the inspiration is broadly Schillerean (the *Letters on Aesthetic Education* had appeared only a year earlier). We will not venture to enter into this debate. But the fact that Hegel can literally pen a text that may not strictly belong to him forces us to think more generally about the meaning of authorship and ownership. The uncertainty in this case is suggestive of a collective impulse around 1800—not exactly romantic *symphilosophieren* but nonetheless complicating the idea of intellectual property in a way that harbours a certain revolutionary potential. Cf. For a recent discussion on the authorship of this early text, see for example the contributions in Bubner 2016.

[7] Abbreviations used:

ESP = Hegel, 'The Earliest System-Programme' in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. S. Houlgate (Malden MA: Blackwell, 1988)/'Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus', in *Werke*, Band 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

HENZ = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften (1817)*, ed. W. Bonsiepen and K. Grotsch (Hamburg: Meiner, 2001).

JS = Hegel, *The Jena System, 1804–05. Logic and Metaphysics*. Trans. and ed. J. W. Burbidge and G. di Giovanni (McGill-Queen's University Press: Kingston and Montreal 1986)/*Jenaer Systementwürfe II: Logik, Metaphysik, Naturphilosophie* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982).

KR = Hegel, 'Konzept der Rede beim Antritt des philosophischen Lehramtes an der Universität Berlin', in *Werke*, Band 10 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

PhG = Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. and ed. T. Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)/*Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952).

PK = Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst. Vorlesung von 1826* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016).

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PM = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, translated from the 1830 edition, together with the Zusätze by W. Wallace and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften Im Grundrisse (1830). Dritter Teil. Die Philosophie des Geistes. Mit den mündlichen Zusätzen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

PN = *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, ed. and trans. M. J. Petry (London/New York: Humanities Press, 1970)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften Im Grundrisse (1830). Zweiter Teil. Die Naturphilosophie. Mit den mündlichen Zusätzen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

PR = Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)/*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse, Werke*, Band 7 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

RSO = Hegel, 'Review of Solger's Posthumous Writings and Correspondence', in *Miscellaneous Writings of G. W. F. Hegel*, ed. J. Stewart (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

VGESCHPH1 = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2014).

VPHREL1 = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Vol. 1, in *Werke*, Vol. 16 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984).

VRPH1 = *Hegel, Vorlesungen zur Rechtsphilosophie*, Vol. 1, ed. K.-H. Ilting (Stuttgart/Bad Canstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1973).

VRPH3 = Hegel, *Vorlesungen zur Rechtsphilosophie*, Vol. 3, ed. K.-H. Ilting (Stuttgart/Bad Canstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1974).

VRPH4 = Hegel, *Vorlesungen zur Rechtsphilosophie*, Vol. 4, ed. K.-H. Ilting (Stuttgart/Bad Canstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1974).

[8] This Hegel adds to this that the immediate idea 'I have of myself' is that I consider myself to be a 'free being'—and this idea has practical implications.

[9] Cf. Jaeschke 2010: 327f.

[10] The primary determination of nature is 'a self-externality' that then appears as 'contiguity' or 'juxtaposition' (cf. *PN*: 223).

[11] In the first edition, the transition occurred at §§555–56.

[12] 'Here the progression that has been going on comes to a halt (*Hier hält das bisherige Fortgehen … inne*): the progression by which the concept in its reality turns into an other … passes over into another sphere.' (*JS*: 173) Virtually the same language describes the (literally geographical) 'passage to another realm [*Reich*]' in the *Phenomenology*, as we have seen.

[13] This is consistent with the form of operation that he indicates are specific to practices of absolute spirit—for example when he points out that artworks present something that is more real than empirical and historical reality, because they depict the—otherwise invisible—principle(s) that govern reality. This is reminiscent of his characterization of the capacity of art to present the 'truer real (*wahrhaftere reelle*) form' than what appears to us 'and we usually call reality'. It does this by making appear 'the powers that are effective [*wirklich*] in reality' and

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thus constitutive of it, even though in ordinary life we never directly empirically encounter or recognize them. (Cf. *PK*: 64.)

[14] 'As readers from Marx on have frequently noted, hardly any of the institutions celebrated by Hegel (bicameral parliament, jury system, the right to conscientious objection, freedom of speech and press, voluntary taxation, modern marriage law, constitutional monarchy itself, among other not so minor details) were to be found in the Prussian state of Hegel's Berlin period, although they do reflect some of the more progressive, French-inspired measures, the "revolution from above" reluctantly initiated by Friedrich Wilhelm III in the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic victory and soon rescinded.' (Cf. Comay 2010: 139.)

[15] As Hegel indicates in one of his lectures on the *Philosophy of Right*: 'with regard to the idea of the state one ought not have a particular state in mind, not particular institutions, one must regard the idea, this actual God (*wirklichen Gott*) for itself' (*VRPH4*: 632).

[16] Hegel indicated that he also planned to do a similar expansion of the final section of objective spirit, on the philosophy of history—which was a lecture course that he based only on handwritten notes (there was no compendium for the students). Jaeschke conjectures that Hegel's manuscripts of the last iteration of these lectures (from 1830/1) indicates—due to the polished character of the manuscript—that Hegel was lecturing from an almost clean copy and hence must have planned to publish it. (Cf. Jaeschke 2010: 400). If the philosophy of history book had been published, then, there would have been a further expansion of the expansion, a supplement of a supplement.

[17] Curiously, this triad is adapted from the philosophy of Subjective Spirit, the first element of the overall trichotomy of the Philosophy of Spirit as a whole (subjective spirit–objective spirit–absolute spirit), which seems at a macro level to reverse this conceptual sequence.

[18] Cf. *PM*: §575: 275–76.

[19] Hegel uses the formulation of ethical life as completion of objective spirit also in *VRPH4*: 798.

[20] Hegel also uses this term pejoratively when he speaks—in his discussion of Solger—about religious devotion (*Andacht*) being 'only the Sunday of life', where what follows are unavoidably the work- and weekdays where we have to exit 'the cabinet of the inner' and confront the present and labour. (Cf. *RSO*: 354–401). Religious devotion in this context therefore appears in the objective world is 'the highest and holiest as object of comedy'.

[21] Cf. *VGESCHPH1*: 70: 'Philosophy can therefore be called a kind of luxury, precisely insofar as luxury refers to those pleasures and pursuits that do not belong to external necessity as such. In this respect, however, philosophy is dispensable. But it depends on what one calls necessary. From the point of view of the spirit, philosophy can be seen as precisely that which is most necessary.'

[22] Art–religion–philosophy seems to correspond to the triad of *Anschauung–Vorstellung–Begriff*, which appears to increase the distance from nature, already when we run through the three practices of the absolute only once.

[23] The question is if the structure of each element of absolute spirit can be mapped onto absolute spirit and onto the overall structure of the dialectic itself: is the relation between

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nature-spirit-logic similar to that of art-religion-philosophy and within, for example, art to that of symbolic-classical-romantic art? Is symbolic art the art that corresponds to nature? Where does world history sit in this with its oriental-classical-Germanic world-historical realms?

[24] Cf. Theunissen 1970.

[25] But as this precondition of the state it will have to be de-absolutized—finitized and contained in its political and cultural reach. If this is so, religion would seem to occupy the role of a vanishing mediator, ultimately disappearing in the fulfilment of its task. Heine had already wittily remarked that for Hegel 'Christianity represented progress because it taught of a God who is dead' (Heine 2007: 197).

[26] Cf. VPHREL1: 106. Hegel states that 'with religion… in general… is immediately …this transition [*Übergehen*] 'from the finite to the infinite and back.

[27] The most recent translation of the *Philosophy of Right* translates this as 'It is God's way in the world that the state should exist'. (*PR*: 233f).

[28] For this cf. Comay and Ruda 2018: 27.

[29] Cf. on this Dolar 2020: 31–48.

[30] There have been numerous works published that address this conceptual concatenation Cf. for example the recent Christ and Honneth 2022.

[31] Cf. for this problem: Menke 2022.

[32] This might be a similarity to a psychoanalytic session where what is not said is as important as what is said.

[33] Hegel states that philosophy is 'essentially […] encyclopaedia' (*HENZ*: 19).

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