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THE INFINITE PASSION OF RESPONSIBILITY:  
A CRITIQUE OF ABSOLUTE KNOWING

A Thesis in

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by

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## ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between knowledge and ethics? Does what we know and the reason that secures knowledge determine ethical responsibility, or might ethical responsibility itself awaken and animate the enterprise of knowing? The dissertation affirms the priority of ethics by juxtaposing two accounts of the relationship between truth and goodness. It critiques Hegel's systematic conception of absolute knowing by showing that this knowing elides the anarchical ethical demand arising from the other person. Hegel's dialectic reconciles the problem of the relation with the other by transposing it to the plane of cognition where it becomes spirit's self-knowing. However, Emmanuel Levinas's phenomenological reduction of the structures of knowing exposes an ethical level of experience that both inspires and interrupts this adventure of knowing. After the introduction of this problematic, Chapter 1 examines the challenge that Levinas poses to Hegel, discovering in experience and subjectivity a ground where real dialogue can take place. Chapter 2 traces the reconception of subjectivity by which Hegel brings all exteriority within the experience of self-consciousness and compares this with Levinas's notion of "lived experience." In Chapter 3, I show how Levinas's account of sensibility and enjoyment resists incorporation into Hegel's notion of self-consciousness. Chapter 4 examines the encounter with the other person and explicates why Hegel and Levinas's accounts cannot be reconciled or made to complement one another, for the non-allergic responsibility incurred in the face to face relation is inassimilable to the antagonism of the same and the other experienced as self-consciousness. Then, in Chapter 5, I trace Hegel's pursuit of a more authentic recognition of otherness through

the development of the concept of spirit, paying special attention to the role of language. The ultimate accomplishment of spiritual recognition in Hegel's account is again challenged by Levinas's notion of responsibility, which signifies as an ethical "saying" apart from the "said." Finally, I contest the absoluteness of knowing without denying the dialectic that animates it by suggesting that philosophy can be maintained as a human enterprise, a pursuit of knowing that is ever subject to and interrupted by the face of the other.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: KNOWLEDGE AND ETHICS.....	1
CHAPTER 1: CHALLENGING HEGEL: UNITY, HISTORY, DIALECTIC AND EXPERIENCE .....	13
1. Levinas contra Hegel .....	13
2. Levinas's Hegel .....	18
3. The Terrain of Experience and the Structure of Thought.....	29
4. Dynamic Subjectivity, or Restlessness .....	42
CHAPTER 2: HEGEL: RECONCILING EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE .....	51
1. An Immense Gulf.....	51
2. Thinking Substance as Subject .....	56
a. Actual/Actuality .....	59
b. Movement .....	62
c. Negativity .....	65
d. From Pure Negativity to Spirit.....	69
3. The Topography of Experience .....	76
4. The Emergence of the Subject in Consciousness .....	82
a. Naive Actuality and Actual Experience .....	83
b. Movement and Negation in Consciousness .....	92
5. <i>Aufhebung</i> and <i>Erfahrung</i> .....	104

CHAPTER 3: LEVINAS: ENJOYMENT, DWELLING, CONSCIOUSNESS .....	109
1. Consciousness and Concrete Life .....	109
2. Enjoyment as Concrete Life.....	114
a. Enjoyment and Care; Desire and Life.....	117
b. Enjoyment and Consciousness.....	127
c. Enjoyment and Experience .....	136
3. Towards Consciousness: Dwelling in the Home, Possession and Labor.....	140
4. Work and Family as Dialectical Moments of Spirit .....	144
5. From Enjoyment to Consciousness: The Advent of the Other .....	152
 CHAPTER 4: HEGEL AND LEVINAS: RECOGNITION AND THE FACE OF THE OTHER.....	161
1. Recognition and Its Misfire .....	163
a. From the Object of Desire to the Other Person.....	165
b. Recognition in Itself.....	168
c. Recognition for Self-consciousness .....	178
2. The Face to Face Relation.....	189
a. The Face of the Other.....	191
b. Allergy and Peace .....	200
c. Sensibility, Substitution, and the Face .....	210
d. Suffering, Goodness, Justice.....	224
 CHAPTER 5: FROM RECOGNITION TO RECONCILIATION AND RESPONSIBILITY .....	228
1. Reason, Recognition and Reconciliation .....	229

2. Ethical Spirit's Unity and Disruption .....	236
3. Culture, <i>Sprache</i> and Saying.....	247
4. Conscience, Recognition, and Reconciliation .....	262
a. Recognition as Doing and Speaking One's Conviction.....	265
b. Recognition as Reconciliation and the Infinity of Responsibility .....	272
5. Religion: Reconciliation, Community and the Absoluteness of Knowing.....	280
CONCLUSION: SAYING OTHERWISE.....	293
1. Infinite Responsibility and Society.....	293
2. Unsayng the Said: Philosophy as Wakefulness and Prophecy .....	302
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	307

## INTRODUCTION: KNOWLEDGE AND ETHICS

Does the gnoseological adventure comprise everything adventitious, everything that comes towards being? Ontology, the logic of being, has always answered this question in the affirmative. Even the Kantian thing-in-itself, like the dark side of the moon, shows itself in the horizon of what we do know. “Unknown,” an X, it is nevertheless bounded by its relation to the known, figures precisely as the condition of the knowable. The critique of reason fixes its place as the limit of knowledge. It is not truly beyond conceptual grasp, but the horizon, the out-line of that grasp.

Hegel taught that philosophy becomes absolute knowing—science—when the spirit bent on knowing the world grasps itself not only *in* but *as* that world. His *Phenomenology of Spirit* achieves the absolute because spirit recoups in its return what it would have lost in setting out. Its figure is the circle or gyre, where the infinity of negation returns upon itself, enriches itself by what it has spent, negates its negation. This thaumaturgical negativity is the elixir of spirit’s perfect recovery that heals the wounds of the Spirit and leaves no scars behind. But to say that the education of spirit ends in absolute knowing does not mean that spirit attains a knowledge of things that is fixed and complete. Hegel’s articulation of philosophy as science signals the triumph of dynamical self-knowing rather than the perfected understanding of an objective world or the end of history as it appears to the natural standpoint. Knowing (*Wissen*) retains its

verbal aspect and is not petrified into the substantive “knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> Self-knowing spirit is absolute from Hegel’s point of view because it is infinite; it is infinite because through its own dialectical activity it produces for itself all that might be or might bear meaning.

But do we know the good? Or is it, as Socrates described, beyond what is, *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*,<sup>2</sup> so that it exceeds the grasp of our comprehension? For Hegel’s spirit the good is not an unattainable beyond, but its very own ought-to-be, arising from and reconciling itself with spirit’s self-actualization. But if we do not know the good, how can we adopt it as an enterprise, even an infinite task? Might not the good signify in our lives as a responsibility rather than as a certainty—not so much the shape to which our lives ought to aspire but the thrust of that aspiration itself? The stories that women and men tell to communicate their deepest moral experience of the world and of one another suggest that while we may often be uncertain about what *is* good, we nevertheless are disturbed by the call to goodness and compelled to suffer the demands it announces. Wounded into responsibility, we are burdened with obligations that we can never fully assume, for they increase or deepen as they are entered into. From this perspective, love of the good would signify as a passion that is other than the projects of

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<sup>1</sup>Etymologically, even the substantive *Wissenschaft* (Science) signifies the shape or shaping of knowledge and not its determinate content. See the entry under *...schaft* in *Das Duden Herkunftswörterbuch, Der Duden in 10 Bänden, Bd. 7, Etymologie*, ed. Günther Drosdowski (Mannheim: Dudenverlag, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>Levinas frequently alludes to this phrase from Plato’s *Republic*, and in fact his whole philosophy could be characterized as a meditation on its meaning. Ironically, the meaning is one that Plato/Socrates does not explore further, perhaps because of the laughter with which the philosophy students, Glaucon and Adeimantus, greet the suggestion. Cf. *Republic* 509b.



cognition and action, theory and praxis. But it would not thus cease to concern philosophy.

Rather than challenge the Hegelian account because there “is” something that spirit does not or cannot know, Emmanuel Levinas testifies to an “otherwise than being”<sup>3</sup> that nevertheless signifies. To hazard such a critique is to point to an *an-archē* beyond Hegel’s own ambiguous beginning, to a *sine qua non* the other side of essence or essencing, beyond what Heidegger has described as the fulguration of being. An-archic, this other side or beyond is really “this side” [*en-deçà*] and would open holes in the fabric of knowledge not after the fact but forever before it, “always already” interrupting the absoluteness of knowledge and even the enterprise of knowing. For Levinas, this “otherwise than being” signifies precisely as goodness. What is beyond being signifies as an unabsolvable responsibility—not a responsibility that can be discharged by “being good” or attaining a certainty of moral conscience, but a responsibility that is irreducibly “for the other.”

Can the otherwise than being disturb the equanimity of spirit’s absolute self-knowing? The difficulty of disrupting Hegel’s system is well-known. Attempts that venture to render parts of the system contradictory may be facilely successful but neglect to account for how contradiction constitutes the very energy of the system. Antagonists and advocates alike often present such domesticated versions of Hegel’s thought that

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<sup>3</sup>This phrase and several others here, including the main title of the dissertation, come from Emmanuel Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991). Hereafter, *OB*. French text: *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974). Hereafter, *AE*.

what would count as rebuttal or affirmation testifies rather to the necessity of the nuances of the dialectical account, an admonition Hegel himself makes in the opening pages of the preface to the *Phenomenology*.

What is wanted is an account that both respects and understands the tremendous power and scope of Hegel's dialectic, yet also addresses the question of what might escape or contest the grasp of *Wissenschaft*. This amounts not to erecting a new rigorous science of philosophy that would replace Hegelian idealism, as Husserl attempted, but to exposing an aperture within the unfolding of science itself that allows one to glimpse beyond or before it to what is other than knowledge, to what signifies without a context, and signifies precisely by putting in question the status of the comprehensive whole. In short, the question becomes this: Can philosophy itself discover an aperture in philosophy as science, absolute knowing? According to Levinas, it is through just such an opening that the face of the other arrests the knowing glance, interrupting the comprehension that holds colloquy only with what is cut to its own measure. The face and voice of the other would signify the interruption of the good, accessible only to the open hand of generosity beyond the grasp of the concept.

The discovery of a rupture in the system of knowing need not make knowledge impossible, although it would call into question what is meant by the absoluteness and the closure of the philosophical system.<sup>4</sup> Hegel does not end the journey of spirit in the

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<sup>4</sup>This is not to deny that there are ruptures within Hegel's system itself, breaks that are in fact necessary for the dialectical closure or containment that does not efface them. See Joseph Flay, "Rupture, Closure, and Dialectic," in *Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit: A Reappraisal*, Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Idees, 149, ed. Gary K. Browning, 149-164 (Boston: Kluwer, 1997). My aim is not to deny *any* sense of closure but to show that closure and

*Phenomenology* with absolute knowing because he has presupposed this end by committing some sort of logical fallacy. What he does assume is that knowing is the only and the absolute end or goal of philosophy. This is an assumption that the natural standpoint with which Hegel begins readily grants, for that standpoint too wants to know and wants to have its claims to know validated in the philosophical examination. The assumption that the end or purpose of philosophy is knowing—or knowing the limits and conditions of knowing—is also one that both Hegel’s predecessors and critics should grant, unless they want to maintain that the purpose of philosophy is merely the edifying discourse Hegel disparages in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, if the interruption of the discourse of knowing that recurs incessantly is an ethical interruption, is it still enclosed by the dialectic that generates and comprehends the contradictions of the quest for knowledge? If knowing’s other is not already determined by the quest for knowledge but interrupts as the hungry mouth, the abused body, the face demanding respect, can an amelioration of the structures of knowing heretofore ignorant or presumptive of this other—even if this amelioration is necessary, just and sincere—

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absoluteness cannot both be maintained and thus shift the notion we should have of the end or goal of philosophy.

<sup>5</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5; hereafter *PS*. In quotations from all Hegel’s works I shall note departures from the indicated translations, except that I shall use ‘concept’ for *Begriff* instead of the unfortunate ‘Notion’ throughout. German text: *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Philosophische Bibliothek Studienausgabe, ed. H.-F. Wessels and H. Clairmont (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988), 13; hereafter, *PG*. This edition reproduces the text of the *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 9; page numbers are given according to the *Gesammelte Werke*, not the Studienausgabe. The Studienausgabe contains a concordance to page numbers for the major German editions, including Hoffmeister (Meiner, 1952).

fully account for the other who interrupts? If ethics catches sight of a dimension other than the dimensions of the known and knowable world, does it not summon philosophy to a responsibility beyond knowing? Or rather, does it not summon philosophy to open the enclosure that structures knowing to the intrusion from elsewhere, to conduct the discourse of knowing not absolutely, but always subject to the interruption of the other person? It is not that the endeavor of knowing must be abandoned, but that philosophy's end or destiny must shift from the quest for absolute knowing to the open discourse whose responsibility to know is infinitely subject to the ethical critique that originates with the other person.

Any attempt to contradict Hegel must confront the notion of "system," a destination that has always been a stumbling block for the understanding and the acceptance of Hegel's thought. Many readers find themselves captivated by the dramatic tensions and contradictory exigencies that transform seemingly secure accounts of the foundations of knowledge into seismic faults or volatilize the solid confidence of human thought in its ability to order and direct its own activity with prudence and justice. How can the vision of a world so rent with contradictions be reconciled, comprehended in a *system*? Since the system seems the inexorable end of all the twistings and turnings that make up the purgative way of the *Phenomenology*, the contradictions that continually disrupt the itinerary are held by some of Hegel's interpreters (friends and foes) to be no contradictions at all, or only contradictions *pro tempore*. Contradiction and system are mutually exclusive in this view, whether the contradictions are thought to be mere illusions conjured for the sake of dialectical argument or incomplete accounts that disappear as soon as the completed system appears.

Yet how fair is this assessment? Without the contradictions between not only the stages of the *Phenomenology* but also the categories of the *Logic*, the system would collapse on itself. Without rupture, there could be no juncture, movement, development, no whole. For Hegel, the whole, the absolute, is the simultaneity and pervasiveness of reconciliation and dialectical opposition and not the undifferentiated immediacy that Schelling imagined, “the night in which all cows are black.” This message at least should be clear from the beginning of the *Phenomenology* and ought not to be forgotten at its conclusion.

Jean Hyppolite has observed this tension between system and non-system that runs through the whole of Hegel’s work:

Indeed we discover in the lecture courses of Hegel edited by his followers marginal remarks and additions from one course to the other that reveal clearly that this thought that wants to be systematic is at once an *open* thought, and not open by accident, by human failing, but in its essence.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, the conviction that openness or disruption and system belong together, require each other, does not necessarily help us to understand *how* the absoluteness of knowledge emerges from the contradictions of experience: “One bare assurance is worth just as much as another.” Hyppolite’s brief but insightful essay argues that Hegel’s paradoxically open system is rooted in the formula, “the absolute is subject.”<sup>7</sup> I will

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<sup>6</sup>Jean Hyppolite, “Note sur la préface de la *Phénoménologie de l’esprit* et le theme: l’absolu est sujet,” in *Hegel-Tage: Urbino 1965*, Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 4, ed. Hans-Georg Gadamer (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969), 76 (my translation, here and following).

<sup>7</sup>We can accept this formula as authentically Hegelian, although Hyppolite ignores the cautionary context in which it appears in the Preface: “Hence, the mere anticipation that the Absolute is Subject is not only *not* the actuality of this concept, but it even makes the actuality impossible; for the anticipation posits the subject as an inert point, whereas the actuality is self-movement” (*PS 13/PG 21*).

return to this important thought in a moment, but for now we can at least be sure that if we would judge the validity of Hegel's ending the journey of the *Phenomenology* with absolute knowing, we must be sure first to understand what *Hegel* means by *closure*, by *reconciliation*, by *comprehension* and thus by *system*. And all this does indeed hinge on understanding what it means to say "the absolute is subject."

As we shall see, Levinas will sometimes seem to join those who reject Hegel out of hand as a systematician. But he will also acknowledge the power of Hegel's thought and describe his challenge in terms that do not simply bear the outlines of a "bare assurance." To say that one must understand Hegel on his own terms does not mean that Hegel's position is unassailable. At the end of his introduction to the "Argument" of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas invokes the problematic that Hegel presents with regard to philosophical beginnings or introductions even as he goes on to extend this problematic to the closure into system:

That the beginning of the silent discourse of the soul with itself can be justified only by its end is a still optimistic conception of philosophical discourse which a genius, and a synthetic genius, such as Hegel can permit himself, assured as he is of being able to complete the cycle of thought....

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Quite apart from this, Hyppolite ultimately has his own doubts about closure: "But how can that subject which is its own history at the same time give way to a speculative Logic, an absolute knowing, which is, in the language of representation, 'God himself before the creation of the world and of finite spirit.' The justification of this thesis, which is that of Onto-theology, is much more difficult; it doubtless leads us a long way without certain hope of an end. We should wander on the shoreless sea of metaphysics. One can only remark that this Logic, absolute thought,...is, in its consciousness of itself, the thought of that subject which is its own adventure and its own return to self, a thought that contains the absolute difference, without, however, being this effectively, since nature and finite spirit do exist" ("Note sur la préface," 79). This last remark, that the absoluteness of the speculative logic or absolute knowing lacks the effectiveness (*Wirklichkeit*) of spirit in the *Phenomenology*, not only suggests another way to critique Hegel's ultimate destination for philosophy, it underlines the necessity of the *Phenomenology* for the system as a whole.

[But,] should we not think with as much precaution of the possibility of a conclusion or a closure of the philosophical discourse? Is not its interruption its only possible end?" (*OB 20/AE 24*).

This is what Levinas asks: as much precaution about closure as Hegel exercised about beginning. This precaution asks us to consider whether the ethical interruption Levinas sees as the "end" of philosophy does not point to a different dynamic than the cognitive dialectics whose interplay weaves the fabric of knowledge. When we have understood "closure" and "system" in Hegelian terms, in a dialectic that preserves openness, must we not also be attentive to the possibility of an interruption that, while it appears on the plane of knowledge, bears a meaning that is not confined to that plane?

It may seem that the articulation of such an interruption in a philosophical discourse already situates Levinas's claim within Hegel's dialectical system. But must every logos, every attempt to assemble or recollect meaning in a discourse, compromise the *pro-mise* that sends forth that meaning? The present work follows Levinas in attempting to catch sight of a dimension, traced in the words and propositions of discourse, of a beyond forever anterior to the discourse it produces. Such a beyond would summon discourse to a responsibility it could never itself assume or discharge, would produce philosophy—but not only philosophy!—as a conversation incessantly interrupted by ethics, knowing's other. Spirit's journey would not end in absolute knowing but be turned back again and again to attend to the moral questioning of the other person.

The philosophy thus produced would not, however, be relegated to the absurd or insignificant role of demonstrating its own inadequacy. It has become a commonplace today to say that philosophy is either dead or dying. At best the accounts bearing witness

to this presumed death eulogize philosophy as the noble but now outmoded or exhausted ambition of a humanity that is also dead or dying. At worst, they crow like carrion birds, deriding reason as the demented pretension of a desperate and perverse despotism, while they themselves remain complacent in the disorienting play of insignificant signifiers.<sup>8</sup> Levinas does not want the death or dissolution of philosophy, but rather the reawakening of thought to a task it has too long neglected or misapprehended. If the ethical relation can be glimpsed as an obligation that conceptual thought can never completely assume or discharge, nevertheless it summons that thought to a responsibility that never ends—an infinite responsibility—and thus must itself take the philosophical dialogue seriously. The primacy of ethics does not make philosophical knowing disappear; it contests its claim to absoluteness and thus itself assumes the responsibility of articulating a new understanding of philosophy's task.

It is true that Levinas often presents this contestation and this articulation in a retrogressive movement, a backward glance from the very freedom of thought that is called into question. But need this backward glance signify only the infinite finitude of the concept dialectically determining itself? Might truth perhaps transpire in a time other than recollected history? It was Hegel who taught that such questions only anticipate the discourse in which they alone have meaning, in which alone they can command our thinking. We must work our way towards them.

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<sup>8</sup>See Levinas's essay "Meaning and Sense" as well as the other essays from *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972), "Humanism and An-archy" and "No Identity," all of which appear in English in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987). Cited hereafter as *HdAH* and *CPP*, respectively.



I will begin by examining the challenge that Levinas poses to Hegel, both to strip away what seems spurious in that challenge and to discover in experience and in the subjectivity that undergoes that experience a workable meeting-ground, a place where real dialogue can be effected (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 will examine the way Hegel reconceived subjectivity so as to bring all exteriority within the experience of self-conscious spirit, comparing as well this notion of experience as discovery and knowing with the “lived experience” Levinas inherits from Husserlian phenomenology. Then I will return to Levinas’s challenge to Hegel to show how his account of sensibility and enjoyment resists being resituated within the infinite territory of self-consciousness that Hegel explores (Chapter 3), ultimately making the work of consciousness and knowing dependent upon an energy that comes from the other person. Chapter 4 will take up the all-important question of the encounter with the other person and examine whether or not the two accounts—Hegel’s and Levinas’s—can be reconciled or at least complement one another as accounts of recognition and responsibility. The comparison will show that Levinas’s call for a face to face, non-allergic relation to the other and his notion of an ethical responsibility suffered prior to conscious commitment indeed goes beyond Hegel’s description of the initial encounter with the other in “self-consciousness,” but that this account is incomplete by Hegel’s own admission and looks towards a completion in the realm of spirit. In Chapter 5, I will trace Hegel’s pursuit of an authentic and effective recognition through the developments of spirit to its fulfillment as conscience, religion, and absolute knowing, paying special attention to the role of language in this development. The accomplishment of this spiritual recognition in Hegel’s account effects a reconciliation that becomes the comprehensive dialectic of

absolute knowing, a reconciliation that is challenged again by Levinas's notion of the wound of infinite responsibility, signifying as an ethical "saying" apart from the "said" of consciousness and experience. Finally, I will attempt to challenge not the dynamic of Hegel's account of recognition, but the absoluteness of the knowing it results in. In the conclusion I suggest instead that the fabric of knowing and experience—the fabric of sociality according to both Hegel and Levinas—is not absolute but rather is always subject to the ethical critique announced in the face of the other, to the saying that "unsays" the authority of the said, and to the infinity of responsibility that witnesses to the "good beyond being.

## CHAPTER 1: CHALLENGING HEGEL: UNITY, HISTORY, DIALECTIC AND EXPERIENCE

### 1. Levinas contra Hegel

From the beginning Levinas characterizes his philosophy as an opposition to and a break with a tradition he identifies with Hegel and Parmenides. In *Time and the Other*, a series of four lectures given in Paris in 1946-7, Levinas announces this break with Parmenides positively as a movement “toward a pluralism that does not merge into unity.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, this comes on the heels of a denial that the “dialectic of being” between “solitude” and the “relation with the Other” he has set out to explore is in any sense Hegelian. Indeed, although Levinas continues to use the word “dialectic,” he immediately qualifies it—“because the word ‘dialectic’ has a more determinate meaning”—and describes his aim as “to show the place of solitude in the general economy of being” (*TO* 39).

This opposition to Hegel continues unabated throughout Levinas’s writings. As Robert Bernasconi has pointed out, Levinas is as severe towards Hegel as he is towards Heidegger.<sup>2</sup> Hegel is the champion of totality, the apostle of ontology. Indeed, Levinas’s

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<sup>1</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 42. Hereafter, *TO*.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Bernasconi, “Hegel and Levinas: The Possibility of Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” *Archivio di Filosofia* 54 (1986): 325. On the other hand, Bernasconi also cites Levinas’s explicit references to his “debt” to Hegel—in conversations with both Philip Nemo (*Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985]) and Richard Kearney (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard

criticism of Heidegger, his most conspicuous and frequently named opponent, often amounts to a disavowal that the analytic of Dasein or the “question of being” can transcend the horizons of dialectic and conceptual ontology. In other words, Levinas condemns Heidegger for not having broken sufficiently with Hegel and the impulse towards totality and systematization that Hegel epitomizes.<sup>3</sup> Levinas indicts Hegel in *Totality and Infinity*, along with Parmenides and Spinoza, as advocates of “the ancient privilege of unity”;<sup>4</sup> in *Otherwise than Being*, he joins Hegel again with Spinoza and now Zeno as one who avows a Stoic “wisdom of resignation and sublimation” in the face of the “ultimacy of *essence*, of the immanence without exit of its enclosing play” (*OB* 176/*AE* 222).<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, Hegel (with Heidegger) reduces the ethical subject “to a modality of being” (*OB* 17/*AE* 20-21) and makes a “radical denial of the rupture between

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A. Cohen [Albany: SUNY Press, 1986]) and in an article, “La pensée de l’être et la question de l’autre” (in *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, 2d ed. [Paris: J. Vrin, 1986]). Bernasconi points out that Levinas’s admiration for Hegel’s “discovery” of the negation that “bears the dust of the being which it rejects” and for “the quest for recognition by the *other man* in Hegel” does not avert his judgment that Hegel’s philosophy amounts to a denial of alterity and an assertion of totality (326).

<sup>3</sup>Robert Gibbs notes that “Levinas reads Husserl as Fichte and Heidegger as Hegel. Levinas views Husserl’s egology as, despite itself, too close to Fichte’s philosophy of the ‘I’; while Heidegger’s resurrection of ontology is seen as parallel to the totalizing system in Hegel.” See Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>4</sup>*Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 102; hereafter, *TI*. French text: *Totalité et Infini* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 75.

<sup>5</sup>Levinas’s emphasis. Levinas notes a technical use of the term “*essence*” and marks it throughout the text of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* by italics, a device which the English translation does not reproduce. “*Essence*,” he writes, “here expresses *being* [*l’être*] different from *beings* [*étant*], the German *Sein* distinguished from *Seiendes*, the Latin *esse* distinguished from the scholastic *ens*” (*OB* xli/*AE* ix). Unfortunately Levinas’s explicit collation of Hegel with Heidegger can only be noted here and not critically examined.

the ontological and the ethical.”<sup>6</sup> Thus from beginning to end Levinas opposes Hegel by identifying him with a tradition with which he wants to make a radical break.

What does this opposition and this declaration of a break signify for an attempt to bring Levinas back into dialogue with Hegel and the claims of coherence and knowledge? When he writes that there is a dialectic between the same and the other that is not determined by the meaning Hegel has given to “dialectic,” what are we to make of this reluctant appropriation and then erasure of terms, the first in a long line of erasures that will culminate but not cease with the “otherwise than being”? Indeed, one begins to suspect that Levinas is already implicated in the system he would evade by the language and figures to which he makes constant recourse, despite the fact that Levinas would find in such a tactic confirmation of the ruses of reason he finds so disingenuous. Ultimately this suspicion of necessary implication is the caution that underpins Jacques Derrida’s thoughtful and provoking essay juxtaposing Levinas with Hegel, “Violence and Metaphysics.” Derrida asks, “Does the strange dialogue between the Jew and the Greek, peace itself, have the form of the absolute, speculative logic of Hegel, the living logic which *reconciles* formal tautology and empirical heterology?”<sup>7</sup>

Even if one is not ready to concede that Hegel’s logic is either formal or tautological, Derrida’s incisive analysis of Levinas underscores the point that Levinas is closer to Hegel than he would like to admit, and especially “at that very moment when he

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<sup>6</sup>“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” 30. Cited also by Bernasconi.

<sup>7</sup>Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 153.

is apparently opposed to Hegel in the most radical fashion.”<sup>8</sup> His central thesis is that Levinas’s language constantly betrays the need Hebrew has of Greek, which is to say the need ethics has of ontology. By offering its theses in resistance to ontological thought, the thought of totality, Levinas’s work preserves this thought in his own. Ontology and the claims of conceptual thought appear in Levinas’s work “under erasure,” and this *erasure* is, according to the familiar argument, a kind of *écriture*, an inscription of the violence of ontology and of the concept in the very ethical metaphysics that would call us beyond the spell cast by knowledge. One can go further and wonder whether this dialectic between erasure and *écriture* is anything but the 20th century deconstructionist version of Hegel’s own determinate negation and *Aufhebung*, a possibility which does not at all diminish the charge that Levinas’s thought is implicated in the tradition he wants to break with.

According to this argument, Levinas’s entry into the philosophical discourse functions as an attestation of that discourse: “As soon as *he speaks* against Hegel, Levinas can only confirm Hegel, has confirmed him already.”<sup>9</sup> But, Levinas asks, is all critique or skepticism, forced as it is to articulate itself in the universality and thus the negativity of the said, of language, comprehended by that negativity? Derrida’s argument is simple: if the *said* cannot not contain the *saying*, how can Levinas produce a work that purports to represent, in philosophical discourse, that very *saying*? This reasoning

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<sup>8</sup>“Violence and Metaphysics,” 99. Derrida goes on to write, “This is a situation [Levinas] must share with all anti-Hegelian thinkers....”

<sup>9</sup>“Violence and Metaphysics,” 120.

surprisingly ignores the very notion of the trace, which points back beyond itself to what can never appear. Although it cannot itself appear, the trace is approached, Levinas says, in a philosophical reduction that “unsays” [*dédire*] the said.<sup>10</sup> Without this reduction, Levinas will maintain, ethics would be subsumed into knowledge or appear only as an egoist protest within the overall synthesis of the system.

But the problem transcends the mode of expression. Levinas cannot get rid of the shadow of Hegel because he teaches us that ethics calls into question the enterprise of consciousness to make absolute sense out of its experience in the world. The critique that ethics presents to absolute knowing—the face and expression of the other calling into question the same’s power to order the world—interrupts the discourse of philosophical thought and at the same time instigates a resumption of this discourse. Having interrupted the subject bent on knowing itself and its world, ethics challenges this subject to re-make the world, not as an absolute subjectivity, but as a subject awakened to the inexorable injustice of its enterprise. Still, what is called for is and must remain an *enterprise*, a task taken on together, and precisely here is where we most keenly feel

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<sup>10</sup>To be fair to Derrida, this distinction between the “saying” and the “said” as well as the notion of “unsaying” only become the subjects of extended analysis in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*; he also notes that Levinas’s article “La trace de l’autre” appeared after his own essay was written. Yet the notion of the trace and of the interpersonal address or “saying” of even a philosophical text (*TI* 81/53) already are clear by the time of *Totality and Infinity*. I do not mean here to discount all of Derrida’s important essay, only the claim that stated opposition to Hegel simultaneously confirms him. It may confirm Hegel as a participant in the ongoing philosophical conversation, but it does not confirm the validity of Hegel’s ideas. On the deliberate ambivalence of Derrida’s reading of Levinas in “Violence and Metaphysics,” see Robert Bernasconi, “Levinas and Derrida: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, 181-202, especially section II, 186-192.

Levinas's failure to lead us from the radicality of ethical critique into the daily task of living together.

Levinas repeatedly addresses this question, but never does he describe adequately the kind of dialectic that ethics must maintain with the claims of consciousness and knowledge once the entrance of the third person has introduced the ethical dyad to the shared world of the human community, a world in which I, too, can hope to be treated ethically by others, a world that requires judgment and justice and the comparison of incomparables. To be sure, in both *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* he asserts that the ethical relation maintains a priority even in the common world of justice and politics, of "fraternity," but while this foundation of human society upon proximity, the responsibility of the one for the other, is intriguing, it remains sketchy and suggestive, as if he were too acutely aware of the risks. In the final chapter of the present work I will attempt to develop further the possibility of such an ethical dialectic.

## 2. Levinas's Hegel

Levinas's thought of an infinite responsibility for the other person that escapes the conceptual grasp of knowing is not co-opted ipso facto by his opposition to Hegel, but neither is it immediately validated. In opposing Hegel, Levinas conjures him in several different ways, some of which are simply inadequate and unfair. As we have seen, Levinas opposes his thought generally to the philosophy of unity or totality that he claims dominates Western philosophy from Parmenides through Spinoza all the way to Hegel. Robert Williams has pointed out that this charge neglects Hegel's own criticism of



Parmenides, and the same could be said with regard to Spinoza.<sup>11</sup> Yet, it is true that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* culminates in an absolute knowing that Hegel describes as “this seeming inactivity which merely contemplates how what is differentiated spontaneously moves in its own self and returns into its unity” (*PS* 15, 21/*PG* 21, 28), while at the end of the *Science of Logic* we find that, “Logic, too, in the absolute Idea, has withdrawn into the same simple unity which its beginning is.”<sup>12</sup> However, in neither work is *unity* something as simple as it sounds. In the *Phenomenology*, the unity of absolute knowing is carefully distinguished from abstract unity, from the unity of thought and extension (i.e., Spinoza), and from unity that would inhere one-sidedly either in substance or subject (*PS* 488-489/*PG* 430-431), while in the *Logic*, the “simple unity” or being to which the idea returns is “*fulfilled being, the concept that comprehends itself, being as the concrete and also absolutely intensive totality,*” an intensity that maintains itself “solely through the absolute dialectic which is its nature” (*SL* 842, 841/*GW*.12.252, 251).

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<sup>11</sup>Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Hegel and Fichte on the Other* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 299. Williams observes that Levinas and Hegel criticize Parmenides along similar lines, notwithstanding Levinas’s repeated attempts to insinuate guilt by association. He cites Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, “Being, the One of the Eleatic School, is only this abstraction, a sinking into the abyss of the [abstract] identity of the understanding [*Verstandesidentität*]” (trans. E. S. Haldane, Vol. 1: *Greek Philosophy to Plato* [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1892; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press/Bison Books, 1995], 243). It would seem that a similar study of Hegel’s criticism of Spinoza would also undermine Levinas’s equation of these two thinkers.

<sup>12</sup>Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1969), 842. Hereafter *SL*. German texts: *Wissenschaft der Logik*, I.1: *Die Lehre vom Sein* (1832); I.2: *Die Lehre vom Wesen* (1813); II: *Die subjektive Logik* (1816), Philosophische Bibliothek Studienausgabe, ed. H.-J. Gawoll (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986-1993), II:252. These study editions reproduce the text of the *Gesammelte Werke*, Bde. 21, 11, 12, respectively. Hereafter, *GW*, e.g., *GW*.12.252; volume and page numbers follow the *GW*, not the Studienausgabe.

It should come as no surprise that the identification of Hegel as a philosopher of unity requires as much differentiation as it does identification. What this means is that when Levinas discovers phenomenologically some rupture in a ground of unity that seems to have been accepted in the Western philosophical tradition, it still remains incumbent on him to show whether and how Hegel himself presumes such a ground or unity, and to ask whether the proposed rupture would not also play a necessary role within Hegel's dialectic. Levinas has a tendency to implicate Hegel in his often incisive criticisms of such philosophical schemas as Husserl's doctrines of consciousness or intentionality, Heidegger's analysis of being, or Sartre's accounts of negativity and the for-itself, without at the same time explicitly making a case that these criticisms can be justly extended to Hegel. Further examination will sometimes reveal that such an extension is indeed warranted, but often it will show rather that Hegel stands *with* Levinas in his criticism of a one-sidedness in these approaches. At any rate, we cannot simply take an assurance that Hegel stands with these or other representatives of the philosophical tradition at face value.

Levinas can also approach Hegel directly and represent his thought fairly, even poetically, although he will inevitably move on to criticize it. A good example of this is his 1971 review of Bernard Bourgeois' study of Hegel's Frankfurt writings on Judaism and Christianity:

The Hegelian system represents the fulfillment of the West's thought and history, understood as the turning back of a destiny into freedom, Reason penetrating all reality or appearing in it. An unforgettable enterprise! Universal thought must no longer be separated, in the heads of some intellectuals, from the individual whom it renders intelligible. A *separate* universal is no longer universal but has once again become something particular. It must be separated from its separation; the universal,

identified from the different, must remain *in* the different from which it had been taken, whether it be, according to the famous formulae, *identity of identity and of non-identity* or *concrete universal* or *Spirit*.<sup>13</sup>

Here is a remarkably apt characterization of Hegel's thought and an indication that Levinas does not simply share the inadequate grasp of Hegel's significance that one seems to find, for example, in Husserl's *Crisis*.<sup>14</sup> As Levinas goes on, even though one begins to pick up hints of irony, the account of Hegel is still cogent and penetrating:

This sort of terminology, of course, frightens the honest man! But it announces a form of knowledge that does not get bogged down in specialization, an Idea that does not remain an abstraction, which animates in its form—in its *entelechy*—Reality itself. *The fulfillment of an idea still belongs to its intelligibility!* The history of humanity, throughout religions, civilizations, states, wars and revolutions, is nothing but this penetration, or this revelation, of reason within Being, long before the philosopher's thought has become aware of it in formulating the System.<sup>15</sup>

The italicized sentence—“*the fulfillment of an idea still belongs to its intelligibility*”—shows how well Levinas can use what he learned from Husserl's phenomenological discoveries to shed light on the enduring relevance of Hegel.

But we see a different side of Levinas's reading of Hegel when he finds inscribed in both Hegel's writings and Bourgeois's study of them, “a whole doctrine that corroborates (is it its source, or despite all Hegel's greatness, a consequence?) the argument that up to the present day has nurtured anti-semitism,” and even speculates

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<sup>13</sup>“Hegel and the Jews,” in *Difficult Liberty*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 235.

<sup>14</sup>Husserl sees Hegel as one of the most noteworthy in a line of unsuccessful post-Kantian attempts at establishing a scientific transcendental philosophy. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 191-203, esp. 201.

<sup>15</sup>Levinas, “Hegel and the Jews,” 235.

whether “Hitler’s propaganda itself did not draw heavily on” Hegel’s Frankfurt writings.<sup>16</sup> While the observation seems to allow that Hegel’s critical thought may be expressed in terms only contingently and retrospectively anti-semitic, it also insinuates that there might be in Hegel an essential and virulent anti-semitism, especially if we are to assume that the fulfillment of *this* idea also belongs to its intelligibility. “Anti-Semitism is based within the System...,” writes Levinas, “What a godsend!”<sup>17</sup>

The article illustrates the best and the worst of Levinas’s reading of Hegel. It appreciates the uniqueness and power of Hegel’s thought and wields Hegel’s often obscure terminology with the vigor and acumen that one finds in the best critical explications. But it also resorts to implication and insinuation, ultimately opposing Hegel by tarring him as a philosopher of not only totality, but of totalitarian ideology and history. The political implications of Hegel’s philosophy may be and have been justly disputed, but the easy association of Hegel with the tragic history of the “totalitarian state” in the twentieth century preempts the nuanced and objective discussion that is needed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Levinas, “Hegel and the Jews,” 236, 237.

<sup>17</sup>Levinas, “Hegel and the Jews,” 236.

<sup>18</sup>A book which almost certainly did not influence Levinas, but which has exerted a strong influence in the Anglo-American schools, painting totalitarianism as the natural and even intentional result of Hegel’s philosophy, is Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Although this view may hardly need to be refuted still, Walter Kaufmann’s “The Hegel Myth and Its Method” shows the absurdity of such charges (in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre [Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1972], 21-60).

The general characterization of Hegel as a philosopher of history and of the State to which Levinas resorts here and elsewhere, although it certainly has some basis in Hegel's own writings, seems dependent on and inseparable from a tradition that, whether critical of Hegel or pretending his defense, almost invariably over-simplifies the complexity on which his thought depends. The most immediate influences on Levinas here are Alexandre Kojève and Franz Rosenzweig, although the whole climate of Hegelian studies in France from the thirties through the sixties accentuated this focus.<sup>19</sup> We know that Levinas attended Kojève's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology* in Paris in the thirties,<sup>20</sup> and while Kojève's *interpretation* of Hegel is disputed, his *influence* on several generations of French philosophers is not. Kojève basically reads the *Phenomenology* as a philosophical anthropology that traces the essential possibilities of the human being as they are actualized in history, culminating in a "truly homogenous

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<sup>19</sup>Alphonso Lingis has suggested to me that Eric Weil's *Logique de la philosophie* (1950) and its notion of philosophical violence was important for Levinas's reading of Hegel. However, Weil's *Hegel et l'état* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1950) contests the received view of Hegel's political philosophy, that "Hegel is the man for whom the state is everything, the individual nothing, morality a form subordinated to the life of the spirit—in a word, the apologist for the Prussian state" (11). Weil cites Rosenzweig as a commentator exercising "remarkable penetration" in particulars, but "erroneous in his conception of the whole" (8). These remarks make it clear that Levinas does not *follow* Weil's reading, but they also suggest that Weil's attempt at rehabilitating Hegel may have helped furnish Levinas with the specific view of Hegel he opposes.

<sup>20</sup>See John Heckman's introduction to Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), xxiii. Although brief and directed towards an appreciation of Hyppolite's importance for the study of Hegel in France, Heckman's notes on Kojève's lectures have the advantage for my purposes of being based in part on an interview with Levinas. For one of the many fuller accounts of Kojève's influence, see Michael Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

humanity, realized as State at the end of History.”<sup>21</sup> However we may doubt that this is a legitimate reading of Hegel, Levinas seems to echo it in statements such as, “Ontology...issues in the State and in the non-violence of the totality.... Truth, which should reconcile persons, here exists anonymously. Universality presents itself as impersonal; and this is another inhumanity” (*TI* 46/16).<sup>22</sup> Against this one can argue, as do Robert Williams, H. S. Harris, Ludwig Siep and others, that Hegel aims precisely to combat the social anonymity Levinas decries and to promote the interpersonal reconciliation he seeks.<sup>23</sup> At least one ought to be wary about accepting a version of Hegel’s thought that culminates in an anonymous mass of humanity.

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<sup>21</sup>Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 252.

<sup>22</sup>Note that while Hegel is not named here, and “ontology” seems to suggest Heidegger, other contexts make it clear that this conjunction of “State” and “universality” inevitably means Hegel (cf. *TI*, 300/276-7). Perhaps the absence of a proper name here is deliberate, allowing Levinas to impeach both under the rubric of anonymity. See *TI*, 298/274.

<sup>23</sup>The centrality of intersubjective recognition and reconciliation to Hegel’s thought is the thesis of Williams’s *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*. H. S. Harris also emphasizes reconciliation in the community as the aim of Hegel’s thought; see *Hegel: Phenomenology and System* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), the “skeleton-key” to Harris’s longer work, *Hegel’s Ladder* (not yet available), and the article, “The Concept of Recognition in Hegel’s Jena Manuscripts,” in *Hegel’s Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, ed. John O’Neill, 233-252 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996). The other articles in O’Neill’s collection are also helpful on this theme. Ludwig Siep’s *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie: Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer “Philosophie des Geistes”* (Freiburg: Alber, 1984) traces not only the development of the concept of recognition in the Jena period, but its implications for contemporary social thought. Reconciliation in society is also the thesis of Michael Hardimon’s *Hegel’s Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), although his account is couched as a “philosophical reconstruction” of Hegel’s thought that deliberately avoids both Hegel’s vocabulary and textual analysis, thus making it less useful for the present study. Further literature on this theme is cited in chapters 4 and 5 of the dissertation.

Rosenzweig's criticism of Hegel, while less important for French Hegelianism in general, was very influential for Levinas.<sup>24</sup> Levinas's avowal in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* that Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* is "too often present in this book to be cited" provides a clue, but does not name Hegel specifically. However, Levinas's other articles on Rosenzweig's thought make it clear that here too an association of Hegel with political totalitarianism is made too easily and too uncritically. In "Franz Rosenzweig: A Modern Jewish Thinker" (1965), Levinas writes:

Rosenzweig had been molded in the certainty of the spiritual importance of the state and politics, under the influence of the Hegelian historian Meinecke, and *was quick to have a premonition of the dangers facing Europe, of which Hegel's philosophy remains a remarkable expression.* The Hegel who frightened him—was it the real Hegel or Meinecke's Hegel? Nationalism, national and nationalist states, a history made up of wars and revolutions had for Rosenzweig a Hegelian face. [Levinas's emphasis]<sup>25</sup>

He goes on to acknowledge that Rosenzweig's revolt against Hegel was criticized by neo-Hegelians who "dispute the authenticity of right-wing Hegelianism, in which the Prussian state and Bismarck's empire nonetheless recognized their origins" (*OS* 52).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>For a summary and analysis of Rosenzweig's social thought and the way it challenges Hegel, see Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, especially chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>25</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, "Franz Rosenzweig: A Modern Jewish Thinker," in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 50; hereafter *OS*. In the Translator's Introduction, Smith cites Levinas as saying in an interview with Salomon Malka that he "simply borrowed Rosenzweig's critique of Hegel" (*OS*, xxii). While a careful reading of Levinas's works, especially subsequent to Derrida's essay, "Violence and Metaphysics," exposes this claim as hyperbole, it can still serve as a cautionary note.

<sup>26</sup>In a note, Levinas cites Jacob Fleischmann's *The Problems of Christianity in Jewish Thought from Mendelsson to Rosenzweig* (in the Hebrew edition), with the barbed comment, "a remarkably well-informed and intelligent work, sure of its Hegelian orthodoxy, but unperturbed by any doubts" (*OS* 52n).

But the ultimate characterization of Hegel that Levinas finds in Rosenzweig returns to the charge of anonymity and impersonality by raising questions about the relationship of individual and system:

Did Rosenzweig have the real Hegel before him, or Meinecke's distorted version of him? When he affirms that since Kierkegaard philosophy has denied impersonal Spirit the right to imprison the individual soul that liberated it, when he sees the essential trait of the "new thinking" in the fact that "the philosopher ceases being a negligible quantity in his own philosophy,"<sup>27</sup> is he not opposing a permanent theme of Hegelian philosophy, even though it may have been learned by way of Meinecke? (OS 53)

This claim about Hegel can also be contested. Does an "impersonal Spirit" really imprison the individual soul of the philosopher in Hegel? Is the individual really "a negligible quantity in his own philosophy"? Hegel would term the individual a "necessary moment," and Levinas adds, "Yet more than that." His description of Rosenzweig's challenge to Hegel—"To an existence frozen into a system of which it becomes a *moment*, Rosenzweig opposes 'the individual in spite of it all' and the inexhaustible newness of life's instants" (OS 54)—recalls the protest that each succeeding generation has made against Hegel. While this in itself does not prove the charge, it suggests that the relation of individual and system is a problem to which Hegel-interpretation must again and again return. Thus, even if the cruder associations of Hegel with Nazism are disregarded, one can and must ask about the place of the concrete life of the individual in the philosophical system. Even those who disagree with

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<sup>27</sup>*The Star of Redemption*, part 1, 11 [Levinas's note].



Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig's reading of Hegel on this issue agree that this is a legitimate problem, one that is at the heart of Hegel's thought.

Levinas's own identification of Hegel as a philosopher of history and of the state usually points to this problem of the relation of the individual to the system. In the preface to *Totality and Infinity* he contrasts the ethical, eschatological judgment that summons one to responsibility with Hegel's notorious statement on the "judgment of history": "*Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.*"<sup>28</sup> Later Levinas associates this judgment of history with the "State" and argues that it makes the individual disappear:

The role of language would be to dissolve the ipseity of individual consciousness, fundamentally antagonistic to reason, either to transform it into an 'I think' which no longer speaks, or to make it disappear in its own discourse, whereupon, having entered into the State, it could only undergo the judgment of history, rather than remain me, that is, judge that history. (TI 208/183)

One might wonder here whether anyone has described such a dilemma better than did Hegel in the *Phenomenology's* discussion of absolute freedom, the general will and the necessary transition to morality (PS 355-363/PG 316-323). However, we should not assume that Levinas makes the judgment he does because he is incapable of appreciating the profundity of Hegel's political and ethical thought. Later in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas writes that,

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<sup>28</sup>TI 23/xi. The reference for Hegel's statement is in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §§340f. (Ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991]; German text: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. Hoffmeister [Hamburg: Meiner, 1955, 1967]; hereafter cited as *PR*, with section number). Wood notes that Hegel is quoting the statement *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht* from Schiller's poem, "Resignation." In any case, the point here is that all states are particular, manifestations of *finite* spirit, and thus subject to an infinite judgment in history. Hegel would certainly consider Levinas and Rosenzweig as part—but only part—of that infinite judgment.

Hegel's great meditation on freedom permits us to understand that the good will by itself is not a true freedom as long as it does not dispose of the means to realize itself.... Freedom is not realized outside of social and political institutions, which open to it the access to fresh air necessary for its expansion, its respiration, and even, perhaps, its spontaneous generation. (*TI* 241/218)

The "great meditation" apparently refers not only to the *Phenomenology*, but also to the sections on freedom in the introduction to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and to the various objectifications of freedom worked out in the course of the lectures. But Levinas is concerned not only with the ultimate ground of freedom and the will, but with the unassumable ethical responsibility that endows them with significance. Ethical responsibility is unassumable not because it is impossible to respond, but because the system that makes a response possible still does not determine the origin or the limits of that responsibility.<sup>29</sup>

In what follows, I will normally disregard Levinas's general references to the philosophy of unity or history or the state as arguments that could serve as *prima facie* evidence discrediting Hegel's account of the claims of absolute knowing. However, insofar as Levinas contends that ethical responsibility overflows and interrupts unity, history and the state, while Hegel argues that it is recognized and realized within them,

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<sup>29</sup>That the *Philosophy of Right* ends with an abbreviated Philosophy of World History that exalts the Germanic realm as the stage in which the world spirit attains its truth, revealing "the *state* as the image and actuality of reason," where the reconciliation of the objective truth and freedom "has become objective" (*PR* §360) explains a good deal of Levinas's skepticism regarding Hegel, politics and history. And even stalwart defenders of Hegel's thought balk at aspects of *The Philosophy of World History*. H. S. Harris, in *Hegel: Phenomenology and System*, remarks, "Every aspect of this concept of history as the work of a *real* 'Divine Providence' is superstitious and reactionary.... The *Philosophy of World History* shows us the weak side of Hegel's philosophy—it is 'speculative' in the bad sense. The *Phenomenology* is the book that contains Hegel's genuine theory of historical knowledge" (5-6).

the issue will remain with us. It is a matter, as Hegel reminds us, of paying attention to the full development of the exposition and not running away with the bare conclusions expressed as theses.

### 3. The Terrain of Experience and the Structure of Thought

To claim that one has discovered a dimension or a meaning not only unaccounted for by Hegel in the course of the *Phenomenology*, the *Logic*, and the *Encyclopedia*, but essentially unaccountable because it would be altered by the very system that would explain it—“a signification without a context” (*TI* 23/xii)—is not the same thing as demonstrating warrant for such a claim. The problem of warrant becomes particularly acute with the challenge that Levinas presents, for any reasoned demonstration or argument would seem to invoke criteria that are already included in Hegel’s phenomenology of consciousness and speculative dialectic, as Derrida claims. Can one provide a justification, a “deduction” of the primacy Levinas claims for ethics, a deduction that not only situates the ethical experience outside the realm of knowing, but confronts this realm as the unassimilable, infinitely anterior condition for knowing?

The answer to this question hinges on what counts as a deduction. Levinas’s method is phenomenological, and it is in terms of method that he professes allegiance to Husserl in both of his major texts. In the preface to *Totality and Infinity* he writes, “The break-up of the formal structure of thought (the noema of a noesis) into events which this structure dissimulates, but which sustain it and restore its concrete significance, constitutes a *deduction*—necessary and yet non-analytical” (*TI* 28/xvii). Although the terms “noema” and “noesis” used to describe the structure of thought clearly refer more

to Husserl than to Hegel, it is certainly legitimate to take at least Hegel's *Science of Logic* as an account of this structure—the “concept of conception.” Thus Levinas claims that the “break-up” [*éclatement*] of this science will expose it not as the comprehension but the dissimulation of experience. He proposes to describe events without which there could be no structured thought, events which thus constitute a necessary condition of possibility for thinking and knowing. At the same time, these events cannot, he claims, be deduced analytically from the structure of thought. They are the events caught sight of when the structure of thought is not dissected into constituent parts, themselves already bearing the noema-noesis or conceptual structure of thought, but exploded, splintered [*s'éclater*].

By what right does Levinas assert the break-up of thought? Surely this cannot be an arbitrary event imposed on thought by some force bent on resisting the claims of thought, come what may. Our clue must come instead from the phenomenological method that Levinas professes he follows. If one suspends or brackets the assumption that intelligibility has an incontestable right to the structures of thought that make its comprehension and its absoluteness possible, one will catch sight, Levinas says, of an irreducible plurality of events from which thought lives and which overflow the consciousness that thus apprehends them. These events are produced<sup>30</sup> in consciousness as a trace, or simultaneous presence and absence; they testify to an excess of the event over the thought that thinks it. In this way the deduction Levinas proposes seeks to

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<sup>30</sup>I am using this term in the double sense Levinas emphasizes in the Preface to *Totality and Infinity*: “The term ‘production’ designates both the effectuation of being...and its being brought to light...” (*TI* 26/xiv and translator’s note).

discover a necessary connection, yet at the same time an incommensurability, between thought and the events from which it lives. It is the structure of thought which thus “breaks up” by being overflowed, by paradoxically containing more than it is possible to contain.

We have thus to examine the connection between thought and the experience from which it lives. A deduction supporting Hegel will show a necessary and perfect correlation between experience and thought, between the gaps in experience and the conceptual thought that closes or traverses these gaps; one supporting Levinas will have to indicate some sort of interval or rupture across which thought operates by dissimulation and not by comprehension. Yet there is more than this. If Levinas does not want to abandon philosophy altogether, wants to maintain the necessity of the connection between thought and the events it dissimulates, this very dissimulation, simultaneously likeness and difference, will have to be something to which thought is exhorted or commanded. Interrupted by what is other than itself, thought incurs a responsibility—the ethical responsibility to think again, only now not as absolute knowing, but as a participant in the infinite conversation that is the plurality of human society.

Hegel also presents the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a deduction, a deduction of the standpoint of absolute knowing or the absoluteness of conceptual thought.<sup>31</sup> He explicitly uses the terms “deduction” and “justification” to describe the *Phenomenology* in the Introduction to the *Science of Logic* (*SL* 48-49/*GW*.21.32-33), but already in the

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<sup>31</sup>For a fuller account of this claim and the ways it has been interpreted, see Joseph Flay, *Hegel's Quest for Certainty* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 2ff, 270n7.

Preface to the *Phenomenology* he calls it a description of “the coming to be of *Science as such*, or of *knowledge*” and the “Science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through” to arrive at Absolute Knowing (*PS* 15, 21/*PG* 21, 28). He explicates this description in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, where he addresses what it means to consider the stages along the way to absolute Science as the “appearance” of Science. The exposition of the various stages or appearances of knowledge in the *Phenomenology*, because it relies on what are merely appearances and therefore untrue,

seems not to be Science, free and self-moving in its own peculiar shape; yet from this standpoint it can be regarded as the path of the natural consciousness which presses forward to true knowledge; or as the way of the Soul which journeys through the series of its own configurations as though they were the stations appointed to it by its own nature, so that it may purify itself for the life of the Spirit, and achieve finally, through a completed experience of itself, the awareness of what it really is in itself. (*PS* 49/*PG* 60)

Hegel goes on in the Introduction to explain how the movement from one shape or form [*Gestalt*] of knowing to the next involves not simple negation, but determinate negation, so that the new form of knowing that arises has a determinate content: it is the truth of the previous, incomplete form (*PS* 51f, 56/*PG* 62, 67f). The path traversed by consciousness in its development to absolute knowing is thus a necessary path, and nothing from a previous shape is ever lost. “The result of an untrue mode of knowledge must not,” he writes, “be allowed to run away into an empty nothing, but must necessarily be grasped as the nothing *of that from which it results*” (*PS* 56/*PG* 67). Hegel does not provide a deduction for a transcendental realm of rules and concepts needed to make human experience—or any experience—possible, but through determinate negation

he demonstrates that the standpoint of absolute knowing is necessarily the truth of the actual experience that consciousness already has.

This description should make it clear that to say that the *Phenomenology* functions as a deduction for the standpoint of absolute knowing means precisely that it provides an account of the transition Levinas says involves dissimulation, the transition between philosophical knowing and the experience from which it lives. Although the path from experience to knowledge is suffused with negativity—or rather, *because* of this suffusion—it is a smooth and necessary path. In Hegel’s version of the transition there are still gaps or contradictions; however, there is no interval that is not accounted for and justified in the final result, absolute knowing itself. Thus the *Phenomenology* also describes the experience from which thought lives, the experience of consciousness as the dynamic conceptual union of apparent contradictories:

In pressing forward to its true existence, consciousness will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of ‘other,’ at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its experience will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit. And, finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself. (*PS 56f/PG 68*)

Instead of the break-up of thought and the dissimulation of experience, we have thought’s complete coincidence and identity with the experience from which it lives.

The two proposed deductions then, Levinas’s and Hegel’s, differ in the accounts they give of the transition from experience to the realm of thought and knowledge fully realized. Our question becomes: Is there a non-recuperable rupture in this transition, as Levinas maintains, or does the dialectic engendered in what Hegel describes as the experience of consciousness continuously recoup its losses, as he claims? What is at

issue is what we might call the topography of the experience covered by the deduction—the topography of the terrain natural consciousness traverses in its formation (*Bildung*, cf. *PG 50/PS 56*) from Sense Certainty to the standpoint of Science, and the topography of the radical interiority and exteriority Levinas claims disrupts the continuity of thought. As topographies, descriptions of the experience from which thought lives, do Levinas’s and Hegel’s accounts map the same philosophical terrain in different ways, each perhaps with its own validity? Or is there a fundamental disparity between the landscapes of ethics and of knowledge? The answer will be discovered in the kinds of fissures or ruptures sketched in the respective “topographies.” If we can discover rifts that run not deeper but into different dimensions than those negotiated by Hegel’s dialectic, we shall have glimpsed the radically other dimension of Levinas’s summons to thought.

The spatial metaphor I use in comparing “topographies” is deliberate, and I believe, justified by the accounts both philosophers give of thought and the experience that precedes or shapes thought. Levinas speaks of the pure depth of enjoyment, of the psychism plunged into the element that has no real sides but instead comes from nowhere: “the *apeiron* distinct from the infinite,” preceding “the distinction between finite and infinite” (*TI 141/115; 132/105*). To be sure, the spatial sense of Levinas’ metaphors is stretched beyond the measurements of natural science, but it is precisely the difference between the dimension of pure depth and the dimensions that appear in representational thought that he seeks to describe. In contrast to the depth of enjoyment, Levinas also speaks of the “height” of the ethical relation. The Other, although destitute, is nevertheless at a height and commands; metaphysical transcendence is a “transascendence” (*TI 35/5*). The significance of these dimensions of depth and height



must await fuller explication, but here they can at least serve to justify the topographic character of the analysis proposed. Levinas's insistence on the rift between the dimensions of thought and the dimensions of the experience from which thought lives is unmistakable.

Hegel, too, in describing the "path" natural consciousness follows, employs topographical language. The past stages of thought that have shaped universal spirit are run through in the itinerary of the *Phenomenology*, "as shapes which Spirit has already left behind, as stages on a way that has been made level with toil" (*PS 16/PG 22*). Even granting the metaphorical character of this description, we can ask what is involved in the labor of "leveling" the experience of consciousness to the plane of knowledge. The ability of spirit to reshape the rough terrain of experience into the even plane of scientific knowing entails a dynamic that converts contradiction into comprehension. This dynamic that effects the commensurability of experience and knowing is what Hegel will call the subjectivity of substance, the true shape of spirit upon which the whole project of philosophical *science* depends.

In fact, Hegel's concern with the *experience of consciousness* would already be described by Levinas as a reduction of experience to the plane of consciousness, of knowing. For Levinas, both the depth of enjoyment and the height of the face to face ethical encounter precede consciousness proper; moreover, it is precisely ethical experience that calls forth consciousness, thought, communication and language as necessary components of an ethical response. While we quite normally and legitimately use the word "experience" to describe the movement of consciousness and knowledge, as for example when we say that someone "is experienced" or "needs more experience," we

also use it just as legitimately to describe what seems to exceed knowledge or the parameters of consciousness: “*That was an experience!*” In the Preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes:

The relation with infinity will have to be stated in terms other than those of objective experience; but if experience precisely means a relation with the absolutely other, that is, with what always overflows thought, the relation with infinity accomplishes experience in the fullest sense of the word. (*TI* 25/xiii)

This ambiguity of *experience* goes to the heart of the difference between Levinas and Hegel, even though Levinas for the most part remains wary of the power of thought to include all experience in knowing and thus generally avoids calling the ethical relation to the other an “experience.” Speaking of the proximity of the other that disrupts the full present of intelligibility in the preface to *Humanisme de l’autre homme*, Levinas writes:

Proximity does not concern a new ‘experience’ opposed to the experience of objective presence, an experience of the ‘you’ [*tu*] producing itself after, or even before, the experience of being[,] of an ‘ethical experience’ in addition to perception. *Rather, it concerns putting EXPERIENCE in question as the source of meaning....* (*HdAH* 14; my translation)

Nevertheless, I will attempt to recover a sense of experience as what overflows thought, yet also signifies for thought, and thus for experience in the second sense, experience as knowing.

For Hegel, the topographical image of the path of consciousness and even the plastic notion of “shape” [*Gestalt*] are embedded in an analysis of the temporal development of spirit to the point of absolute knowing. The itinerary of spirit, imagined as a path traversing various stations or shapes of consciousness and self-consciousness, refers to the actual existence of these modes of thinking in the history or education of the individual human consciousness. As the hills and valleys, the rough places of the

experience of natural consciousness are made level by the labor of the concept, historical time is “recollected” and comprehended in absolute knowing. Hegel explains this recuperation of historical time at the end of the *Phenomenology* as follows:

Time is the concept that *is there* and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure concept, i.e., has not annulled [*tilgt*] time. It is the *outer*, intuited pure self which is *not grasped* by the self, the merely intuited concept; when this latter grasps itself it cancels [*hebt...auf*] its time-form, comprehends this intuiting, and is a comprehended and comprehending intuiting. (*PS 487/PG 429*)<sup>32</sup>

Although the exact meaning of annulment or cancellation can be debated, it is clear that, in time as in space, absolute knowing heals all wounds, converts the fissures that would destroy it into the very tissue of the absolute itself. The “dimension” suggested by time will complement the topographical comparison already proposed. I stated above that Levinas invokes Husserl in both of his major works to describe his procedure as phenomenological, allowing us to catch a glimpse of the lived experience from which consciousness lives, even though Husserl himself, according to Levinas,

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<sup>32</sup>I have eliminated the unnecessary capital letters, which suggest a super-mundane ideality, and used a more obvious translation of *aufheben* than Miller’s “sets aside.” The meaning of the passage is much disputed; see Flay’s discussion in *Hegel’s Quest for Certainty*, 404-406, n38, and also his “Time in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 31 (September 1991), 259-273. Although J. N. Findlay (*Hegel: A Re-examination* [New York: Macmillan, 1958], 20-21, 146) laments the use of “religious language” here and argues that “annul” can mean only that time is irrelevant for some philosophical considerations, the German *tilgen* has a strong sense of “wipe out” or “efface” and, like the English *delete* to which it is related, signifies as the negation of existence, which is entirely appropriate to Hegel’s context. *Tilgen* can also mean “redeem” in an economic sense. However, although the notion of redemption is applied to time this way in the New Testament, such as when Paul tells the Ephesians to live wisely, “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (*Eph. 5:16*; cf. *Col. 4:5*), Luther here and elsewhere uses the literal *auskaufen* [buy out] to translate the Greek *ἐξαγοραζόμενοι*, and *tilgen* to translate *ἐξάλειψω* [wipe away], generally in the sense of wiping away sin. Whatever the meaning of *tilgen* here, it is clear that the ruptures of time are erased in the absolute perspective.

inevitably interpreted this experience itself as “intentional” or “thoughts aiming at objects” (*TI* 28/xvi). In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas characterizes this phenomenological method as a *reduction* rather than a *deduction*.

Our presentation of notions proceeds neither by their logical decomposition, nor by their dialectical description. It remains faithful to intentional analysis, insofar as it signifies the locating of notions in the horizon of their appearing, a horizon unrecognized, forgotten or displaced in the exhibition of an object, in its notion, in the look absorbed by the notion alone. The said in which everything is thematized, in which everything shows itself as a theme, has to be reduced to its signification as saying, beyond the simple correlation that is set up between the saying and the said. The said has to be reduced to the signification of the saying, giving it over to the philosophical said, which also has to be reduced. Truth is in several times, here again like breathing, a diachrony without synthesis which the fate of skepticism refuted and returning, the legitimate child<sup>33</sup> of philosophical research, suggests, and which it encourages. (*OB* 183/*AE* 231)

I have quoted this passage at some length in order to point out several things.

First, although the passage from the plane of consciousness to its horizons is described in the technical phenomenological language of “reduction” rather than “deduction,” this does not signal a rejection of the themes developed in *Totality and Infinity* so much as the rigorous abstention from ontological language that characterizes the later work. Better than “deduction,” “reduction” signals a retrogressive movement, a movement back to the horizons dislocated by thought, back to the horizons of experience before they have been worked over by consciousness or the labor of the concept. In any case, as a movement that traces thought and being back to the horizons that somehow precede their origin, this

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<sup>33</sup>“Legitimate child” is a correction of Lingis’s inadvertent “bastard child” for “*enfant légitime*”(AE 231).

reduction remains faithful to the task of critique laid out in *Totality and Infinity*, where Levinas writes that “to philosophize is to trace freedom back to what lies before it, to disclose the investiture that liberates freedom from the arbitrary” (*TI* 84f/57). This reduction or critique, which is precisely ethical and not ontological, seeks to discover how even the infinity of absolute knowing—the realm of the “said”—is confined to an arena where its power to think and to know indeed seems absolute, but which nevertheless owes this power to another dimension, from which it lives and to which it is responsible.

The second claim in this methodological comment from the end of *Otherwise than Being* addresses the temporal concerns of Hegel’s project in the *Phenomenology*. Earlier, Levinas speaks of “a diachrony without synthesis,” and says that “truth is in several times....” Fully aware of the recuperable diachrony of the history experienced by natural consciousness, Levinas writes that time has been thought of as both identity and difference:

In the temporalization of time the light comes about by the instant falling out of phase with itself—which is the temporal flow, the differing of the identical. The differing of the identical is also its manifestation. But time is also a recuperation of all divergencies, through retention, memory and history. (*OB* 9/*AE* 11)

Yet, despite this seemingly perfect return, time itself must point back to another dimension, to a “past that was never present.” Levinas go on,

In the recuperating temporalization, without time lost, without time to lose, and where the being of substance comes to pass—there must be signaled a lapse of time that does not return, a diachrony refractory to all synchronization, a transcending diachrony. (*OB* 9/*AE* 11)

Much remains to be explicated in this claim: What is the meaning of this signalling? How can what is refractory to synchronization signify nevertheless as *time*? What is the relation of this transcending diachrony and its interruption of synchrony to the rupture of historical diachrony recollected or synchronized in thought? Still, we see that the challenge Levinas poses meets Hegel on grounds each can agree to: the topography and the temporalization of the relation between experience and knowing.

There are further points of contact signaled in Levinas's description of the phenomenological reduction that his thought effects. He says that the transcending diachrony is tied to a distinction between the "saying" and the "said," which is where the essential rupture takes place. It is as if there were two sayings or two dimensions to the one saying: one that is a saying *of* the said and correlative with it, and another saying that signifies before the content or message it nevertheless transmits. Similarly, there seem to be two dimensions to diachrony: a diachrony of past nows spread out in history that is recollected by spirit and correlative to the thought synchronized in the concept, and a diachrony that has never been present, an immemorial past that nevertheless sustains the whole conscious structure of time and thought.

Finally, when he writes that, "the said has to be reduced to the signification of the saying, giving it over [*tout en le livrant*] to the philosophical said, which also has to be reduced," it is clear that the role of philosophy itself is at issue for Levinas as for Hegel. He does not substitute for the hard work of conceptual thinking a religiosity that is merely a pious wish for security. Rather, philosophy appears in the texture of a discourse which, as a said, must submit to a reduction in which it undoes its own authority. This movement is not the abasement of thought, but its dignity.

This confrontation between Hegel and Levinas ought not to lead us to the brink of a superficial decision: Hegel or Levinas? The present study seeks to respect the integrity of each philosopher's account of the relation between experience and knowing in order to discover the terms under which such a relation is possible as a comprehensive conceptual account that renders the processes of knowing absolute (Hegel) and the terms under which it is possible only as an ethical relation that arrests the constant temptation to dissimulation and absolution (Levinas). This will provide the context for a critique of the relationship between knowing and ethics, between thought and morality. If there is an ethical interruption that transcends conceptual discourse, then knowing will certainly have to give up the title "absolute." But this ethical interruption, if it is not to be dismissed as irrelevant or as grounds for despair, must engage thought in a kind of dialectic—to be sure, a non-ontological and non-determinative dialectic—in which reason, without abandoning the concepts it must employ, nevertheless renounces the goal of absolute cognition and so submits to the critique of its other. Thus will the ethical interruption present conceptual thought with *another* responsibility, a responsibility that cannot be wholly comprehended in the activity of knowing to which it gives birth and which concerns it still.

Now we can embark on our own journey through the terrains and times of these two deductions or reductions of the standpoint of human knowledge. Our object will be to examine the account each philosopher gives not only of the topography of experience, but the way this topography is worked over by consciousness, and to seek to discover whether the ruptures and discontinuities to which Levinas attests are indeed translatable

to the gaps Hegel has made good in the *Phenomenology*.<sup>34</sup> The fact of rupture or contradiction itself, far from constituting evidence for the rejection of Hegel's deduction, will signal places where the *how* of dialectical closure must be examined in light of the absolute asymmetry Levinas claims for the ethical relation. We must be vigilant for what might be overlooked in the passage from contradiction to comprehension and ask what difference this difference makes. What difference does it make for ethics? What difference for thought? And what difference for the relation between them?

#### 4. Dynamic Subjectivity, or Restlessness

Hegel makes it clear in the *Phenomenology* that the *how* of dialectical closure is effected by the process in which the absolute reveals itself to be, in truth, subject. Rather than an inert, underlying substrate or an arbitrary, fixed point of view in which the realities of substantial being are imperfectly reflected, the subject in Hegel is a dynamic, self-conscious process that both produces and embraces contradiction and contrariety in its development to full self-knowledge. Thus, for Hegel, it would be wrong-headed to consider the fissures in the terrain of experience as empirical facts that could be used as a sort of objective criterion to judge the validity of his account of the topography of this experience. The oppositions and contradictions overcome by the conceptual dialectic appear as such only within this dialectic itself, and Hegel's constant teaching is that it

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<sup>34</sup>Hegel addresses the relationship of thought to experience, of the *Phenomenology* to the *Science of Logic*, at the beginning and the end of the *Logic*, as well as elsewhere in the *Logic* and the system of philosophical thought. I will turn to these accounts—from the *Logic*, the *Encyclopedia*, the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and other writings—as appropriate, but my focus, to remain manageable, must be on the *Phenomenology*.



would be one-sided to see them as objective discrepancies that the dialectic of knowing confronts outside of itself and then overcomes or nullifies. The whole thrust of the *Phenomenology* is to comprehend such oppositional moments as the dynamic dialectical structure of spirit itself, which means that the ruptures, fissures and gaps of experience are themselves dynamical moments or patterns of spirit's self-comprehending actualization. It is the *how* of spirit's simultaneous self-sundering and self-comprehension that we must try to understand, and not a one-sided *what*. And to understand how Hegel reconciles experience with knowledge requires that one grasp with Hegel the truth of absolute subjectivity.

There may seem to be something obsolete in a call to understand subjectivity. The age of the death of philosophy has also been the age of the death of the subject. In part this virulence of contemporary thought for the subject has been a reaction against the Hegelian apotheosis of subjectivity, or has conceived itself as such, although the subjectivity most often declared dead or irrelevant bears more resemblance to Husserl's transcendental ego or Sartre's for-itself than it does to Hegel's spirit. Hegel already shows that a subject posited as the ideal arbiter of experience is as one-sided a conception as is the immediate objectivity of consciousness. Spirit experiences the death of this and many other incomplete shapes of its self-knowledge in the course of the *Phenomenology*. Fully developed in absolute knowing, it is not a dead subject, but the subject volatilized into every aspect of experience. The de-centering of the subject into the community of readers or into the institutions in which cultural power is invested does little more than trace some (and by no means all) of the ramifications of Hegel's own discovery into the contexts in which we today try to realize the possibilities of knowledge. As such, these

de-centered subjectivities appear to be aspects of the “Real Philosophy” of the present age rather than refutations of Hegel’s absolute spirit.<sup>35</sup>

If understanding the meaning of subjectivity in Hegel requires one to transcend the limitations of a philosophy of reflection in which subject-substance and subject-object distinctions remain mutually exclusive and static, understanding the role subjectivity plays in Levinas’s thought requires a similar and paradoxical movement beyond traditional oppositions. Although he cautions that the philosophical tradition has inevitably asserted its claims by reducing the other to the same, Levinas cannot and does not abjure a philosophy of subjectivity in order to exalt an obscure and unintelligible “otherness” that would render the projects of consciousness an arbitrary and solipsistic game and make philosophy itself impossible. Such an “otherness” would coyly offer itself as the condition of a cognition it would refuse to acknowledge. It would renounce the serious business of ethical critique that is the heart of Levinas’s thought. For Levinas, although the I or separated being is involved already in the welcome of the other and indeed necessary for this, it remains unable to grasp the other’s alterity and is subject

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<sup>35</sup>The contention that the subject is dead, although ubiquitous, is difficult to trace and would require, as I have discovered, a separate dissertation. When one rounds up the usual suspects—Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, Lacan—one is hard-pressed to determine any common point of origin, although Foucault’s assertion at the end of *The Order of Things* that the notion of man is “an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end” (Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* [New York: Random House, 1970], 387) is often cited as “proof” that the “subject” is “dead.” Derrida and Foucault certainly take much of their inspiration for the critique of subjectivity from Heidegger and Nietzsche, although few of the literary critics that cite them seem to have engaged in a critical study of either precursor. In any case, the belief that Hegel can be categorically dismissed as hopelessly modern because the subject is de-centered or dissolved in post-modern discourse betrays little if any familiarity with or understanding of Hegel’s thought.

always to the critique that exposes the other as the condition of its own welcoming. This tension between the subject's initiative and its responsibility also evinces a dynamic conception of subjectivity, one in which the conscious subject catches sight of its ethical subjectivity only in the face of the other who contests the grasp of its thought.

There are in fact three orders of subjectivity in Levinas's thought. Subjectivity can refer to the "Same": the I as the power [*pouvoir*] of consciousness, established in a site that allows it to know and to act in the world. But the I is also the separated being, the flesh of sensibility and enjoyment that bathes happily and innocently in the element of the world. Enjoyment is rent in ethical responsibility, but it remains distinct from that responsibility, a moment of pure atheism. It is to be distinguished from the first aspect of subjectivity—the power and capability of consciousness—as well as from the ineluctable "one for the other" of substitution or ethical responsibility. This last aspect—the one for the other—is the aspect of subjectivity that is ultimately most important for Levinas's ethical critique of absolute knowing, although one can also ask whether there might be a critique of knowing attempted in the direction of the lived experience of sensibility and enjoyment. For Levinas, ethics precedes or takes precedence over ontology<sup>36</sup> because the relation with the absolutely other remains foundational, a "condition of possibility" not only for the projects of consciousness, but also for enjoyment and sensibility.

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<sup>36</sup>A section early in *Totality and Infinity* is entitled, "Metaphysics Precedes Ontology." "Precedes" here signifies both "takes precedence over" and "makes possible," although it would be absurd to assert temporal priority in any empirical sense. Of course, for Levinas, metaphysics or first philosophy is ethics, so long as we understand ethics to be something more radical than a set of behavioral norms or principles for such norms. See Adriaan Peperzak's remarks on the word "ethics" in his introduction to *Ethics as First Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak (New York: Routledge, 1995), xi.

These three orders or milieus of subjectivity—consciousness, enjoyment, responsibility—have a non-dialectical relationship, which is to say that they are not self-mediating and mutually determinative. But the lack of mediation and reciprocal determination does not mean that they are unrelated or have no impact on each other. The I of consciousness that establishes itself in a site and through labor draws the elemental into its power and possession does so by postponing enjoyment. This power that it wields as if from its own essential nature, its own will, comes to it initially but discreetly as the gift of the other in a paradoxical relation: “in such a way that without being *causa sui* it is first with respect to its cause,” a created being capable of atheism (*TI* 59/30). Thus there is an interaction between the three aspects of subjectivity, but it is not an interaction that is comprehended by any one of them. Even responsibility, although irrecusable, calls into question the privileges of the same without determining its response.

Neither the one immersed in enjoyment and ignorant of the other nor the one who suffers responsibility for the other in her own skin is a self in search of certainty. Still, these modes of subjectivity can and must be conscripted into the adventure of knowledge, where they will necessarily appear as shapes of consciousness and even self-consciousness. In this way, the whole long journey of spirit recounted by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, the comprehensive categories of the *Logic*, as well as the all-encompassing range of the *Encyclopedia*, can all be situated by Levinas within the mode of subjectivity that appears as knowing consciousness. But in this guise, exercising its power over the other as the same, subjectivity threatens to efface the responsible self by abdicating wholly to the knowing subject that assembles all its moments into the

synchrony of history or logic. What I hope to do is to trace the movements of this interplay between responsibility and knowing consciousness, and to try to articulate a new dialectic in which the absolute, self-determining whole that Hegel makes supreme is again and again recalled to a responsibility it cannot wholly assume.

Levinas does not thematize subjectivity specifically as a “dynamic” and in fact would be chary of the term, given its philosophical origin as the “potency” related to “act.” To designate subjectivity as “dynamic” in this sense would be to reinscribe it in the logic of being. But “dynamic” can also oppose “static” to designate a movement not confined to a potency that plays itself out in activity. What I would like to call the “dynamic of subjectivity” in Levinas is more like the agitation or “restlessness” of spirit that Hegel speaks of at the end of the *Phenomenology* (PS 491/PG 432). In fact, Levinas uses the term “restlessness” to describe subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being*: “It is a restlessness and patience that support prior to action and passion” (OB 109/AE 139). However, there is a decisive difference between the sources of this restlessness. While the restlessness of absolute subjectivity in Hegel stems from spirit’s own self-externalization and self-comprehension, the restlessness of ethical subjectivity is described by Levinas as obsession, proximity and sensibility, as recurrence and substitution, all of which designate a disturbance that comes from exteriority, from the other, and not from itself.

Thus the dynamism and restlessness of subjectivity explored by both thinkers provides an occasion for comparing the accounts they give of the relation of experience to knowing. I argued earlier that the determinate negation effected by Hegelian subjectivity is the motor of the dialectic, insuring that the movement of spirit towards the

absolute is both continuous and necessary. By examining the work of subjectivity and especially determinate negation in key transitions of the *Phenomenology*, I will try to show that the movement of “taking up” the inadequacy of the previous moment into the truth of a new configuration of thought does indeed elide a movement in another direction, a movement that does not preserve contradiction by comprehending it “in its truth,” but rather signifies as a restlessness and torsion—a non-coincidence whereby there appears in thought what nevertheless exceeds the grasp of thought. Rather than a movement that leads to the recollection of experience in the *concept*, this movement is an “extraction from essence” or “*ex-ception*” (*OB 8/AE 9*).<sup>37</sup>

I hope to show that the reconciliation of experience and knowledge effected by the Hegelian subject attains the absolute standpoint for the same reason this dialectic fails to incorporate the exception designated by Levinas’s ethical subjectivity. In the movement of Hegel’s dialectic, the negation taken up into the new shape of knowing is always already a specific shape of knowing. Spirit becomes absolute because it has, in a sense, always been so. Its experience of doubt and despair arises because it dialectically discovers inadequacies in the structure it claims founds knowledge, that is, it discovers them by working out ironic implications of its own provisional standpoint.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Lingis translates *arrachement* [from L. *eradicare*] once as a “break out” of essence and then as “extraction” from essence. It is tempting to translate it more literally as “uprooting” or “deracination,” an escape from reason. While the author may have intended this, what we have is a disruption of the claims of reason and not a complete repudiation of it.

<sup>38</sup>See Joseph Flay’s “Hegel’s *Science of Logic*: Ironies of the Understanding” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, ed. George di Giovanni, 153-169 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990). Although Flay limits this discussion to irony in the *Science of Logic*, such irony is also necessarily operative in the *Phenomenology*.

Comprehension or absoluteness is possible because the contradictions of the dialectic are already immanent to consciousness. But this immanence is precisely what Levinas contests. To authenticate this exception to the dialectic of knowing spirit, it is necessary to show that not every experience of subjectivity involves a knowledge claim, or at least that the experience of subjectivity is not wholly involved in a knowledge claim. Further, it must be shown that a significant dimension of subjectivity's experience is *an-archic*, or comes from outside the structures under its own power. In other words, subjectivity is not wholly self-generated. Finally, it must be shown that this exteriority signifies ethically by critiquing the adventure of knowing, calling it into question by calling it to face its responsibility for the other person.

Because Levinas turns to accounts of sensibility and language—and through these, to an account of time—that contest the way these are held to be wholly immanent to the cognitive experience of the thinking subject, we will also have to examine Hegel's accounts of these experiences. In each case Levinas describes a relationship with exteriority that, while it exceeds the cognitive dimensions of consciousness, nevertheless gives birth to and signifies in these dimensions. His argument with Hegel will be that sensibility transcends or exceeds the notion of a content sensed or given to thought in sensation; that in its imperative and vocative moods language goes beyond or signifies prior to the indication of qualities, the positing of existence, or the dialectical determinations of the concept.

We return to the claim with which we began: that the absoluteness of knowing can be traced back or reduced to levels of experience in which its systematic structure breaks up and that this break-up signifies as an ethical interruption of the absoluteness of

knowing. If the reduction Levinas offers has done its job, we will have begun to glimpse ruptures that extend in dimensions that escape the recollection of knowing spirit. But what then? Does this simply leave us with an ethical skepticism and evasion of the adventure of human knowledge? The attitude of one who would live romantically in the anarchy of absolute difference: “Why know? Why is there a problem? Why philosophy?” (*OB 157/AE 199*) Levinas rejects completely. It is the call of the other and the desire to offer things into a shared space that awakens consciousness to this adventure in the first place.



## CHAPTER 2: HEGEL: RECONCILING EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

### 1. An Immense Gulf

Immanuel Kant, awakening not only himself from dogmatic slumber, discovered in the operations of human reason criteria that set limits on its operation in both the theoretical and the practical fields. In the theoretical realm, reason could only claim validity for its processes if it restricted itself to operating within the conditions under which intuition is given to human sensibility. Although reason was continually driven by its own ambitions beyond these conditions, Kant taught it the responsibility of operating against this natural drive by demonstrating that in this beyond it could only operate dialectically and never definitively, except, in articulating this very limitation and its necessity. In the practical realm, on the other hand, reason seemed to be free, even identical with freedom, insofar as here it was obliged to conform only to the law of its own universality. If this autonomy manifested itself as a “finite freedom,” it was so only in contradistinction to a false freedom—random, capricious and arbitrary (*willkürlich*) activity. Intuition and natural feeling were to play no part in determining moral action, for this would introduce an element external to reason and compromise its autonomy. Practical reason determined how men and women were to act in an ideal world, and if the dialectical operation of theoretical reason gave them reason to hope that this ideal world was realizable—or at least that it was not impossible—the dialectical operation of practical reason obliged them to this hope.

Although Kant thus reconciled the claims of theoretical and practical reason as harmonious and necessarily non-contradictory, he did so at a price. His critique of reason left philosophers with two realms: the realm of phenomena and the realm of noumena. This bifurcation ran right through the human person, who was on the one hand both an agent and an effect in the sensuous world of appearances, subject to the totality of its contingent laws, and on the other hand, a free and autonomous agent in the noumenal world, subject only to the moral law within. In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant describes these two realms or domains as having “two different legislations on one and the same territory of experience.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, in describing these two domains on one territory or ground (*Boden*), Kant goes on, “Hence an immense gulf is fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, the supersensible, so that no transition from the sensible to the supersensible...is possible, just as if they were two different worlds.”<sup>2</sup> This immense gulf in the territory of experience was Kant’s legacy to Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and their contemporaries. The heirs, however, were not satisfied with the merely *regulative* resolutions Kant provided,

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<sup>1</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 13; German text: *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Second Introduction), ed. Karl Vorländer (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990) 5.175 (using *Akademie* edition page numbers).

<sup>2</sup>Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 14-15; *Ak.*5.175-176. Kant goes on to argue that there is a basis for thinking of a transition in the opposite direction, of the domain of freedom having an influence on the domain of nature, and that this basis grounds aesthetic and teleological judgment, although it does not ground any kind of *cognition*. Whatever the merits of such thinking, it obviously did not satisfy Fichte, Schelling, Hegel or keep them from searching for a firmer ground of unity.

and sought to overcome this gulf by discovering a definitive ground of unity for human experience and thought.

As distressing as this immense gulf was to the new generation of philosophers, they could not simply repudiate Kant; he had made too definitive a break from the seemingly unselfconscious world of thought that had reigned until 1781. The only way to resolve the contradictions Kant had left them was to go beyond him and to discover some unitary principle that could heal the divisions he had discovered.<sup>3</sup> Fichte tried to plumb the depths of the transcendental ego in order to discover a way to deduce the categories and thus the transcendental object itself from the ego. Schelling developed an aesthetic doctrine of intellectual intuition that provided direct access to the absolute. Hegel stayed faithful to Kant's search for unity in religion, but he turned away from a rational religion to the ideal of an aesthetically vigorous religion in ancient Greece.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Frederick Beiser's *The Fate of Reason* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) is probably the best recent account in English of the response of the next generation to Kant's legacy. See also the documents collected in *Between Kant and Hegel*, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>The most thorough account of the whole of Hegel's early career is H. S. Harris's two volume study, *Hegel's Development*, Volume 1: *Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801*; Volume 2: *Night Thoughts (Jena 1801-1806)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972; 1983). Adriaan Peperzak's *Le jeune Hegel et la vision moral du monde*, 2d ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960) emphasizes the development of Hegel's moral views as an attempt to complete Kant's project. Klaus Düsing reviews the development of Hegel's conception of subjectivity and dialectic through the early writings (among which he includes the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) in *Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik*, Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 15 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1976). See also the accounts of Hegel's development in: Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Freiburg: Alber, 1973) and "Die Komposition der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*" in *Hegel-Tage Royaumont 1964*, Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 3, 27-74 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1966). Harris includes several texts in the Appendix to Vol. 1 that are important for an understanding of Hegel's early thought about the reconciliation of opposites. Other early texts are translated by T. M. Knox and Richard Kroner in *Early Theological Writings* (University of

The problem of bridging the immense gulf and providing access to a unitary whole of experience is consistent in nearly all of Hegel's early writings. Sometimes it is expressed as the conflict between objective or "positive" religion and subjective or inner religion,<sup>5</sup> sometimes as the conflict between individuals and between the individual and nature,<sup>6</sup> or as the conflict between a finite mode of thought (belief, representation reflection) and the unity of true being.<sup>7</sup> But the quest to overcome the finitude inherent in opposition is constant. In his early works, many of them extant now only in fragments, the ideas he used to express how the rifts in experience might be healed were primarily "religion," "life," and "love."<sup>8</sup> Scholars differ as to whether Hegel went through a period of crisis in which he despaired of these solutions or whether his eventual discovery of a

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Chicago Press, 1948; reprint, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). Hereafter, *ETW*.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. the "Tübingen Fragment" (*Religion ist eine*), in *Hegel's Development*, 1:481-507; "Positivity of Christian Religion" in *ETW*, 67-181; and "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," in *ETW*, 182-301.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. the fragment *...welchem Zwecke denn alles Übrige dient*, entitled "Love" by Knox, in *ETW*, 302-308; and the so-called "Fragment of a System (1800)" (*absolute Entgegensetzungen gilt*), *ETW*, 309-319.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. the Frankfurt sketch on "Faith and Being" (*Glauben ist die Art*), in *Hegel's Development*, 1:512-515; and Hegel's critique of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte in *Faith and Knowledge* (trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris [Albany: SUNY Press, 1977]). Also of interest is Friedrich Hölderlin's 1795 sketch, *Über Urtheil und Seyn*, translated Harris in *Hegel's Development*, 1:515f, which Harris acknowledges may help locate an influence and a development in Hegel's own thinking.

<sup>8</sup>See the above references, and also Harris's account of the relation of these concepts to Hegel's mature conception of dialectic in *Hegel's Development*, 1:388-391.

dialectical resolution stemmed from a continuous development.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the case, his early works do not express an unrelieved pessimism about bridging the gulf. In “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” (1797-1799), for example, he writes, “What is a contradiction in the realm of the dead is not one in the realm of life” (*ETW* 261). In the famous letter to Schelling written in November 1800, at the close of the century and just before his move to join Schelling in Jena, Hegel writes, “I was bound to be driven on to science, and the ideal of my youth had to be transformed at the same time into reflective form, into a system.”<sup>10</sup> This ideal of Hegel’s youth was, as H. S. Harris shows, the Greek *ὅν και πᾶν* (one and all), and Hegel indicates to Schelling that he has been working on the transformation of this ideal into a system although this work is not yet complete.<sup>11</sup> But whatever the state of Hegel’s work on the reconciliation of opposites in a system of scientific unity in 1800, it is in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807 that he first offers to the world the dialectical resolution that he was to uphold for the rest of his life. And he expresses this resolution in terms of a new understanding of the *subject*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Harris is the great proponent of the continuous development theory and summarizes well most of the opposite line. Peperzak also sees a more continual development with regard to moral concerns, but notes considerable shifts in Hegel’s attitude towards religion.

<sup>10</sup>Letter 29, 2 November 1800 (*Briefe*, i:59-60), quoted in Harris, *Hegel’s Development*, 1:406.

<sup>11</sup>Hegel’s *Development*, 1:405-408.

<sup>12</sup>Harris notes that this role for subjectivity was a reversal of the negative role it played in the *Differenzschrift* (1801) and in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802); cf. *Hegel’s Development*, 2:569. Klaus Düsing, in *Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik*, analyzes the transformations in the relation between logic and a theory of subjectivity, noting that Hegel still considers the logical-dialectical overcoming of the finitude of reflection to be preliminary to a metaphysics of subjectivity in 1804-5.

## 2. Thinking Substance as Subject

The solution to the problem of opposition rests on the conception of subjectivity and determinate negation as developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indeed, this solution might also be called an *absolution*, since opposition ceases to be simply a problem and itself becomes a crucial moment of the reconciliation. What is to be reconciled may still be expressed in terms of the immense gulf described by Kant: finite human cognition which spells things out in concepts according to its experience and the conditions which bound this activity on the one side, and the unconditioned freedom and universality of the absolute on the other.

Everyone who has studied the *Phenomenology* knows that, in bridging this gap, “Everything turns on grasping and expressing the true, not only as *substance* but equally as *subject*” (PS 10/PG 18). But what exactly does this mean? Or more importantly, how are we to accomplish this task upon which everything turns? In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel explicitly addresses the meaning of *subjectivity* in only three places: the Preface, the section on revealed religion, and the final section on absolute knowing. In the rest of the work—by far its bulk—we could assume that subjectivity is everywhere implicit in discussions of the ‘I,’ of self-consciousness, and of spirit itself, but rarely is this conception on which “everything turns” named, although there are numerous references to “substance,” especially once we enter the realm of spirit proper with “Ethical Substance.”<sup>13</sup> That the final sections of the *Phenomenology* and its Preface should share

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<sup>13</sup>Joseph Gauvin’s *Wortindex zu Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 14 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1977) lists 121 instances of forms of the word *Subjekt*- in the *Phenomenology*, 63 of which are in the Preface, while 35 are in the last two chapters. (Except for

a particular focus and vocabulary is hardly surprising, since Hegel of course wrote the Preface after the fact. But there are reasons more material than this genetic argument, which might even seem to undermine the unity of the work and the accomplishment Hegel claims for it. Although consciousness may not realize that the truth is to be grasped and expressed as subject until rather late in its educational journey, this does not at all mean that subjectivity has not been quietly at work all along.

It is the Preface of the *Phenomenology* itself that can teach us how to trace the operation of subjectivity throughout the work. Immediately after telling us—against his better judgment, for he knows that academic magpies will take flight with this gem—that the truth is to be grasped just as much as subject as it is substance, Hegel goes on to specify what he means by this. He tells us that “the living substance is being which is in truth *subject*, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself. This substance is, as subject, pure, *simple negativity*...” (PS 10/PG 18). There are three terms in these one-and-a-half sentences that are crucial for understanding what Hegel means by “subject”: actual [*wirklich*], movement [*Bewegung*], and negativity. These three terms are developed, along with the corresponding notion of the truth as the whole (PS 11/PG 19) for several pages, until Hegel sums up for us: “That the true is actual only as system, or that substance is essentially subject, is expressed in the representation of the absolute as

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the Preface, *no* forms of *Subjekt-* appear prior to the section on reason.) While nothing definitive can be inferred from such data, it can help corroborate Hegel’s assertion that this conception cannot be easily summarized, but must be wrung from the development of the work.

*spirit*” (PS 14/PG 22). Thus, *spirit* is added to the vocabulary by which we must come to recognize or grasp the reconciliation of experience and knowledge.

It may at first seem odd that Hegel uses the term *representation* [*Vorstellung*] here, for a major goal of the *Phenomenology* is to move beyond representational thought to conceptual *knowing*. However, the same sentence goes on to identify the “representation of the absolute as *spirit*” as “the most sublime concept and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion,” which is entirely consistent with the development of the concept of spirit in the last chapters of the book. And Hegel concludes the paragraph by pointing to the surpassing of the *representation* of the absolute as spirit, explaining that spirit must become this concept not only *for us* but *for itself*: “The spirit that, so developed, knows itself as spirit is *science* [*Wissenschaft*]; science is its actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] and the realm which it builds for itself in its own element” (PS 14/PG 22). The *representation* of the absolute as spirit is not wrong. It is in fact the penultimate shape in the development of consciousness, one that must be grasped in its full significance if we are to ascend to the realm of the concept and absolute knowing, where spirit will show itself not as an image, but as the movement of self-externalization and self-comprehension (PS 490/PG 431).

An examination of the individual terms—*actuality*, *movement*, *negativity*, and *spirit*—will enable us to grasp substance as subject, upon which conception Hegel says his whole deduction for the process of absolute knowing rests. They are to help us see that the gaps in the terrain of experience insure the rich diversity of experience even while they unite it into a comprehensive whole.



a. Actual/Actuality

When he tells us that substance conceived truly as subject is actual [*wirklich*] or that spirit's knowing itself is its actuality [*Wirklichkeit*], he means more than the existence or the objective reality of substance and subject, although these are also included.<sup>14</sup> In standard German *wirklich* connotes a contrast to what is illusory or unreal, but philosophically it also carries the import of effective activity in contrast to mere potency or possibility.<sup>15</sup> Hegel points to this connection when he refers to Aristotle's doctrine of "purposive activity [*zweckmäßige Tun*]" (*PS 12/PG 20*)<sup>16</sup> to explain how

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<sup>14</sup>The *Science of Logic* lays out this inclusion in section 3 of the *Doctrine of Essence*: "Actuality is the unity of essence and existence" (*SL 529/GW.11.369*); "Actuality also stands higher than existence" (*SL 541/GW.11.380*).

<sup>15</sup>*Das Duden Herkunftswörterbuch* lists the contemporary meaning of *wirklich* as attested since the 15th century and derived from the *spätmd.* *wirkelich* »tätig, wirksam, wirkend.« These earlier, more active conceptions may be more apposite for Hegel's philosophical meaning.

Martin Heidegger notes the misunderstanding that ensues, "wenn man unter »wirklich« das gemeine »Wirkliche«, d.h. Vorhandene, einer zufälligen »Gegenwart« versteht." Instead, he claims that Hegel uses *Wirklichkeit* to name what he (Heidegger) calls *Sein*: "Was wir *Sein* nennen, gemäß dem Anfang der abendländischen Philosophie, das heißt für Hegel *Wirklichkeit*; und diese Benennung ist nicht zufällig, sondern bei Aristoteles am ersten Ende des Anfangs vorbestimmt: ἐνέργεια ἃ ἐντελέχεια" (Martin Heidegger, *Hegel, Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 68, ed. Ingrid Schübler [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1993], 10-11, 50; hereafter Heidegger, *GA.68.10-11*, 50). These "Abhandlungen," in places very sketchy, are entitled "Die Negativität"—ostensibly an examination of the opening sections of the *Science of Logic*—and "Erläuterung der »Einleitung« zu Hegels »Phänomenologie des Geistes«." They stem from the years 1938/39, 1941-2—simultaneous with his work on Nietzsche and just before the seminar that is the basis for *Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung* (1942/3). By contrast, the lectures published as }plain *Hegels "Phänomenologie des Geistes"* (*Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 32) are from the years 1930/1. What is also noteworthy in the text I have cited here is the corroboration by Heidegger that *wirklich/Wirklichkeit* have an active and even temporal significance.

<sup>16</sup>The editors of the *Studienausgabe* list references to Aristotle's doctrine of nature as "zweckgerichtete Tätigkeit" [activity directed to an end or purpose] (*PG 567*, nn16, 33-36). Unfortunately, the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe, 1971-) is not completed past volume 9, and thus cannot provide a succinct historical overview of the use and meaning of either *Wirklichkeit* or *Tätigkeit*. However, the article for "Entelechie," after defining the term as "Vollkommenheit, Vollendung, Verwirklichung, Wirklichkeit," goes on

reason becomes actual when it makes itself for-itself what it is in-itself. If one divorces a purpose from its actualization, both the purpose and the actuality become one-sided, and the desire to know their connection will be frustrated. One-sidedly, or abstractly, the purpose is only the immediate beginning, but if we remove this abstraction, we can see that because the beginning is purposeful, its result will be this purpose in developed form. Hegel says that “the actual [*das Wirkliche*] is the same as its concept only because the immediate, as purpose, contains the self or pure actuality [*reine Wirklichkeit*] within itself.” However, the result is not this “pure actuality” but “the realized purpose, or the existent actuality [*der ausgeführte Zweck oder das daseiende Wirkliche*]” (PS 12/PG 20). Thus, for actuality to be thought in an actual manner, it must be grasped as not only a bare result, a fact, but as an active and effective process.<sup>17</sup> Another reason for this emphasis is that in the Preface Hegel has been forced to start out not only *in medias res*, but already quite near the end, contesting the one-sided claims that the absolute is substance (Spinoza), that it is “thought as thought...*universality* as such,” or that it is apprehended by intellectual intuition (Schelling). All of these conceptions of the truth share the same problem: they attempt a shortcut to the truth and, in so doing, “depict actuality itself in a non-actual manner” (PS 10/PG 18).

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to say, “*dabei ist zuweilen der Zustand bzw. Vorgang der Verwirklichung gemeint.*” Specifically, “*ein ἐντελέχεια ὄν ist ein Seiendes im Zustand der Verwirklichung, ein der Wirklichkeit nach Seiendes.*” The article on the Aristotelian conceptual pair “*Potenz/Akt*” is also helpful; it defines *Akt* as “*entfaltete Wirklichkeit.*”

<sup>17</sup>For a discussion of the effective category, see Flay, *Hegel's Quest for Certainty*, 143, including n17, 336.

It may seem easier to understand why the beginning, as purpose, pushes towards the result, than to understand why the result thus reached is the same as the beginning, as Hegel claims. In thinking of a purpose that only pushes towards its result but does not achieve it, we make use of the idea of an external nature, or at least of a resistance that is external to the purpose, and that would thus alter the purpose in its fulfillment. But this is exactly why Hegel tells us that the whole exposition is necessary to demonstrate his claim. For—whether it is the sensible confronted by the sensing consciousness, life pursued by desire, reality observed or acted upon by reason—every attempt to separate something off as this external resistance fails and becomes incorporated into the self-development which is substance-as-subject or spirit. To think of the purpose as effective yet sundered from its result, as working but essentially separate from the work it produces, is what the slave-thinking of self-consciousness tries vainly to hold onto as its truth. Indeed, this attempted separation of activity from actuality is a common failing of all the shapes of self-consciousness that culminates in the unhappy consciousness, whose conception of actuality is “something like that consciousness itself, an *actuality broken in two*” (PS 133/PG 127).

We can also say that to make the result essentially external to the purposeful activity is to deny that it is a result. What claim would it have to the title? The need to express the result together with the process of its becoming as an actuality and not merely think of the beginning as a purpose or endeavor is one of Hegel’s first arguments in the Preface: “The aim by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the guiding tendency is a mere striving [*Treiben*] that as yet lacks actuality; and the bare result is the corpse which has

left the actuality behind it” (PS 2-3/PG 10-1).<sup>18</sup> Technically, one can say that substance thought as subject is both *Wirkung* and *Verwirklichung*, both effect and effectuation.

This is expressed in the image of the circle that Hegel uses to describe the True: “It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by its detailed development [*Ausführung*] and its end is it actual” (PS 10/PG 18).<sup>19</sup> There is a doubleness to actuality that is essential to Hegel’s use of the term: what is actual is both the end that is worked out and also the process of working out that end. Actuality not only bridges the gap between beginning and end, it articulates that gap and thus requires all the steps or spacings of experience.

#### b. Movement

We began with the statement that substance as subject “is in truth actual only in so far as it is the *movement* of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself” (PS 10/PG 8). The significance of this movement is traced in the same sections

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<sup>18</sup>Miller misconstrues the last phrase of this passage. He writes, “just as the guiding tendency is a mere drive that as yet lacks an actual existence; and the bare result is the corpse which has left *the guiding tendency* behind it [emphasis added]” for “*wie die Tendenz das bloße Treiben, das seiner Wirklichkeit noch entbehrt, und das nackte Resultat ist der Leichnam, der sie hinter sich gelassen.*” It is one thing to add *Existenz* to *Wirklichkeit*, but it is something else to read the *sie* as referring back to *Tendenz*. The whole sense of the passage is that both the bare purpose or guiding tendency *and* the bare result lack precisely *Wirklichkeit*. A corpse is certainly not an actual human being, although it just might still be thought of as having a guiding tendency—to dust.

<sup>19</sup>Translation slightly emended. In the last phrase Miller has, “only by being worked out to its end, is it actual.” This is the sense I am arguing for, but the German simply says, “*nur durch die Ausführung und sein Ende wirklich ist.*” Perhaps Miller’s version puts too much emphasis on the end and suggests that the process of working it out is something that can be left behind—the opposite of Hegel’s intention.

that spell out why the true is actual by uniting beginning and end, for this movement is nothing other than the process of working out this actuality. That is why the discussion of Aristotle's doctrine of purposive activity ended by saying that the "the realized [*ausgeführte*] purpose, or the existent actuality, is *movement* and unfolded becoming" (*PS 12/PG 20*, [emphasis added]). Notice that the actuality is not simply something that *has moved*; it is *movement* itself, self-othering.

As this movement is a self-movement, a self-positing or active "putting itself" (*sich selbst Setzen*) apart from its simple immediacy, it is a mediation or reflection of self into self. What this says is nothing other than that the movement is the means or middle "term" by which the immediate becomes something other, but something other that is itself the actuality of the simple immediate. Although he knows that the suggestion that the absolute contains mediation "is rejected with horror" (*PS 11/PG 19*), Hegel warns us that this horror stems from ignorance that the mediated terms are *actually* the same, that is, the actual *movement* from self to self. But there is nothing terribly astounding in this; it is implicit in the most elementary notion of the true, which goes beyond the simple word to say *X is Y*. If either X or Y or the mediating process that connects them disappears, there is no truth left, which is exactly what Hegel warns will happen to the absolute if mediation is rejected out of hand and not seen as "self-moving selfsameness, or...reflection into self" (*PS 11/PG 19*).

This can be illustrated with a simple example: if I become a doctor I will still be myself. In fact, both when I begin the process with the intention or *purpose* of becoming a doctor and at the end of the process when I *actually* am a doctor (if we abstract these moments), I could be said to be immediately my "self." The whole process of study and

practice is the movement from self to self, or the mediation between two selves. Actually being-a-doctor is not a facticity cut off from the process of becoming one, but is the actual effectiveness of that whole process. It is that process taken up into the result which appears immediately as the doctor-self. The movement between these two versions of the self (each of which can be taken by itself as immediate) is also the self, now grasped as movement or mediation, for, as Hegel says, “it is just this unrest that is the self” (*PS 12/PG 20*).

Nowhere is this movement in which substance becomes actual emphasized more than in the critique of representational thought [*Vorstellen*] that marks the transition from religion to absolute knowing near the end of the *Phenomenology*'s account of “Revealed Religion.” Here Hegel discusses the uttermost experience of rupture, the feeling that *God is dead*, in order to show that even this seemingly complete loss of substantiality is comprehended by spirit as the truth of its experience of itself:

This feeling is, in fact, the loss of substance and [the loss of] its appearance over against consciousness; but it is at the same time the pure *subjectivity* of substance, or the pure certainty of itself that it lacked when it was object, or the immediate, or pure essence. This knowing is the inbreathing of the spirit [*Begeisterung*= inspiration], whereby substance becomes subject, by which its abstraction and lifelessness have died, and substance therefore has become *actual* and simple and universal self-consciousness. (*PS 476/PG 419*)

It is first of all clear here that when substance becomes actual self-consciousness, this does not mean that it achieves objective reality, but rather that it knows itself as a living dynamic that has experienced the loss of all external objective reality. As *actual*, it is this fully realized experience of loss, or rather, the fully self-conscious process of realizing this loss. Hegel goes on to emphasize that actuality is to be thought of as an

active process and not fixed in any one state of being: Spirit is *actual* “because it runs through [*durchläuft*] the three elements of its nature; the movement through its own phases [*durch sich selbst hindurch*] constitutes its actuality” (PS 476-477/PG 419). The next sentence sums up this conception of the “terrain” of spirit’s experience as its own immanent development: “What moves itself, that is spirit; it is the subject of the movement and is equally the *moving* [*Bewegen*] itself, or the substance through which the subject moves” (PS 477/PG 419).

This explication of the importance of movement points us back to the fully developed concept of spirit as the subjectivity of substance, and it also helps explain why, for Hegel, there is a perfect and necessary transition and not merely a gap between experience and knowledge: by virtue of its self-movement, spirit is dynamically identical with its experience. This experience is spirit’s *energeia* or being-at-work, and absolute knowing is its *entelecheia* or self-fulfillment.

### c. Negativity

Movement, or specifically self-mediating self-movement, requires the next term, *negativity*, to be fully understood, for movement is essentially negation, and self-movement is self-negation as well as self-positing. Hegel points to this when he says that the ancients rightly made the void the principle of movement and conceived it as the negative, although they did not yet grasp this negative as the self (PS 21/PG 29). It is this last insight that allows negativity to function as it does for Hegel, for instead of negativity producing a bad infinite by negating each position in turn without uniting them into a

whole, its character as the self makes every movement not only a negation but ipso facto a recuperation, an integration of that very negation into its own development.

If one surveys the passages in which Hegel seeks to clarify his keynote theme of grasping the true as not only substance but also subject, negativity indeed is given crucial importance in establishing the absolute subjectivity of substance. The passage which introduced our three terms—actuality, movement, negativity—points to this role when it says that “this [living] substance is, as subject, pure, *simple negativity*.” Just a little later Hegel tells us that “mediation is nothing beyond self-moving selfsameness, or is reflection into self, the moment of the ‘I’ which is for itself pure negativity...” (*PS 11/PG 19*). Finally, discussing Aristotle’s doctrine of purposive activity, he says that this unmoved but self-moving purpose is itself subject, whose “power to move, taken abstractly, is *being-for-self* or pure negativity” (*PS 12/PG 20*). Each of these passages points to negativity not merely for its own sake, as if it were just another quality that needs to be taken into account in the quest for truth, but because negativity is the hallmark or distinguishing feature of subjectivity. If negativity is the moving principle that mediates the self-actualization of substance, linking the end with the beginning, it is also the fingerprint by which we ascertain the active presence of subjectivity in this whole process.

We might first ask why Hegel so readily describes the notion of subjectivity or the ‘I’ or thought as negativity. Inevitably, it is here that those leery of Hegel’s accomplishment begin to suspect that they are becoming victims of an elaborate shell game. For the natural consciousness, to be a subject or to be the ‘I’ that thinks does not at all seem to be something negative. (As Levinas will argue, to be ‘I’ is first of all to love



life, not to negate but to enjoy what one lives from.) But within the movement of thought in which philosophy makes its home, negativity designates the I as distinct from everything else, as distinct from not only the object about which it thinks, but even as distinct from the thoughts it thinks about that object. When Descartes sets out to doubt everything that admits even the possibility of uncertainty, he suspends or negates the truth of every object, every thought, except the activity of this doubting or negation itself. *Cogito ergo sum* means *dubito ergo sum*. It is the negativity of thought that provides Descartes with the fixed point he needs to move the world, not the unalloyed positivity of substance.

Hegel's own exploration of the negativity of thought is found in the section on skepticism and the freedom of self-consciousness, which does not passively confront otherness but takes a "polemical bearing" toward it, "annihilating the being of the world in all its manifold determinateness," so that "through this self-conscious negation it preserves for its own self the certainty of its freedom, generates the experience of that freedom, and so raises it to truth" (*PS* 123-124/*PG* 119-120). We should probably recall here that the argument of the Preface is not part of the progressive education of consciousness itself, is not the first rung on the ladder to the absolute standpoint (which commences only with Sense-certainty), but necessarily and even reluctantly anticipates what is discovered in the course of the systematic experience of consciousness itself. Thus the negativity that is implicit in language and pointing (both subjective acts) at the inception of the dialectic of sense-certainty does not become recognized and thematized as a characteristic of the self and of thought until the section on self-consciousness. However, the Preface is largely written from the point of view of accomplished science

itself, or at least with an awareness of what is involved in reaching that standpoint. It is in part written for the philosophers of Hegel's own time, to exhort them to take his account of the absolute standpoint on its own terms, which are the full development of the system itself. Thus the identification of the subject and the 'I' or thought with negativity would come as no surprise to those who had heard Fichte declare that the second principle of the *Wissenschaftlehre* is the positing of the *non-I* in opposition to the *I*, or Schelling's assertion of the negativity of the absolute.<sup>20</sup>

Martin Heidegger, in his *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel about the conceptions of Negativity and "das Nichts" in the *Science of Logic* but also in Hegel's thought in general, even while claiming that Hegel does not think "das Nichts" in its most originary form as "Ab-grund," nevertheless confirms the essential character of thought as negation: Negativity is the differentiation that occurs in thought, in the "ich denke etwas."<sup>21</sup> Although Heidegger mischaracterizes this movement of thought as representation (*das unbedingt sich vorstellende Vorstellen*)<sup>22</sup> Hereafter, the English translation of *Hegel's Concept*

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<sup>20</sup>For a historical survey of the concept of negativity in ancient and medieval philosophy and especially in its development through German idealism, see the articles on "Negation, Negativität" and "Nichts, Nichseinendes" in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*.

<sup>21</sup>Heidegger, *GA*.68.28f.

<sup>22</sup>Heidegger, *GA*.68.11f. Heidegger consistently characterizes Hegel's thought as *Vorstellung*, both here and especially in "Hegels Begriff Der Erfahrung" (in *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 5, 115-208 [Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977]): "Alle diese Momente der Absolutheit haben den Charakter der Repräsentation. In Ihnen west die Parusie des Absoluten" (136). *Repräsentation* is equivalent to *Vorstellung*, as is clear from Heidegger's description of Hegel's concept of the subject: "das Vor-stellende selber in seinem Vorstellen, das sein Vor-gestelltes auf sich zu und so zurückstellt. Das Vorstellen präsentiert in der Weise der Repräsentation" (145). I know no place where Heidegger specifically defends this claim about

*of Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1970) will be cited as Heidegger, *HCE*, and the German edition as *GA.5*, followed by page numbers.), his general observation about the “*ich denke etwas*” agrees exactly with what Hegel says in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*: “The disparity [*Ungleichheit*] which exists in consciousness between the ‘I’ and the substance which is its object is the distinction between them [*ihr Unterschied*], the *negative* in general” (*PS 21/PG 29*). The subject or the ‘I’ is pure negativity insofar as it thinks, insofar as it simply distinguishes itself from whatever it thinks.

#### d. From Pure Negativity to Spirit

In each of the above passages establishing negativity as the distinguishing feature of subjectivity, one should also note that it is “pure” negativity or “pure, simple negativity” that Hegel points to. At first glance, this simply makes the identification more direct and uncomplicated. But, purity can also point to one-sidedness or incompleteness, and much of the labor of the *Phenomenology* is devoted to discovering mediation where there seemed to be purity, simplicity, or immediacy. Thus, while negativity can help us discover the operation of subjectivity in the living substance, it is not by itself or in its purity enough to insure the absoluteness of knowledge or the systematicity of the system, which are one and the same thing for Hegel.

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representation in light of Hegel’s own account of the transition from *Vorstellen* to *begreifendes Denken* that is necessary for philosophy to appear as science.

Hegel indicates the way in which negativity goes beyond its simple and pure function when he describes the “magical power” of spirit that “tarrys with the negative” and “converts it into being.” This important passage is worth quoting in full, for here Hegel draws together many of the strands he has been spinning and weaves them into a whole that describes the life of the concept, absolute knowing. Hegel has just explained how the present study (the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) takes up the formative process of spirit at the point where the “first negation” or “sublation of existence” “is no longer necessary” because it has already been endured by the world spirit and “transposed into the element of the self” (*PS 17/PG 26*). Thus, what the *Phenomenology* must accomplish is a further confrontation with and re-animation of these determinations of thought that have become “familiar, fixed, and inert, ...*separated* and non-actual” (*PS 18/PG 27*). This it does by becoming more negative than the pure or simple negativity of thought:

This is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure ‘I’. Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast to what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, beauty hates the understanding for asking of [it] what it cannot do. But the life of the spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment [*absoluten Zerrissenheit*], it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive that closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. This power is identical with what we earlier called the subject, which by giving determinateness an existence [*Dasein*] in its own element supersedes [*aufhebt*] abstract immediacy, i.e., the immediacy which merely *is* [*die...nur überhaupt s e i e n d e Unmittelbarkeit*], and thus

is authentic substance: being or immediacy whose mediation is not outside of it but which is this mediation itself. (*PS 19/PG 27-28*)<sup>23</sup>

In this passage the negative appears both as what is confronted—death, the inert and fixed determinations of thought—and what confronts—the “tremendous power of the negative,” “the energy of thought,” spirit or absolute subjectivity that by “tarrying with the negative... converts it into being.” It is this conversion that grasps the utter dismemberment that seems to be the fate of consciousness and comprehends it as what it is in truth, consciousness’s experience of itself—the life of spirit’s own self-knowing. Absolute knowing is able to give an account of its completeness and closure not by ignoring the ruptures in experience, but, as indicated here, precisely by “tarrying with” these ruptures. The magical power over the negative is itself something negative: subjectivity. This magical power does not turn away from the ruptures in its experience but, facing them, converts them from fixed determinations into the very pulsation of spirit’s life.

Thus negativity raises itself to the level of spirit when it is doubled, when it is grasped as the *Aufhebung* or “negation of negation” signaled here. This famous phrase does not merely indicate that there is a recursive process involved, where the result, as something negated, is ploughed back into the subjective machinery of negation. Such a

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<sup>23</sup>I have slightly emended the last sentence and inserted key expressions from the German to make clearer the contrast between general being [*das nur überhaupt Seiende*] and existence [*Dasein*] and the *Aufhebung* that generates the latter from the former. This description is consistent with the movement at the beginning of the *Science of Logic* that leads from immediate being to the *Daseiendes* or *Etwas*. As “the first negation of negation,” the *Daseiendes* is also the “beginning of the subject” (*SL 115/GW.21.103*), even if here Hegel emphasizes that it is merely this beginning and not the subject’s full development or articulation.

process would produce nothing but the monotony of endless denial, a bad infinity of negation, a descent into the maelstrom. Rather, we should take a clue from Heidegger, who insists that the phrases “phenomenology *of* spirit” and “experience *of* consciousness” employ the subjective genitive and not (or at least not merely) the objective genitive.<sup>24</sup> This means that spirit is not merely one of the objects—not even a privileged one—on which a process called phenomenology operates. Nor is there simply one domain of experience that would concern itself with consciousness (as if it could take up anything else!) Rather, spirit itself takes place or eventuates as phenomenology, as the progressive gathering to itself of its own appearing. Consciousness *is* as experience, as the progressive development of its own self-knowledge. In Hegel’s words, “This *dialectical* movement which consciousness exercises on itself as both knowledge and its object is precisely what is called *experience*” (*PS 55/PG 60*).<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the phrase “negation of negation” does not simply designate a negative operation that is exercised on an object that is already something negated, but rather negation negating itself. Only on such a reading is the assertion that there is a positive result from the negation of a negation at all plausible.

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<sup>24</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 21-26, passim. *Gesamtausgabe*, 32:30-36, passim. Hereafter Heidegger, *HPS/GA*.32. Similar arguments about these phrases appear in Heidegger, *HCE 140f/GA.5.197f*.

<sup>25</sup>Translation emended slightly. The German runs, “Diese *dialektische* Bewegung, welche das Bewußtsein an ihm selbst, sowohl an seinem Wissen als an seinem Gegenteil ausübt...ist eigentliche dasjenige, was *Erfahrung* genannt wird.” Heidegger discusses these particular phrases in *HCE*, 113-141/*GA.5.180-198*.

If negation remained the one-sided action of a subjectivity simply conceived as a negative force, the negation of negation would yield only another negative, a negative at another level, but still purely a negative result. Instead, the phrase “negation of negation” means that negativity, as the power of thought, never touches an object that has an independent positivity or externality. Rather, it negates a negative that is already its own—its own previous conception of the object or of the subject-object relation, or its own role in the structure of knowing. Because this previous conception was its own thought, its comprehension of the insufficiency of this previous way of thinking is something positive, insofar as thought has educated itself into a new way of understanding its own processes. The new thought-schema is not something contingently or externally generated, but is the product of thoughtful experience itself. It is the recognition or insightful grasp [*Erfassen*] of the whys and wherefores of the previous insufficiency, or, in Hegelian terms, “the truth of” the previous way of thinking.

Thus, in the long passage cited above, spirit converts the negative to being not because its magical power is some secret weapon it wields against whatever it confronts, but because, facing these negativities, these seemingly inert determinations of thought, “in utter dismemberment, it finds *itself*” [emphasis added]. In this negation of negation the seeming fixity of the determinations of thought as well as the seeming fixity of the self-positing of the ‘I’ itself are thoughtfully “given up” or “surrendered” [*aufgegeben*, as opposed to *weggelassen* or “omitted”] and pure thought, in this surrender of fixity, becomes “fluid,” giving birth to *concepts*, which “are only now what they are in truth, self-movements, circles, spiritual essences, which is what their substance is” (*PS 20/PG 28*). In the realm of absolute knowing, substance becomes one with subject and lives the

life of the concept as spirit: self-actualization and self-movement through the restless activity of self-sublation.

This restless activity of self-sublation is attested as well at the end of the *Phenomenology*, when Hegel explicates the fully developed conception of spirit. Here, he emphasizes that spirit is neither the pure inwardness of subjectivity nor subjectivity's surrender to and submersion in the supposed truth of substance. Nor, for that matter, is spirit some "*tertium quid*" that would subsume all differences in its own abyss, thus voiding the dynamical and reciprocal negativity that insures identity and thus knowing—the negation of negation. Rather, "Spirit is *this movement* of the self which empties itself of itself and sinks into its substance, and also, as subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object at the same time it cancels this difference between objectivity and content" (*PS* 490/*PG* 431). Each of these movements—the withdrawal into self and the self-emptying or externalization<sup>26</sup> into substance—is a negativity. Thus, the double and simultaneous movement of withdrawal into self and kenosis as substance marks the spiritual actualization of the formula "negation of negation." Hegel's description of spirit here echoes "the magical power of the negative" evoked in the Preface.

The 'I' has neither to cling to itself in the *form* of *self-consciousness* as against the form of substantiality and objectivity, as if it were afraid of the externalization of itself: the power of spirit lies rather in remaining the selfsame spirit in its externalization and, as that which is both *in itself* and

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<sup>26</sup>Miller translates *sich entäußert* and *Entäußerung* variously as "empties itself," "self-alienation," and "externalization." There is merit to each choice; however, the variation can obscure Hegel's consistency. "Externalization," his preference, is literal and captures the contrast with "recollection" [*Erinnerung*] well, although it is perhaps too formal and misses the sense of *kenosis* and self-surrender that other choices capture.



*for itself*, in making its *being-for-self* no less merely a moment than its in-itself. (PS 490/PG 431)

The pure negativity of subjectivity here becomes the perfect and dynamic self-comprehension of spirit, both substance and subject. Hegel concludes, “Knowing is this seeming inactivity which merely contemplates how what is differentiated spontaneously moves in its own self and returns into its unity” (PS 490/PG 431).

I observed previously that in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel says that it is the dynamic of *determinate* negation that allows him to assert both the necessity and the continuity of the transitions in experience that lead to absolute knowing. At first glance the point seems to be that a nothingness with content is superior to the pure nothingness of skepticism. But because determination is itself negation, a de-limitation of being,<sup>27</sup> “determinate negation” and “negation of negation” are virtually interchangeable expressions: both indicate the dynamic by which something new and positive is generated out of what preceded it, and point to the operation of subjectivity. I also noted earlier that Hegel makes this connection in the *Science of Logic* in the section on “Determinate Being” [*Dasein*] (see note above). The dialectical negation of the determinate quality and transition to “Something” are, although a rudimentary stage, “the beginning of the subject” that is developed to its “concrete intensity” in the *Subjective Logic or Doctrine of the Concept*. Determinate negation is here said to be grounded in

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<sup>27</sup>Hegel, borrowing the formula *omnis determinatio est negatio* from Spinoza, develops this point explicitly in the remark on “Quality and Negation” in the *Science of Logic* (SL 111-114/GW.21.99-102). But he also makes the point in the discussion of perception in the *Phenomenology*: “Negation is inherent in a property as a *determinateness* which is immediately one with the immediacy of being...” (PS 69/PG 73); cf. also PS 68/PG 71-72.

what all determinations of the subject are: “negative unity with self”  
(*SL 115/GW.21.103*).

When we think substance as subject, the negative moments or ruptures in experience are not simply left behind, but sublated into knowledge, and this constitutes the *truth* of experience. In fact these ruptures in experience are themselves produced by the negativity of the subject, which does not abandon them, but, as the energy of thought, transforms them into principles of motion and therefore necessary moments in the movement of spirit’s self-actualization.

### 3. The Topography of Experience

We are thus in a position to ask what effect the apprehension of substance as subject has on the “immense gulf” between the legislations of phenomenal knowledge and of noumenal freedom that Kant discovered in experience. How does a thorough grasp of the actuality, self-movement and negativity of spirit—the subjectivity of substance—allow this gulf to be bridged and the absolute to be attained? The gulf, we must remember, is produced insofar as experience must be constructed according to two different and heterogenous legislations. While the reconciliation of these legislations is only worked out in the course of the whole *Phenomenology*, a course which culminates in the reconciliation of consciousness with self-consciousness, the principle by which this is made possible is evident in the re-conception of what “experience” means when we attempt to grasp substance as subject. For Kant, experience was on the one hand something we construct according to fixed determinations or categories of thought but only with what comes to us fortuitously from outside, and on the other hand something

we try to enact in the outside world on the basis of the pure determinations of practical reason, abstracted from all external conditions. Already these conceptions of the meaning of experience go beyond the point of view of natural consciousness, which takes “experience” to mean that it is in immediate contact with an outside world. But for Hegel, experience goes beyond both the natural viewpoint and the two one-sided determinations explored by Kant and becomes the actual movement of rupturing and recuperation that spirit, which is both subject and substance, accomplishes *in and for itself*. The ruptures of experience are part of the very process of securing knowledge.

In this way *experience* is not something that comes first which thought later goes to work on and tries to know. Indeed it often *seems*, as Hegel argues in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, “that our experience of the untruth of our first conception comes *by way of another* object which we come upon by chance and externally...” (*PS 55/PG 60-61*).<sup>28</sup> But the course of the *Phenomenology* teaches us that this seemingly contingent and “other” object is in fact the truth of our previous conception, which is negated but preserved when thought brings its power to bear on its own thought. What knowing is, then, is consciousness’s experience of itself, the necessary path of its own appearance and self-realization. The gaps that open up in experience are thus precisely what keep the Aristotelian formula that describes absolute knowing, “thought thinking itself,” from collapsing into the empty tautology it is often assumed to be. Without the openings or ruptures of experience there would be no movement of knowing, just a static and

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<sup>28</sup>Translation and emphasis slightly revised, following the German text.

indeterminate void that would not even sustain abstract thought. There would not even be wishful thinking, only an impotent wish to be able to think.

But if there are gaps and rupture within experience that are recuperated in the fullness of the development of that experience, there is not and cannot be for Hegel any rupture *between* experience and knowledge. Experience is precisely the necessary development and comprehension of the structures that make knowing possible. Experience at once discovers openings in its ways of thinking about the world and takes the measure of these openings. It discovers them in taking their measure, in knowing them.

The word Hegel uses for “experience,” *Erfahrung*, very clearly indicates the character of experience as discovery. In fact one could even say that *Erfahrung* means learning through discovery, as is attested in the origin of the word from the verb *fahren* and the Middle High German form, *ervarunge*, which originally meant “traversal, exploration.”<sup>29</sup> “*Ein erfahrener Mensch*” means what its English equivalent means; “an experienced person” is one who has learned much by going through much. The archetype of the experienced person is Odysseus, who suffers much in the twenty years he spends sailing to Troy and back to Ithaca, but never ceases turning in thought (he is *πολύτροπον*), so that, “He saw the cities of many men and came to know their minds” (*Od.I.3*). Odysseus thus functions as a model of how the Hegelian subject knows: the

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<sup>29</sup>The *Duden Herkunftswörterbuch* cites this origin for both the verbal and noun forms, but notes that the present sense of “*erforschen, kennenlernen, durchmachen*” (discover, come to know, study or suffer through) is attested very early. Indeed the *Duden Deutsches Universal Wörterbuch* lists the first meaning of *erfahren* as “*Kenntnis erhalten; zu wissen bekommen.*”

riffs in experience are both discovered and measured by the mind that develops through them.

Jean Hyppolite comments on the relation of experience and discovery in a slightly different way, noting that natural consciousness takes experience to be the discovery or fortuitous appearance of a new truth that does not fit its previous truth, rather than the development or birth of the new truth out of the old one. He writes, “That is why consciousness posits the new truth as contraposed to it, as an *object*, and not as that which results from the prior movement and is engendered by it (*Enstandenes*, no longer *Gegenstand*).<sup>30</sup> Hyppolite shows that although Hegel does not deny that the experience of consciousness produces a new *object*, he does emphasize that this *Gegenstand* arises in an “*Entstehung*,” which aspect *we* (philosophical consciousness) will also grasp: “*For it [consciousness], what has thus arisen exists only as an object; for us, it exists at the same time as movement and a process of becoming [für es ist dies Entstandene nur als Gegenstand; für uns zugleich als Bewegung und Werden]*” (PS 56/PG 61).<sup>31</sup> It is clear that for Hegel *experience* does not mean an unforeseen event that sends us scrambling for a new theory, or even the bare discovery of a new and adequate truth, but the discovery also of this event’s secret of birth: its subjectivity as the key to its substantiality.

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<sup>30</sup>*Genesis and Structure*, 24.

<sup>31</sup>I have eliminated the “appears” which Miller uses to translate how what thus arises *is* for us. The emphasized term *Entstehung* occurs on this same page, translated by Miller as “*origination*” which is fair enough, although it misses the play on *Gegenstand/Entstehung* to which Hyppolite draws our attention.

A contrast with Levinas might be helpful here. When Levinas asserts an incommensurability between experience and the structures of thought, he is clearly thinking of a different meaning for *experience*, a traumatism of astonishment and not the discovery of its birth secret. The level of experience that his analyses look to is that of Husserl's conception of *Erlebnis* rather than Hegel's conception of *Erfahrung*. In fact, this should be stated more strongly: Levinas maintains that there is a fundamental incommensurability of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. Even if the discoveries of thought indeed arise dialectically from previous thoughts, Levinas argues that this is not true of enjoyment, nor of the thought par excellence, the idea of infinity, which "overflows the thought that thinks it."

On Hegel's side we can ask what sense it makes to speak of *Erlebnis* apart from *Erfahrung*. We could even suspect that a level of *Erlebnis* in which *Erfahrung* is not involved would be for Hegel a level of manifest untruth, a level at which not only spirit but even bare consciousness is denied. This is what Hegel means when he says that the only criteria we need in order to examine the truth of consciousness is consciousness itself (*PS* 53-54/*PG* 59-60). The experience to which thought must correspond in order to be true is already within thought itself. In short, for the whole itinerary of spirit's development in the *Phenomenology*, we are always already within the domain of thought and of *Erfahrung*. But, while this does not mean that Hegel has presupposed his destination, absolute knowing,<sup>32</sup> it does leave room for us to question the relation

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<sup>32</sup>This is Heidegger's argument in *Hegel's Concept of Experience*, cf. *HCE* 30f/ *GA*.5.131f, See also *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, *HPS* 30f/*GA*.32.42f.

between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* in Hegel's philosophy. In examining the particular movements of thought's experience (*Erfahrung*) of itself, we must also pay attention to see if they do not bear traces of the kinds of experience (*Erlebnis*) to which Levinas points. But before we can examine this, we must first see how the subjectivity delineated here is developed in the shapes of spirit as Hegel presents them. Only this concrete development can justify the role he has claimed for subjectivity and thus allow the *Phenomenology* to serve as a deduction for the standpoint of absolute knowing, a standpoint which comprehends the ruptures and recuperations of the terrain through which consciousness passes in its experience.

I will begin with the first major division, "Consciousness," which is divided into three stages or shapes—"Sense-certainty," "Perception," and "Understanding"—and is itself the first of a triad of meta-shapes that are sometimes termed the "phenomenology proper" because the later *Encyclopedia* versions of a "Phenomenology of Spirit" stop with them. While I am quite willing to accept that these first three major divisions of spirit's journey to absolute knowing—"Consciousness," "Self-consciousness," and "Reason"—have a developmental and structural affinity and accomplish something as a whole insofar as they issue in "Spirit," I do not accept the argument that they constitute the first part of a "schizophrenic" work.<sup>33</sup> However, because I will later examine key

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<sup>33</sup>There is a long history of such claims, some spurious and some that shed much light on the work as a whole as well as in many of its particulars. For a brief account in English of the arguments, see Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 109-110, including the notes, which refer to the more comprehensive German accounts of the issue of unity and disunity by Hans Friedrich Fulda and Otto Pöggeler. The characterization of the disunity of the work as "schizophrenic" is made by

moments from the chapters of “Spirit,” “Religion,” and “Absolute Knowing” in light of Levinas’s claims about the priority of the ethical relation, I will focus here more on the earlier sections, especially where the truth of subjectivity is less apparent. Without conflating different parts of the work, I think that one can also safely maintain that the truth of subjectivity becomes easier to recognize once one has worked through some of its less apparent dialectical developments in detail.

#### 4. The Emergence of the Subject in Consciousness

The first major section of the *Phenomenology* develops the first three shapes of spirit—sense-certainty, perception, and understanding—which, as shapes of *consciousness*, each presuppose that thought is in contact with something actually external to itself that is its object: the this, the thing, or force. By the end of the chapter on understanding, this externality will have been driven back completely into consciousness itself, and consciousness will undergo a transition to self-consciousness, where we might expect the operation of subjectivity to be readily apparent. But subjectivity is already covertly at work in the moments of consciousness, in the various aspects of actuality, movement and negativity. The dialectical examination of precisely these features of consciousness is the education that leads consciousness to the more specifically subjective standpoint of self-consciousness.

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Merold Westphal, who rejects the claim, in *History and Truth in Hegel’s “Phenomenology”* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978), 2a.



But there is another concern that makes these initial stages of spirit's pathway of doubt even more important for an eventual critical comparison—an *Auseinandersetzung*—with Levinas's thought. Since the position of consciousness in general attempts to begin with an immediate experience of something other than and external to consciousness, the way in which this immediacy is subverted will tell us much about how things stand with Levinas's thought, which, as Jacques Derrida reminds us, asserts its rights "solely by remaining faithful to the immediate, but buried nudity of experience itself."<sup>34</sup> The standpoint of self-consciousness, although issued from the dialectic of consciousness, will similarly attempt to begin with the immediacy of subjective life, and so the subversion of this immediacy will also have a particularly strong bearing on Levinas's confrontation with Hegel.

#### a. Naive Actuality and Actual Experience

In each of the three shapes of consciousness there is a pivotal moment where Hegel introduces the notion of actuality. Having allowed sense-certainty to state its claim that it is the richest form of knowledge—or rather, stating this claim for it—Hegel says that if we observe the pure being that sense-certainty claims it apprehends, we will see what else "comes into play here": "An actual sense-certainty is not merely this pure immediacy, but an *example* [*Beispiel*] of it" (PS 59/PG 64).<sup>35</sup> This night, this day, this

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<sup>34</sup>"Violence and Metaphysics," 82-83.

<sup>35</sup>Miller translates the first phrase as, "much else is involved." However, Hegel is punning on *Beispiel* (example) and *spielen* (play) when he writes, "*An dem reinen Sein...spielt noch vieles andere beiher;*" and then says, "*Eine wirkliche sinnliche Gewißheit ist nicht nur diese reine Unmittelbarkeit, sondern ein Beispiel derselben*" (PG 64). Hyppolite or his translators suggest

book before me on the desk, this desk—all these actual “thises” come into play in the certainty that seeks to express their individual truth: “This *is*.” Even in one actual instance there are two “thises” at play: the object and the I. Similarly, it is the *actual* attempt to say what is meant that miscarries and expresses the universal rather than the “this” or “actual thing” that is meant (*PS 66/PG 69-70*). At this point we must not read too much into the significance of the term “actuality”; it certainly does not yet signify the “purposeful activity” that Hegel suggests in the Preface. We can merely observe that actuality here appears out-of-phase with what sense-certainty wants it to be. It should designate the pure being of the “this” but instead shows us what else is at play in this pure being; it should say the pure “this” that is meant but instead says the universal. The point is simply that, although it at first thinks that it has direct access to actuality in sensation, sense-certainty has the poorest understanding of actuality of any shape of spirit.

Similarly, once we have made the transition to perception, Hegel spells out how the perceiving consciousness has solved the incongruities of sense-certainty by accounting for the “thing with many properties” which it organizes by means of the “one” and the “also.” Perception is sure of its criterion for truth, which is the self-identity of what it perceives, and even provides ahead of time for non-identity or non-truth, taking the possibility for this failure upon itself. Then Hegel writes, “Let us see what consciousness experiences in its *actual* perceiving” (*PS 70/PG 74*, emphasis added).

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“bypass” for “*Beiheispielen*” (*Genesis and Structure*, 88) but this too misses the pun. It is what is actually “at play here” despite being bypassed in sense-certainty’s account of itself that Hegel spends the rest of the chapter explicating.

Again, as in sense-certainty, the actuality of perception turns out to be out-of-phase with what it claimed as its truth. Summarizing the discoveries of this observation, Hegel writes:

If we look back on what consciousness previously took, and now takes, responsibility for, on what it previously ascribed, and now ascribes, to the thing, we see that consciousness alternately makes itself, as well as the thing, into both a pure, many-less *one*, and into an *also* that resolves itself into independent ‘matters.’ (PS 74/PG 77)

This is not exactly the same discrepancy as occurred for sense-certainty, for perception is quite willing to let the perceived thing be a mediated universal; but nevertheless, consciousness as perception learns by its *actual* experience that its account of what it knows is inadequate or *not at all actual*.

As consciousness continues to develop, following the lead of the “we” in its questioning but finding the answers—the unsatisfactory answers—always within itself, it takes account of the gap between its theoretical schema and its actuality by generating a new schema. In this way thought will gradually be led to a better attunement between its actuality and its way of knowing, and in so doing, will be led into a fuller and fuller grasping of itself as subject. What we can discern even at this early, seemingly non-subjective stage, is that it is the *actuality* of consciousness that itself pushes this development. Left to its own theoretical schema, each of these first shapes of consciousness is comfortable, if not complacent. Then, confronted with the actuality of its knowledge, each is forced to admit not only that it knows less than it thought, but even the opposite of what it thought. Still, if actuality is poorly comprehended at this stage of spirit’s journey to absolute knowing, it nevertheless catalyzes this journey itself as part of the covert operation of spirit’s subjectivity.

Actuality is first explicitly thematized in Chapter III on “Force and Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World” as not only the occasion for the examination of the standpoint of this shape of consciousness, but also as a component part of the conceptual schema of the understanding.<sup>36</sup> “The concept of force becomes *actual* through its duplication into two forces” says Hegel (*PS 85/PG 87*). What does this mean and how does it constitute an advance in the comprehension of actuality as part of the subjective truth of substance? In the previous two shapes, what is supposed at first to be actual follows the everyday conception of *wirklich* as what is objectively real: this particular sensed object, the perceived thing. However, careful observation of the actual operation of these modes of knowing revealed that what is actual is rather the dialectical movement or interplay of senser and sensed, perceiver and perceived, universal and particular, etc. Here, too, with force, what is actual about force is not that it is simply an objective reality in itself, but that it “becomes *actual* through its duplication into two forces.” The two forces were introduced as the “*expression [Äußerung] of force*” and “*force proper, force which has been driven back into itself from its expression [die in sich aus ihrer Äußerung zurückgedrängte ...Kraft]*” (*PS 81/PG 84*). These are further explicated as a force that solicits and a force that is solicited. But when Hegel asks us to consider the *actuality* of force, he argues as follows:

These two forces exist as independent essences; but their existence is a movement of each towards the other, such that their *being* is rather a pure *positedness through another [Gesetztsein durch ein anderes]*, i.e. their

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<sup>36</sup>Among commentators on this chapter I have not found many who address Hegel’s explicit focus on actuality. An exception is Heidegger, in *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, *HPS* 114-115/*GA.32.165-167*.

being has really the pure significance of *disappearance*. They do not exist as extremes which would retain for themselves something fixed and substantial, transmitting to one another in their middle term and in their contact a merely external property; on the contrary, what they are, they are only in this middle term and in this contact. (*PS 85/PG 87*)<sup>37</sup>

As actuality in the previous two shapes of consciousness could not be fixed in the extremes of the I or the This, of the I or the Thing, here actuality is not found in the extremes as “something fixed and substantial,” but rather in “a movement of each towards the other” or rather “a movement against one another [*Bewegung gegeneinander*].”

The *energy* of actuality begins to make itself known, appropriately enough, in the chapter on force. Hegel plays with the connection between movement and positing, between *Bewegung gegeneinander* and *Gesetzsein durch ein anderes*, and the “contact” (*Berührung*) the two extremes have with each other is more of a disturbance or *incitation* that each transmits to the other than it is mere contiguity of location. The *Duden Herkunftswörterbuch* says of the verb *rühren* that, “In the older situation of the language, *rühren* was used primarily in the general sense of ‘set in motion, move [*in Bewegung setzen, bewegen*].’ From the meaning ‘set in motion, impel [*den Anstoß geben*]’ the meaning developed already in Old High German of ‘push, handle, touch’; cf. *anrühren* [‘touch, mix’] and *berühren*.” The range of meanings is mirrored in the English

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<sup>37</sup>Translation slightly emended according to the German. There is only one *Gesetzsein* in the German, and the adjective *reine* goes with *Bedeutung* not *Verschwinden*. I note also that I have followed Miller’s general pattern of translating *ist als...* as “exists as...” instead of attempting a strong sense of “*is as...*” Unfortunately, this makes it almost impossible in English to distinguish *sein als* from *existieren* (which is used in the first sentence here) as well as from *dasein*.

expressions, “That story touched me” and “That story moved me.” Hegel is not talking about mere contact, conjunction, but contact that impels, affects. This becomes clearer when we notice that he set up this discovery by describing a force that solicits (*das Sollizitiernde*) and a force that is solicited (*das Sollizitierte*). This verb is unusual enough in German that we may assume Hegel has taken it directly from Latin, where it means “to disturb, agitate,” in distinction to the purely rhetorical force of its English cognate.

Hegel goes on to emphasize the energetic, i.e., *subjective* character of the actuality of force when he says that the two extremes, the soliciting and solicited forces, “have thus, in fact, no substances of their own which might support and sustain them. The *concept* of force rather preserves itself as the *essence* in its very *actuality*” (*PS 86/PG 87*). Actual force is the incessant supersession of itself, which begins to sound very much like the descriptions of subjectivity in the Preface, and in fact quite like the description of absolute spirit from the end of the book: “It is its own restless process of superseding itself, or *negativity*” (*PS 491/PG 432*). What we could call the birth of actual subjectivity (but only its birth, not its maturity) is confirmed in this extremely pivotal paragraph that announces the advent of the *concept as concept*:

Thus the truth of force remains only the *thought* of it; the moments of its actuality, their substances and their movement, collapse unresistingly into an undifferentiated unity, a unity which is not force driven back into itself (for this is itself only such a moment), but is its *concept qua concept*. (*PS 86/PG 87*)

The shift is similar to what it was in the first two moments of consciousness: force, which was initially supposed to be “an *actual* object for consciousness” is transformed into a new universal that “is determined as the *negative* of force that is

objective to sense; it is force in the form of its true essence in which it exists only as an *object of the understanding*”(PS 86/PG 88).

This development is what Hegel had pointed to at the beginning of the chapter when he described what has come to be “*for us*,” who are always a step ahead of consciousness itself, seeing what goes on behind its back. Because he immediately shifts back to consciousness’s own experience, it is easy to miss the affirmation that the unconditioned universal object that has emerged from the play of perception has “*for us*, ...developed through the movement of consciousness in such a way that consciousness is involved in that development” (PS 79/PG 82). Still, consciousness begins in this experience with “merely the objective essence and not consciousness itself” for its content, and “shrinks away from what has emerged” (PS 80/PG 82). Of course, when consciousness comes to realize that this supposed objectivity vanishes into force when it is grasped as a concept, a pure object of the understanding, it has not yet come to the full realization that it has itself for its object. This realization will mark the transition to self-consciousness. Much of the development of the dialectic of force and the understanding is yet to come, and we may wonder why the insight that the actuality of force is in truth only the thought of force—the concept as concept—has yet so far to go before it grasps itself as consciousness of self.

What happens is that consciousness does not so easily give up its tendency to objectify its insights, and it “converts this truth again into an objective *inner*,” the *supersensible* world (PS 87/PG 88-89). The resulting exploration of the play of forces and the emergence of the law of force and the inverted (*verkehrte*) world all take place in the inner leeway (*Spielraum*) opened up by the insight into the vanishing actuality of

force, the insight that its truth is the concept as concept, *Begriff qua Begriff*. The insight that the actuality of force destroys the naive notion of actuality as objective reality—“the realization [*Realisierung*] of force is at the same time the loss of reality [*Realität*]<sup>38</sup>—is repeated in the inverted world, which repels the world of appearance from itself “as an inverted *actual world*” (*PS 97/PG 97*) but comes to realize that this actual world, although inverted, is present in its own actuality. The understanding cannot think of “two different kinds of actuality” as subsisting in two separate substances (*PS 98/PG 98*), but grasps them as “itself and its opposite in one unity” or an *infinity* (*PS 99/PG 99*). This infinity is the “absolute rest of pure self-movement...the soul of all that has gone before” (*PS 101/PG 100*). With this realization consciousness is transformed into self-consciousness and we enter the “native realm of truth” (*PS 104/PG 103*).

It may seem odd that discussion of “actuality,” if it is a hallmark of the subjective truth of substance, almost disappears once we enter this realm. It is mentioned as such sparingly in the first part of “Self-consciousness”—the work of the servant “*actually* [*wirklich*]” brings about “the dissolution of everything stable” (*PS 117/PG 114*); and fear

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<sup>38</sup>It is important to be careful about distinguishing between *real/reality* and *actual/ actuality*, both of which undergo a transformation (or several transformations) in the course of the *Phenomenology*. Although they are related and sometimes seemingly interchangeable, an important goal of Hegel’s thought is to grasp just how dynamic this relation is. In general, *real* and *reality* [*real*, *reell*, *Realität*] retain some relation to the Latin *res*, “thing,” while *actual/ actuality* [*wirklich/Wirklichkeit*], assumed by natural consciousness to be immediately identical with the former terms, goes through several stages, eventually rejoining and even transforming the meaning of *real/reality*. Note that, in calling the supersensible world “appearance as appearance,” Hegel clarifies that when the supersensible world is said *not* to be appearance, “what is understood by appearance is not appearance, but rather the *sensuous* world as itself the really actual [*reelle Wirklichkeit*]” (*PS 89/PG 90*). In other words, the supersensible is appearance, properly conceived, but not the apparent immediate identity of reality and actuality.



without service “does not extend to the conscious actuality of existence” (PS 119/PG 115).<sup>39</sup> It becomes an explicit theme again only in the section on the unhappy consciousness, which desires and works on an “actuality” which, like this consciousness itself, is “an *actuality broken in two*” (PS 132-133/PG 127). But it is not at all surprising that self-consciousness itself must slowly learn what actuality means for it. At first, insofar as it is a living self-consciousness and for-itself, it is not concerned with what would be an actuality in the sense in which consciousness took this term, but rather it lives and desires life. And it has not yet learned what it will learn as Reason, when it seeks to actualize (*verwirklichen*) itself and apprehend itself as all reality.

In a sense *actuality* as such is not part of self-consciousness’s conception of truth: “In the previous modes of certainty what is true for consciousness is something other than itself. But the conception of this truth vanishes in the experience of it. ...The concept of the object is superseded in the actual object” (PS 104/PG 103). Self-consciousness has abandoned the conception of truth as dependent on and derived from an independent actuality or object, and becomes instead concerned with its own independence and dependence. Later it will learn that it needs to recover a renewed sense of actuality. The section on consciousness develops dialectically by a comparison of each shape’s conception of actuality with its own actuality or enactment, and the new section on self-consciousness will develop through a comparison of what subjectivity (the I) thinks it is

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<sup>39</sup>Miller has “the known real world of existence,” but the German is “*die bewußte Wirklichkeit des Daseins.*”

for-itself and what it *is* as it lives and desires, works and thinks.<sup>40</sup> Having despaired of the truth of a substantial actuality, consciousness gives itself wholly over to the subjective moment, which it does not yet know works its own actuality in and for itself.

#### b. Movement and Negation in Consciousness

The preceding analysis of actuality in the chapters on consciousness already lays the groundwork for an appreciation of the importance of *movement* there, another clue to the way in which subjectivity is operative in the experience of objective consciousness without being an explicit theme of its self-articulation. Here too there is a progression in importance, which we might expect in a work which follows the slow journey of the development of spirit to the point where it can grasp the truth of the thoroughgoing subjectivity of substance as a key to the absoluteness of its self-knowledge. And, as the movement proper to subjectivity was described as self-movement and even self-mediation, the discovery that movement is involved in truth begins with the simple experience that movement comes into play in the seeming fixity and pure being of sense-certainty and progresses to the self-mediating movement of the infinite at the transition to self-consciousness.

Movement as such comes into play once the pure immediacy of being that sense certainty supposed itself to grasp turns out to be mediated between the I and the This.

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<sup>40</sup>Robert Williams is one of the few who points to this implicit contrast between self-consciousness's self-conception and its actuality when he compares the "eidetics" and the "empirics" of recognition. See his *Recognition*, chapters 7 and 8, as well as chapter 4 below.

Although we who have read the Preface may suspect already that where there is mediation there is movement, for consciousness this is not apparent, and it merely follows the implications of its attempt to indicate or point out the pure individual being that it means. This is what it experiences:

In this pointing-out, then, we see merely a movement which takes the following course: (1) I point out the ‘now,’ and it is asserted to be the truth. I point it out, however, as something that *has been*, or as something that has been superseded; I set aside the first truth. (2) I now assert as the second truth that it *has been*, that it is superseded. (3) But what has been, *is not*; I set aside the second truth, its *having been*, its supersession, and thereby negate the negation of the ‘now,’ and thus return to the first assertion, that the ‘now’ *is*. The ‘now,’ and pointing out the ‘now,’ are thus so constituted that neither the one nor the other is something immediate and simple, but a movement which contains various moments. (PS 64/PG 68)

The last sentence here is important, for it tells us that not only is the object to which sense-certainty tries to hold fast a movement, but also the pointing out itself. Moreover, the whole pointing-out process embraces two moments: 1) Because it returns to the now not as immediate but as a universal—the now reflected into itself—the pointing out is “the movement which expresses what the now is in truth...”; 2) It is also “the experience of learning that now is *universal*.” Finally, Hegel writes, “sense-certainty itself is nothing but...the simple history of its movement or of its experience” (PS 64/PG 68). Movement, established in the Preface as a key aspect of what it means to be *subject*, is thus identified with sense-certainty’s own mode of knowing and expresses its *truth*. Movement also describes the *experience* of learning this truth it expresses. Here, in a nutshell, is a perfect example of what Hegel had claimed in the Preface: Truth must be grasped and expressed as subject. Of course, this insight is only “for us” who have anticipated what “subject” means and have been cautioned not to divorce process

from result. Consciousness does not so easily abandon its faith in objectivity, but changes its criterion to perception of the universal object, the thing with many properties.

The passage just explicated concerning movement also contains much of the discussion of negativity in sense-certainty. This is hardly surprising, since the principle of movement is the void, or negation. As Giorgio Agamben has pointed out, the “place” of negation here is the indicative function of language, which says the universal that is by negation instead of the individual being it *means*.<sup>41</sup> In the passage cited above, a double negation or *Aufhebung* yields the truth of sense-certainty, the universal, and it also keeps the appearance of this truth wholly immanent to the experience of consciousness, although again consciousness does not grasp this itself. However *we* should have no doubt, even at this early stage, that what Hegel identified as subject is very much responsible not simply for the fracturing of sensation’s certainty, but also for uniting these pieces into the experience taken up as the truth of the next shape of consciousness.

What also seems established here is that not only is there no gap between experience and knowledge, but a perfect identity between them. The key to their identity is the subject, which appears here as movement and which operates by negation. But

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<sup>41</sup>Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen Pinkus and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), especially 6-18; 41-48. This memoir of a seminar is provocative, drawing startling parallels between Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein*’s having-to-be-the-*Da* as the “null basis of a nullity” and Hegel’s discovery of the negation enacted in the attempt to “take the This.” But the seminar never really explores what negativity means for Hegel and how this might differ from what it means for Heidegger. Luckily, the English text includes the German that Agamben cites from the *Jenenser Realphilosophie*, as well as the Greek he cites from Aristotle; the English translations that are provided are unreliable. For example, they disguise the fact that, in using *Nichtigkeit* (“nullity,” translated as “negativity”), Heidegger seems deliberately to be taking some distance from Hegel’s *Negativität*.

Levinas would have us notice as well that in sense-certainty, Hegel is dealing only with the components of experience that make up and stay within *Erfahrung*. It is not sensation as the life of enjoyment that the dialectic takes up, but sensation as a mode of knowing that claims to have access to truth. The *Phenomenology* does not ask sensation, “How do you live?” but “What do you know?” The journey of spirit begins with “the *knowledge* or *knowing* which is at the start our object...” (*PS 58/PG 63*, emphasis added). If Hegel and the history of German idealism is right that thought is negation, then starting with knowledge or even apparent knowledge is starting with a negation. We should ask what this first negation has separated us from, and what kind of gap or rupture this separation is. Hegel assumes that what sense-certainty is separated from is the object of its knowledge, its truth, which is immediate sensuous being. But in an important way this begs the question, placing knowing already on both sides of the rupture and giving the dialectic the foothold in the territory of experience (*Erfahrung*) that it will need to complete the circle in absolute knowing.

This distinction between sensation as a mode of knowing and the sensate life of enjoyment is important. In Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, the philosophical Ivan taunts his meeker, religious brother Alyosha with his own lack of belief in the order of things. Even though he admits that “the sticky little leaves that come out in the spring are dear to me,” Ivan threatens that he will not allow himself to be seduced to life by them past his thirtieth year.<sup>42</sup> For the strangely puritanical Ivan, this thirst for life makes

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<sup>42</sup>Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 1990), 230. According to a note, the reference is to a poem by Pushkin. The rest of

him a sensualist, a self-condemnation in which he luxuriates. But Alyosha affirms the sticky spring leaves and the blue sky, saying that one should love life before everything else. “Love life more than its meaning?” asks Ivan. “Certainly.” Although Dostoyevsky has other concerns here and Ivan Karamazov is not expressly an avatar of the Hegelian spirit, the passage still points to the milieu that Levinas will describe as enjoyment and sensibility, which is not, or at least not yet, a fund of knowledge or certainty.

We cannot yet evaluate the fate of an attempt to make such a milieu of lived experience philosophically significant, nor can we conclude from the beginning of the *Phenomenology* that Hegel nowhere takes account of it. Hegel does examine pre-cognitive sensibility in the opening chapters of the later *Philosophy of Spirit*, although there, too, sensibility is “on the way to knowing.” The *Encyclopedia*’s transition from the philosophy of nature to the philosophy of spirit is characterized by Hegel as “a coming-to-itself of spirit out of its self-externality in nature,”<sup>43</sup> which of course means that the structures of thought are already implicit in nature. The absolute idea of the *Logic* releases itself into the self-externality of nature, and then in the next major transition,

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my example here deals with the continuation of this meeting, which ends with Ivan’s famous Grand Inquisitor story.

<sup>43</sup>Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind*, Part Three of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), with *Zusätze*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), §382, *Zusatz*; Hereafter, *PM*. German text: *Sämtliche Werke*, Jubiläumsausgabe. Bd. 10: *System der Philosophie: Dritter Teil, Philosophie des Geistes*. Edited by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1964. I will use “spirit” for *Geist* instead of “Mind,” and as usual, “concept” for *Begriff*. The first sub-section builds towards consciousness from “The Natural Soul” through “The Feeling Soul” and the “Actual Soul,” §§388-412.

the idea, or spirit implicit [*an sich*], slumbering in nature, overcomes, therefore, the externality, separateness, and immediacy, creates for itself an existence conformable to its inwardness and universality and thereby becomes spirit which is reflected into itself and is for itself, self-conscious and awakened spirit or spirit as such. (*PM* §384, *Zu.*)

The sensibility that Hegel explores at the start of the *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Spirit* already contains what will be made explicit in consciousness, for “everything that emerges in conscious intelligence and in reason has its source and origin in sensation,” and sensibility is just this pre-conscious preparation for thought: “the dull stirring and inarticulate breathing of the spirit” (*PM* §400).

Hegel does say here that besides the contents which sensation provides, there is another side to the soul, and “we are also, *qua* individuality, in ourselves a world of concrete content with an infinite periphery,” so that, “the totality of relations in which the individual human soul finds itself, constitutes its actual livingness and subjectivity and accordingly has grown together with it just as firmly as, to use a simile, the leaves grow with the tree” (*PM* §402, *Zu.*) Yet, in this “*concrete natural life*,” the soul merely “dreams away”; its destiny in the full life of consciousness (taken in its widest sense) is to make explicit for itself what it is merely in itself (*PM*, §402, *Zu.*) Experience (*Erfahrung*) does not come on the scene until “Consciousness Proper,” in the phenomenological sections of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, in fact, not until “Sense-perception [*Wahrnehmung*],” when what is given in sense certainty is reflected upon and elevated “into something necessary and universal, viz. *experiences*” (*PM* §420). How close what is analyzed here comes to the life of enjoyment that Levinas describes we have yet to see, but it is clear that, for Hegel, this progress is already determined by the

idea itself in its destiny as self-knowing spirit and that experience is simultaneous with knowing.

If we return to the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we see that in “Self-consciousness” Hegel does indeed explore on several levels what the concept of “life” means, and although spirit there is characterized as desire rather than sensation, we must still ask whether this analysis does not comprehend the kind of enjoyment and *Erlebnis* with which Levinas is concerned. I will return to this question and Hegel’s account of *Erlebnis* after we have taken a better look at Levinas’s phenomenology of enjoyment. Here I only wish to note that Hegel does not begin the itinerary of the *Phenomenology* with sensation as lived experience, but specifically as a mode of knowing: “the knowledge or knowing which is at the start our object” (*PS* 58/*PG* 63).

When the examination of consciousness shifts to perception, movement again comes to supplant what is first taken as the object or the thing as identical with itself, even though consciousness vainly tries to use the “in so far” to keep the moments of this movement separate. As a result, “perceptual understanding runs to and fro through every kind of material and content” unable to accept that it is actually involved with “simple essentialities” of “singleness [*Einzelheit*]” and “universality,” essence and non-essence instead of “substantial material and content” (*PS* 78, 77/*PG* 80). It is precisely the truth of this movement that is taken up as the true object of consciousness, the unconditioned universal, when the various essentialities are brought together and consciousness takes shape as understanding. Here, however, a gap appears between the *for us* and consciousness.



*For us*, this object has developed through the *movement* of consciousness in such a way that consciousness is involved in that development, and the reflection is the same on both sides, or, there is only one reflection. But since in this *movement* consciousness has for its object merely the objective essence and not consciousness as such, the result must have an objective significance for consciousness; consciousness shrinks away from what has emerged, and takes it as essence in the objective sense. (PS 79-80/PG 82; emphasis on *movement* added)

Movement signals the operation of subjectivity, but only “we” know this; consciousness itself suppresses the movement it knows itself to have undergone and holds fast to the hope of grasping a simple objective certainty, substantial being. Nevertheless, the truth of this movement will return in spirit’s self-recollection, which is really all that Hegel means when he says that it is this way already “for us.”

If movement is key to what perceptual consciousness does but denies, or deems unessential, negativity is something that it appears to be quite comfortable with. Of course, it does not yet know that this negativity inheres in consciousness itself and is the spring of the movement at which it balks. In contrast to the nugatory wealth of sense-certainty, perception appears to possess a concrete abundance, “for only perception contains negation, that is difference or manifoldness, within its own essence” (PS 67/PG 71). That this negativity may prove too powerful for perception or any first-order consciousness to harness may be seen in its readiness to attribute negativity both to the many properties, which, as determinate, negate each other, as well as to the “one..., a unity that *excludes* an other” (PS 69/PG 73). This pervasive negativity is fatal to the truth of self-identity that perception wants to maintain, for both the one and the properties can be self-identical only through the exclusivity and determinateness that link them to other things and properties equally exclusive and determinate.

The most important aspect of negativity that Hegel examines in perception is the doubleness of supersession or *Aufhebung*: a simultaneous “negating and preserving [*Aufbewahren*]” (PS 68/PG 72). Critics who hope to unmask this preservation as a Hegelian subterfuge tend to miss the fact that it is precisely here that Hegel vindicates the rights of natural consciousness, which always sees its thinking preserved by being taken up into its truth [*Auf-be-wahrt*] in the next stage of thought. This process is introduced to guarantee the sensuous richness of perception in the determinate properties, but it is also involved in the whole process that the dialectic of perception runs through.

As consciousness examines what it knows in its actual perceiving, the determinations which are to remain self-identical slip and slide into one another. Unwilling to admit that this untruth is in the object, consciousness takes it upon itself, in an effort to negate this negation:

By this very recognition it is able at once to supersede this untruth; it distinguishes its apprehension [*Auffassen*] of the truth from the untruth of its perception, corrects this untruth, and since it undertakes to make this correction itself, the truth, *qua* truth of perception, falls of course within consciousness. (PS 72/PG 75)

Here we see, in the negation or untruth that consciousness takes upon itself and then negates again or *aufhebt* into its truth, the first glimmers of the realization that negation is the essence of the subject. Both the untruth and the truth of perception fall within consciousness itself; this is the essence of *Erfahrung*, which returns truth from its substantial externality into its subjective homeland.

But consciousness of course does not yet grasp this truth of subjectivity. It “experiences” that the thing with many properties is a “purely self-related negation,” or “suspension of *itself* [*Aufheben seiner selbst*]” (PS 76/PG 78), and takes up this

whole movement as the truth of the unconditioned universal object of understanding or force, which appears to substantialize this purely self-related negation. Only by working through that dialectical process will consciousness come to the realization that it is itself the seat of truth.

We saw above that the analysis of actual force comprehends the movement taken up from perception as the movement of two opposed moments of force (cf. *PS 82-83/PG 84-85*) as the *concept* of force, or “the *negative* of force that is objective to sense,” or “the *inner being* of things *qua* inner” (*PS 86/PG 88*). Movement remains the operative conception of understanding as it considers the “play of forces” that is “the developed negative” (*PS 87/PG 88*) even as it tries to fix this movement in an essential moment, the supersensible world (*PS 87/PG 89*). The heightened focus on negativity and movement in this chapter pushes the dialectic closer and closer to its entrance into “the native realm of truth” or self-consciousness.

This transition is made in the discussion of “explanation,” which seems “a tautological movement” when viewed objectively, but becomes internal, a true movement of the understanding from the point of view of the *Phenomenology*. “In it...we detect the very thing that was missing in the law, viz. the absolute flux itself; for this *movement*, when we look at it more closely, is directly the opposite of itself, ...a *MOVEMENT* in which *a distinction is certainly made but, because it is no distinction, is again cancelled [aufgehoben]*” (*PS 95/PG 95*).<sup>44</sup> This movement that is internal to consciousness

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<sup>44</sup>It is worth noting that Hegel draws double emphasis to *movement* at this stage, an emphasis which I have reproduced following the text of the critical edition (*BEWEGUNG*).

becomes the inverted world, which is at once an *inverting* world. The word *verkehrt* means “inverted” or “perverted,” but the verb form *verkehren* also meant in Hegel’s day “to make exchange, have commerce.” It indicates a movement or “traffic” of inversion and not simply the fact of being upside down.<sup>45</sup>

The development of the notions of movement and negativity within consciousness culminates in the thinking of contradiction in the “simple infinity” which is the self,

...the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal blood, whose omnipresence is neither disturbed nor interrupted by any difference, but rather is itself every difference, as also their supersession; it pulsates within itself but does not move, inwardly vibrates, yet is at rest. (*PS* 100/*PG* 99).

The contradictory language here is appropriate—on the next page Hegel describes the infinite as “this absolute unrest of pure self-movement” (*PS* 101/*PG* 100)—and indicates the sublation of the external objectivity of consciousness into the truth of self-consciousness:

Since this concept of infinity is an object for consciousness, the latter is consciousness of a difference that is no less *immediately* cancelled; consciousness is for its own self, it is a distinguishing of that which contains no difference, or *self-consciousness*. (*PS* 102/*PG* 102)

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<sup>45</sup>My source for the dating of this meaning is the *Duden Herkunftswörterbuch*. The contemporary meaning of *Verkehr* as “vehicular traffic” is of course related to its 18th century meaning of traffic in the sense of exchange, trade, commerce. Terry Pinkard, in *Hegel’s “Phenomenology”*: *The Sociality of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), notes that the expression “*verkehrte Welt*” commonly designated popular paintings and drawings depicting comic reversals—students lecturing teachers, the rabbit roasting the hunters, etc. (42). And Hans Georg Gadamer points out the use of the term in reference to dramatic satire (*Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. Christopher Smith [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976]), 48-49. It is perfectly characteristic of Hegel to capitalize on such popular terms of usage, but to invest it as well with the dynamic philosophical significance I have indicated.

With this realization, consciousness makes the crucial transition in its search for a ground for truth from external givenness or objectivity to the internal ground of subjectivity or the for itself.<sup>46</sup> Even when we return to an objective consideration of the world in “Observing Reason,” subjectivity is in charge of the observation. While in the stages of simple consciousness objectivity “was something that only *happened to* consciousness,” in reason, “consciousness *makes its own* observations and experiments. ...It seeks to possess in thinghood the consciousness only of itself” (PS 145/PG 137). The truth of subjectivity, even if it seems not to be fully explicit or thematized as the Preface might lead us to expect, remains the native ground of all the experience through which spirit comes to its full self-realization.

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<sup>46</sup>Klaus Düsing emphasizes the dialectical solution of the problem of infinity as the key to the development of Hegel’s mature conception of subjectivity in the *Science of Logic*. In brief, he argues that Hegel’s logic remains finite—*die Logik der Endlichen Reflexion*—and capable only of *introducing* a speculative metaphysics of the absolute until the *Jena Logic* begins to develop a sense of the logical infinite as the *true* infinite, one that sublates simple relations and determinations as a whole (*insgesamt*) and not merely reciprocally (*wechselseitig*) (*Der Begriff der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik*, 150-153). This allows Hegel to begin to develop a conception of subjectivity as absolute self-cognition and not merely as a form that must be overcome, as in *Glauben und Wissen* (155). Düsing maintains that Hegel continued to work through this problematic in the *Phenomenology*, but that he only comes to his mature conception of such subjectivity in the *Logic* (204-208). The question of whether the *Logic* supersedes the *Phenomenology* (as Düsing contends) belongs to another debate, but the importance of infinity to the conception of subjectivity in both of them is indisputable. Harris (who maintains the necessary complementarity of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*) says, however, that Hegel’s statement that “the exposition of the concept of infinity belongs to science” (PS 102/PG 101) means that now “we could begin at once with the pure Logic” (*Phenomenology and System*, 35). Although I cannot follow Harris’s leap here, he is surely right that the concept of infinity remains crucial to the structural dynamic of absolute spirit and the absolute idea.

### 5. *Aufhebung* and *Erfahrung*

The preceding analysis of the transitions from consciousness to self-consciousness shows that the truth of subjectivity is already implicit in natural consciousness. The experience that this consciousness goes through on its way to absolute knowing is the process of making this implicit truth of subjectivity explicit, *an und für sich*. Thus experience is for Hegel *Erfahrung*, a discovery that ruptures what natural consciousness assumed to be its immediate ground of truth but recuperates or recaptures this immediacy in the simplicity of self-consciousness's being for itself. Consciousness began its dialectical examination holding the whole wealth of the external world in its hands as sense-certainty and has discovered through the examination that what it held was actually itself. Hegel says at the end of the chapter on the understanding, "It is true that consciousness of an 'other,' of an object in general, is itself necessarily *self-consciousness*, a reflectedness-into-self, consciousness of itself in its otherness" (*PS* 102/*PG* 102). This whole process demonstrates the subject's "magical power of the negative" or the double movement of the *Aufhebung* that generates a whole of experience out of its own brokenness (*Zerrissenheit*).

Criticism of Hegel often attempts to refute the validity of specific transitions or *Aufhebungen*, claiming that what is "taken up as the truth" of an experience is not in fact that experience's truth, or at least not its only truth. Such criticism misses the point that within the framework of the phenomenological examination of consciousness, experience is not on one side and truth on the other; rather, experience is precisely the discovery that a new conception is the truth of a previous *conception* of how things stood for consciousness. This is the point of the discussion of the immanence of the criterion of

truth in the Introduction (PS 52-55/PG 58-60). Therefore, when one contests any specific transition or *Aufhebung* in the path of the *Phenomenology* by claiming that the conception of knowing under examination could be more faithfully or seriously represented, one is still arguing about the relation of one conceptual scheme to another, one *Gestalt* to another,<sup>47</sup> and thus one remains wholly within the sphere of thought and within the power of the subjectivity that Hegel claims is the key to absolute knowing.

Ludwig Feuerbach offers a potentially different position with his argument from *Existenz*, charging that Hegel begins “not with what is other [*dem Anderssein*] to thought, but with the thought of what is other to thought.”<sup>48</sup> Even though Feuerbach interprets *Existenz* as a concrete and tacit but active knowing, what is “other to thought” could also point in some way beyond a consciousness that thinks it knows what it has hold of.

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<sup>47</sup>I am using “conceptual” in a general sense here, not in the sense of Hegel’s *Begriff* or “speculative thinking” (*begreifendes Denken*). On the other hand, the general meaning of “*Gestalt*,” familiar from psychology, seems to accord well with what Hegel means by the “shapes” of consciousness.

<sup>48</sup>Ludwig Feuerbach, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie* (in *Samtliche Werke*, Bd. II, 2d. ed., ed. Friedrich Jodl (Stuttgart-Bad Constatt: Frommann, 1959), 187. Merold Westphal argues that Feuerbach mistakenly takes the crux of the argument to be the role of language here, but is led willy-nilly to affirm conclusions similar to Hegel’s own, thus proving himself “incapable of a cogent critique” (*History and Truth in Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 72-77; 89n30). However, I think Westphal dismisses the *Existenz*-based critique too easily. It is true that to say that the truth of sense-certainty rests on the concrete life of the individual is in one sense merely to take a short cut to the truth of self-consciousness that Hegel develops in Chapter IV. However, the claim that *Existenz* has roots that reach beyond the structures of knowing is strikingly similar to Levinas’s, as I hope to develop. The point is to negotiate a meaningful relation between knowing and *Existenz*, for to refuse knowing or reason altogether is a course Hegel rightfully disdains as inimical to philosophy. The main points of Feuerbach’s critique are found in *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie* and *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, both in *Samtliche Werke*, Bd. II: *Philosophische Kritiken und Grundsätze*. Both are found in English in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, trans. Zawar Hanfi (Garden City, NJ: Anchor Books, 1972).

Hegel no doubt would argue that the very claim that something is other *to thought* means that it cannot be unrelated to thought, but this begs the question by asserting that there is no difference between otherness and the thought of otherness. The two appear simultaneously, it seems, but this does not mean they are coincident; Levinas claims that what is other to thought appears on the horizon of thought as an object but it comes to that horizon from elsewhere. Thought *takes* this other *as* its object, as indeed it must if it is to think at all, but in this experience there would seem to be the trace of something not immanent to thinking itself.

What calls for special attention here is not simply the assertion that consciousness, in its experience of what is other to it, comes to take the truth of its relation as a determinate negation of this otherness-for-it, but what exactly is involved in this “taking as.” Thought or consciousness itself is perhaps nothing other than this movement of assumption or *ὑπολήψεις*, this movement of taking up X *as* Y, and Hegel’s genius was to perceive that, within the domain of consciousness, the second conception is not arbitrary or fortuitous, but is generated precisely out of the contradictions within the first conception, and thus contains nothing alien to the natural consciousness in search of a warrant for its claim to know something about the world. But the *ὑπολήψεις* by which thought takes up lived life into the *Gestalt* of sense-certainty is not a passage from one conceptual scheme to another, and thus perhaps not an *Aufhebung* in the same sense that the other transitions in the section on consciousness are.

What will become critical for the ethical critique of the standpoint of absolute knowing is the possibility that a dynamic other than that of knowing is elided in this “taking as.” Experience [*Erlebnis*] may not always appear phenomenally as a mode of



knowing [*Erfahrung*], although Hegel's dialectic always takes it up as such. I will turn now to Levinas's descriptions of the phenomenon of enjoyment and its relation to subjectivity, consciousness, and thought. The interruption of this enjoyment by the other who faces and addresses me, calling into question my presumption that the world is for me and thus provoking the very activity of knowing and objectifying that world, will mark a key moment in this examination, one where Levinas will have to at once explain how consciousness works and develops, and evade the absoluteness of the concept vis-à-vis ethical responsibility.

By suggesting that another dimension of experience manifests itself alongside the discoveries of consciousness and self-consciousness, even manifests itself as the condition of these discoveries, I am not rejecting Hegel's dialectic as wholly invalid. Rather, I am suggesting that even if this dialectic and its comprehension through determinate negation can demonstrate its validity within the domain of thought, its grasp may not be complete, may only reach what appears on the plane of consciousness. This question of a non-absolute validity will become most acute in the dialectic of moral conscience, where guilt and responsibility are taken up as problems of certainty and mutual recognition, but it shows itself already here in sense-certainty, where what Levinas would describe as the way the separated being "lives from" the elemental medium is taken up as a problem of the certainty of propositions describing this medium or one's relation to it. Thus, even if absolute knowledge can demonstrate warranty for itself by means of its ability to resolve problems of experience taken up as problems of knowing in a long series of *Aufhebungen*, this does not mean that the absoluteness of

such a warranty cannot be disputed by a way of thinking that does not take up experience primarily as a problem of certainty, but faces it as a question of responsibility'.

## CHAPTER 3: LEVINAS: ENJOYMENT, DWELLING, CONSCIOUSNESS

### 1. Consciousness and Concrete Life

Levinas, too, describes the way the I, in the life of consciousness, by dwelling in a site and maintaining itself through labor and possession, overcomes the apparent alterity of the world in which it finds itself. In so doing, however, he insists that this aspect of subjectivity or interior life does not exhaust the possibilities of the I, nor even give an adequate account of its origin and destiny. It is not that “the star which rises in us still had somewhere else its setting,” or that what we are will only be known at the term of a history that surpasses and comprehends our initiatives, but that the separated I emerges from the dream of enjoyment, roused into consciousness and self-consciousness by the exteriority of the Other whom the structures of consciousness nevertheless cannot contain. And in this “nevertheless” there dawns the future: the non-coincidence of my time and the time of the other, the non-coincidence of both times with objective time or history.

Of course, it would be wrong to insist on the basis of the result of the dialectic of consciousness that self-consciousness as such encompasses the whole destiny of spirit in Hegel’s account, especially since spirit is not explicitly developed as a concept until we have passed through the dialectic of self-consciousness and all the stages of reason as well. Still, since with self-consciousness we have entered the “native realm of truth,” Levinas is not altogether wrong either when he argues that Hegel’s philosophy operates

only within those dimensions where self-consciousness or “the same” is at home. Hegel says as much himself when he announces that the concept of spirit is already present in self-consciousness’s realization that it can achieve satisfaction or fulfillment [*Befriedigung*] only in another self-consciousness. Although consciousness (which Hegel uses here as a general term, including self-consciousness) does not yet know what spirit is—“this absolute substance which, in being the perfect freedom and independence of their opposition, is the unity of different self-consciousnesses existing each for itself: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” (*PS 110/PG 108*)<sup>1</sup>—nevertheless here, in the concept of spirit, “consciousness first finds its turning point, where it leaves behind it the colorful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present” (*PS 110-111/PG 108*). Without preempting the need to learn more about what spirit is, this “We that is I and I that is We,” we can assert with confidence that the whole subsequent development of consciousness’s experience unfolds in this spiritual day [*geistigen Tag*] opened up by self-consciousness.

By contrast, in only one of the three major shapes of subjectivity that we find in Levinas—enjoyment, consciousness, and ethical responsibility—does the I approach the actuality, self-movement, and negativity that characterize Hegel’s subject. Nevertheless,

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<sup>1</sup>Miller’s translation is suspect, transferring “perfect freedom and independence” to the different “independent” self-consciousnesses, whereas Hegel describes spirit as “*diese absolute Substanz, welche in der vollkommene Freiheit und Selbstständigkeit ihres Gegensatzes, nämlich verschiedener für sich seiender Selbstbewußtsein, die Einheit derselben ist*” (*PG 108*). Cp., “this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence” (*PS 110*).

it is important to recognize that there is in consciousness a connection and an overlap between the thinkers, despite Levinas's wish to dissociate himself from dialectical thought. As the power of consciousness, at home in a site, the I concretely identifies and maintains itself through labor, possession and thought. Levinas means this "power" [*pouvoir*] of consciousness literally, for consciousness is the mode and the site is the means by which the "I can" [*je peux*]. Early in *Totality and Infinity* he writes:

In a sense, everything is in the site, in the last analysis, everything is at my disposal, even the stars, if I but reckon them, calculate the intermediaries or the means. The site, a medium [*Le lieu, milieu*], affords means. Everything is here, everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is com-prehended. [*Tout est ici, tout m'appartient; tout à l'avance est pris avec la prise originelle du lieu, tout est com-pris*]. (TI 37-38/7-8)

The language of this description of the I is strikingly Hegelian. The site is the means or middle term by which the I, the power of thought or reckoning, lives its life, pursues its projects; and the grasp of the I reflected in the forms of *prendre* seems deliberately to echo the conceptual power of the German *begreifen, Begriff*. It is not simply that everything is included (*tout compris*) in the site, but that everything is grasped in advance when the I takes its place, seizes its "place in the sun."<sup>2</sup>

The Hegelian character of the I expressed here is no accident. Levinas had introduced the way the I works its self-identification by maintaining itself concretely in a site by citing Hegel's description in the *Phenomenology* of how the I distinguishes itself

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<sup>2</sup>Levinas is fond of citing Pascal: "'That is my place in the sun.' Here is the beginning and the image of the usurpation of all the earth" (*Pensées*, §64, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. H. d'Gouhier and L. Lafuma [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963]).

from itself only to have this differentiation immediately superseded, since it is itself precisely both aspects of what is distinguished as well as the power that does the distinguishing.<sup>3</sup> This citation does not mean that Levinas is wholly willing to concede to Hegel the description of consciousness, in which the individual maintains itself as self-consciousness despite facing myriad different objects. He protests that the self-identity of the I effected through the site in labor, possession and thought “is not the void of a tautology nor a dialectical opposition to the other, but the concreteness of an egoism” (*TI* 38/8). Nevertheless, it is clear that the alterity of things and of the world in general, once the site is established or “seized” (*prisé*), is only provisional.

Although relations with both things and people require the concreteness of living in a site, Levinas makes the distinction that things “offer themselves to or resist possession” while the other person “contests” possession (*TI* 38/8). This statement would seem to ascribe to things the same kind of mediated alterity Hegel shows they have, and perhaps even mirror the distinction between the desire which seeks satisfaction in the fluid medium of life and the desire that realizes it can reach satisfaction only in the recognition of another self-consciousness. True, Levinas insists that the surrender or resistance of things is not merely an intellectual game, but that is not what Hegel means by dialectic either. One has to resist Levinas’s suggestion that “dialectical opposition” and “the concreteness of an egoism” are mutually exclusive. It relies on the false characterization of Hegel as an abstract thinker describing a dialectic in a “void,” whereas

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<sup>3</sup>*TI* 36-37/6-7. The reference is to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 102/PG 101, the transition from Consciousness to Self-Consciousness.

*concreteness* of thought and the redemption of philosophy from abstraction was one of Hegel's abiding passions. Furthermore, Hegel too insists that the concreteness of an egoism is not simply self-grounding, which is what drives the dialectic on towards the articulated whole. There is clearly a much greater affinity between these two accounts than the easy disclaimer directed against dialectical tautologies can dispel.

This affinity makes it important to ask about the precise relation between the three aspects of subjective life that Levinas describes. How does their relation escape dialectical determination? I will examine this question in several stages, first concentrating on Levinas's phenomenological description of sensibility and enjoyment and the distinction he makes between these and the activity of consciousness, which, seizing the interval afforded by the home, work, and possession, manifests itself in the freedom of representation and thought. These relations I will compare to the dialectical development that Hegel traces from self-consciousness as life and desire, through the work that raises the dependent consciousness to independence and then reason, and on to the manifestation of spirit proper. At this point the analysis must move to another level, for both philosophers submit the whole complex of relations between subjective life and objective thought (Self-consciousness and Reason for Hegel; Enjoyment and Representation for Levinas) to an ethical critique that takes place at both a higher and a more fundamental level. Here we will see how for Levinas the ethical critique constantly interrupts the drive towards knowledge, rending the sense that consciousness makes of sensibility and recalling it to the condition of its birth in the face and word of the other, while for Hegel, ethics leads to the reconciliation of inconsistencies by transposing them to higher levels: religion and absolute knowing.

## 2. Enjoyment as Concrete Life

According to Levinas, the life of enjoyment opens up a dimension that philosophy has inevitably ignored. We live in the world, he says, not only as intelligences ascertaining the truth of things, but as vital centers borne up and sustained by what we could never have imagined ahead of time. Indeed, we discover the world as at once gratuitous and suited to our enjoyment, and this grace is not annulled or sublated by the later realization that the lives we lead depend to the point of necessity upon the air, earth, water and light we enjoy. Nor is the “animal complacency” of enjoyment (*TI* 149/123) simply an inchoate shape of representational consciousness whose destiny would be fulfilled when this consciousness makes explicit what sensibility or self-feeling possesses only “in itself.” Enjoyment is not imperfect certainty but happiness, at once the pulsation of life and its delectation.

Levinas delineates the phenomenon of enjoyment most vividly and completely in the second major section of *Totality and Infinity*. Enjoyment is “living from...” or “living on...,” “living off of...” [*vivre de...*] (*TI* 110f/82f),<sup>4</sup> a movement that transfigures nourishment and dependence into happiness and independence and reaches “above” or “beyond being” (*TI* 113/85). “Life,” Levinas writes, is “*love of life*” and exceeds existence as the mere fact of being or even the care of being (*TI* 112/84). The description of life as enjoyment swells with this sense of overfullness: it is *accomplishment* and not

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<sup>4</sup>Here and elsewhere I will use ellipsis as Levinas does with expressions such as living from... or living on... and consciousness of..., enjoyment of... He means by this to indicate the general intentional or quasi-intentional structure of these modes of the I, although these various intentionalities are by no means completely analogous (see below, -).



“the extirpation of needs” (*TI* 115/87-8); it is *consummation* and not merely consumption (*TI* 114/86). Both of these words as well as the sexual connotations of the French *jouissance* (fairly but barely translated by the English “enjoyment”) testify to an exorbitance that exceeds the outlines of any mere capacity. In enjoyment the separated being immerses the whole density of its flesh in the element of the world and “drinks deeply of life.” Prior to the reflection of consciousness or self-consciousness and oblivious to the otherness of things or persons, the subject in enjoyment luxuriates even in the needs it feels but does not yet indulge, enjoys its needs.

Enjoyment is not simply the optimistic condition of the naive, animal being before it is awakened to the anxiety and uncertainty of existence. It sustains the human even in the throes of discouragement and sorrow. In William Faulkner’s novel *Light in August*, the millhand Byron Bunch, having given up the woman he loves by reuniting her with the rogue who got her pregnant and abandoned her once already, pauses at the top of the hill he has mounted on his way out of her life and decides after a short debate to look back. He says to himself, “I reckon I might as well have the pleasure of not being able to bear looking back too.”<sup>5</sup> This reflects precisely the way one lives concretely or “enjoys” even the life one suffers, how one “lives from...” even the misery one posits as the meaning of living. One thinks also of the great plays of Sophocles: of the élan with which Antigone defies the edict of Creon who would neuter sorrow, of Oedipus turning at the threshold of the earth that will swallow him up to embrace his daughters once

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<sup>5</sup>William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 402.

again, of Philoctetes already homesick for the scene of his desolation: “Farewell, cave that shared my watches, nymphs of the meadow and the stream, the deep male growl of the storm-lashed headlands....”<sup>6</sup> It is essentially human, Levinas suggests, for disquietude to trouble enjoyment, but even in fleeing affliction we grasp at joys, however frail. He himself alludes to the story of the Countess Du Barry, jeered by the crowd and about to be guillotined for their entertainment, who cries out, “*Encore un moment, monsieur le bourreau, encore un moment!*” (TI 149/123).<sup>7</sup>

The movement by which the separated being raises itself up corporeally, sinks its teeth into the world that sustains it, and enjoys this dependence is distinguished from other ways in which philosophy has described the relation between an exterior world and interior subjectivity. Enjoyment is not representation, and “the things we live from are not tools or even implements, in the Heideggerian sense of the term” (TI 110/82). Indeed it is probably not Hegel’s phenomenology of the experience of consciousness, but Husserl’s phenomenology of object-constituting intentionality and Heidegger’s fundamental ontology of Being-in-the-world that forms the background against which the phenomenon of enjoyment is delineated, although it is clear that here as elsewhere Levinas wants to include Hegel among the “intellectualist” philosophers who discount the concrete dimensions of lived life. Rather than accept this characterization at face

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<sup>6</sup>Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, trans. David Grene, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume II, ed. David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), ll. 396-398.

<sup>7</sup>The allusion is to a story related in Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot*, part II, chapter 2 (cf. the translation by Constance Garnett [New York: Bantam, 1958], 190).

value, I wish to examine how Levinas criticizes representation and fundamental ontology and examine whether disengaging enjoyment from these two approaches serves also to call into question Hegelian dialectic and phenomenology.

a. Enjoyment and Care; Desire and Life

The things we live from or on—bread, soup, air, water, even language, laughter and love—are not simply implements for living, even though we could not, would not live without them. We need not deny the “readiness-at-hand” in which Dasein discovers its world and the things in it in order to appreciate how enjoyment and *living from...* manifest themselves in a different dimension than the “that-for-the-sake-of-which” [*das Worumwillen*] analyzed by Heidegger.<sup>8</sup> The elemental medium and even the things that it affords are shown to overflow the ontological references that endow implements with meaning: “The enjoyment of a thing, be it a tool, does not consist simply in bringing this thing to the usage for which it is fabricated—the pen to the writing, the hammer to the nail to be driven in—but also in suffering or rejoicing over this operation” (*TI* 133/106). In denying that readiness-at-hand founds or accounts for the I’s enjoyment, Levinas asserts that there is already in the flesh of sensibility a finality sufficient unto itself, if only for the moment, after which, let the floods come.

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<sup>8</sup>See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), ¶¶14-18, 63-88 (page numbers from the original German edition, *Sein und Zeit* [Tübingen: Niemayer, 1927]).

Enjoyment catches sight of or sinks its teeth into a dimension that subtends the plane of existence or being: “The love of life does not resemble the care for Being, reducible to the comprehension of Being, or ontology,” he writes. “The love of life does not love Being, but loves the happiness of being” (*TI* 145/118); it “does not take place on the plane of *pure being*, ...[but] always beyond being, in which the things are hewn” (*TI* 113/85). Levinas emphasizes that the I of enjoyment has a substantial density that is simultaneously its dependence on and triumph over the world in which it is steeped. The I lives not *in* but *as* a body, raised up within the element of which it partakes in such a way that this very partaking nourishes its independence and enjoyment. This bodily and sensual density distinguishes enjoyment from anxiety far more than their apparent polarity on a continuum of existential moods. Levinas makes this point when he claims that the food would figure in Heidegger’s ontological analysis only as fuel and not as an object of satisfaction or enjoyment: “*Dasein* in Heidegger is never hungry” (*TI* 134/108).

Whatever the merits of this as a criticism of Heidegger,<sup>9</sup> our concern is whether the charge that the vital sensuality of enjoyment vanishes and is reduced to the status of a “missing person” holds against Hegel. What is clear is that Levinas distinguishes enjoyment and the subjective mode or interiority it produces from an existence—be it *Dasein* or some shape of consciousness or subjectivity—whose primary concern is the

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<sup>9</sup>I note that Levinas seems to take issue primarily with Heidegger’s analyses in *Being and Time*, and we might ask whether the pleasure in things and the conviviality they afford explored in such later essays as “Building Dwelling Thinking” or “The Thing” do not approach much nearer Levinas’s sense of enjoyment. These were published in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1954) and are translated by Albert Hofstadter in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

*meaning* of its existence. If enjoyment has a meaning or a sense, it is one that exploits the double meaning of the French *sens* (direction)<sup>10</sup> and reaches both into the depth of the element in which the I is immersed and which it takes to itself in the thickness of its flesh, and into the very interiority of the I that is hollowed out in this enjoyment.

Subjectivity, interiority, thought—all this has a body and a site in Levinas’s thought. If it orients a world around itself and its concerns, establishing an order in which things are and have meaning, it does so already on the basis of its dwelling as a body in a home.

How does such a critique affect Hegel? We have seen already that the sensate being confronted by consciousness in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology* is from the first conceived as a locus of truth. It is presumed to be “the *richest* kind of knowledge” but turns out to have only “the most abstract and poorest *truth*” (*PS* 58/*PG* 63). Such a judgment, however, would not trouble the flesh of enjoyment, which does not aspire to knowledge or truth. It does not bother to know whether or not it has hold of true being, only to live from what it does have. When Hegel mentions the animal complacency that “do[es] not stand idly in front of sensuous things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, [falls] to without ceremony and eat[s] them up” (*PS* 65/*PG* 69), he takes this as a humorous but implicit judgment about truth and being. But is it not just as much an affirmation of the essential

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<sup>10</sup>Levinas often exploits this ambiguity of *sens*. He speaks of the “change of sense [*sens*]” involved in the body’s living from the very world whose meaning [*sens*] intentional thought would constitute (*TI* 129/102; see below, ). And the essay “Meaning and Sense” [“La Signification et le Sens”] points to the ethical “direction” or orientation that cuts through the cultural multiplication and relativization of meanings epidemic in contemporary thought (translated in *CPP*, 75-107).

materiality of life, the agreeableness of the body and the sensuous element in which it is steeped? Sensuous life has other concerns than certainty and truth.

This of course does not mean that Hegel fails to make room for enjoyment at all, but only that enjoyment is not the same thing as the mode of certainty that has already been tried and found wanting in the *Phenomenology's* analysis of sense-certainty. But what about the *desire* that seeks to satisfy itself in *Life* in opening of the analysis of self-consciousness? At first glance there would seem to be a strong affinity here, one that escapes the criticism Levinas levels at Heidegger. If Dasein is never hungry, self-consciousness certainly is. As desire, it feeds on everything that makes up its life. No longer confronted by objects that would have their essential being outside of consciousness, self-consciousness nevertheless preserves their sensuous being negatively, as the source of the satisfaction of its desire.

This brief but notoriously difficult section at the beginning of the "Self-consciousness" chapter of the *Phenomenology* has been interpreted in various ways. The most common misreading, is to see it as a genetic account of self-consciousness, which would mean that this passage marks a whole new beginning or second sailing for the journey of the phenomenology. The temptation to such a reading is understandable, as the similar account given in the *Encyclopedia* is embedded in a more generally genetic project, although even here the genetic account proper comes earlier, and the phenomenological account again examines the suitability of desire as a criterion for

truth.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the very description of a desire that finds fleeting satisfaction in feeding on the fluid universal element but needs another self-consciousness to satisfy its true desires suggests that there is a passage here from animal appetite to human desire.<sup>12</sup> Such an interpretation requires that a lower set of desires or needs would be assuaged in a perpetual round of satisfaction and re-kindling, while a higher or nobler desire would supervene, one that is unsatisfiable by consumption (*das Aufzehren*, PS 106). However, it is because the satisfactions afforded by desire do not satisfy the criteria for truth, which is that the object should be for consciousness what it is in itself, that desire fails as a standpoint for knowing. Desire fails to satisfy because it is not charged only with satisfying desire.

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<sup>11</sup>See Joseph Flay, *The Quest for Certainty*, 299-301, nn1-2, for a summary of approaches, as well as 81-82 for an argument on why the section should be read as a development of the problem of certainty that governs the whole of the work. Hans Georg Gadamer argues strongly for the development of the framework of self-consciousness out of the conclusions of the chapter on “Force and the Understanding,” showing the continuity of the concept of infinity there (which “may be called the simple essence of life, the soul of the world”) and the overarching I and the infinite process of life in “Self-Consciousness”. Cf. *Hegel’s Dialectic*, 58-59. H. S. Harris also argues for this continuity, but I cannot follow his thesis that this “natural evolution of the self as Desire” mirrors the nutrition, growth, and reproduction of individuals in the human community, nor the suggestion that the desire for recognition from another self-consciousness is reflected in the dubious platitude that “Boys want to be like their fathers, girls like their mothers” (*Hegel: Phenomenology and System*, 36-38). However, I find that the best overall commentary on the concept of self-consciousness as desire that has life as its object is Hyppolite’s (*Genesis and Structure*, 143-164). Not only does he account for the way self-consciousness appears as the truth of consciousness and clarify how desire and life qualify as the active, practical but immediate configuration self-consciousness assumes, but he also reads the whole chapter as the deepening realization of how the negativity which consciousness tried to elude constitutes the essential being of self-consciousness.

<sup>12</sup>See Merold Westphal, who emphasizes the animal nature of desire here (*Freedom and Truth*, 123-127). Hegel, however, nowhere restricts the desire he discusses to an animal nature.

We have seen that Hegel makes the transition to the chapter on self-consciousness when he has demonstrated that the supposedly independent object of consciousness is pervaded by the actuality, movement, and especially negativity that are the hallmarks of subjectivity. Here, in the subjective homeland of truth, consciousness taken as self-consciousness seems to have found a “certainty which is identical with its truth” (*PS 104/PG 103*), and it takes the object immediately as a negative and itself as desire. In this immediate conception, self-consciousness apprehends itself as the “movement in which this antithesis is removed” (*PS 105/PG 104*); however, as in the previous shapes of consciousness, these moments will fall apart. Desire cannot wholly bring together the moments that must correspond for there to be a certain warrant of truth because it can only bring them together from one side. Certain that the object is only a negative, the fuel of its satisfaction, self-consciousness will, “on the contrary, learn through experience that the object is independent” (*PS 106/PG 105*). In doing so, it will shift to a position in which the negativity of the object merges with the negativity of self-consciousness and becomes the self-sublating activity of opposed self-consciousnesses. In other words, it finds that the negativity of the object of desire does not exhibit the infinite negativity which characterized self-consciousness, and so it moves further in the direction of securing the absoluteness of this infinite negation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Robert Pippin, in explicating the whole genius of Hegel as the drive towards “the satisfactions of self-consciousness,” stresses the “provisional and soon ‘sublated’ character” of the criteria desire provides, which is “ultimately untenable” (*Hegel’s Idealism*, 148, including n10).



Several passages from Levinas's description of enjoyment could almost pass for commentaries on Hegel's description of the transition from consciousness and its objects to desire and the life that it lives. He says that "*living from...* is not a simple becoming conscious of what fills life. These contents are lived: they feed life. One lives one's life: to live is a sort of transitive verb, and the contents of life are its direct objects" (*TI* 111/83). Furthermore, enjoyment satisfies the *needs* of the separated being. When Levinas maintains that metaphysical desire (which leads to ethics) is different from need, is not determined negatively by the same on the basis of what it lacks, he seems to affirm implicitly that what Hegel calls desire—"the negative essence of the shaped independent moments" (*PS* 109/*PG* 107)—is what he calls need. This impression is strengthened when he writes:

Nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other, recognized, we will see, as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my own strength. (*TI* 111/83)

Such a dynamic seems to imply that enjoyment, in satisfying needs by making the other its own, would also have a negative essence.

However, the proposed difference between metaphysical desire as desire for the absolutely other and need as a relation that stays within the domain of the "same" does not mean that need is to be defined purely negatively for Levinas. The "reason" for this is the body, which incarnates need and gives it time, time for satisfaction and enjoyment in the midst of dependence, time that is not obliterated in the inevitable recurrence of appetite. For Hegel, the repetition of desire marks a failure inherent in the satisfaction of desire because the satisfaction [*Befriedigung*] desire takes in the object is not at the same

time the truth of self-certainty, or *freedom* from the object: “Thus, self-consciousness, in its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it [*ihn aufzuheben*]” (*PS* 109/*PG* 107). In the *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Spirit* he characterizes this failure as “the monotonous alternation *ad infinitum* of appetite and its satisfaction” (*PM* §429.*Zu.*), indicating that the self-consciousness that takes its object to be simply a negative determined by desire itself cannot move beyond the configuration of a bad infinite. This does not mean that the ephemeral satisfaction of desire is illusory, but that it must be overcome in Hegel’s schema because the real satisfaction he is concerned with has to do with the criteria for certain knowledge, which in this section seeks fulfillment as certain self-knowledge.

By contrast, the needs Levinas says are satisfied in enjoyment are not purely negative. He makes this point by contrast with Plato rather than Hegel, but it is not hard to extend the argument, even though Hegel is less concerned than Plato about a possible enslavement to the illusory pleasures that stem from satisfying passing desires. “Need cannot be interpreted as a simple lack” or only as negativity, according to Levinas, for “the human being thrives on his needs; he is happy for his needs” (*TI* 114/87). The body and its labors in which the human being has time and enjoys her dependence on the world measures the dimensions of enjoyment that, if they appear in the Hegelian analysis of desire, are immediately sublated as negative in the dialectic of certainty and truth. But in Levinas’s philosophy, need exhibits a kind of positivity in the body of enjoyment.

To be cold, hungry, thirsty, to seek shelter—all these dependencies with regard to the world, having become needs, save the instinctive being from anonymous menaces and constitute a being independent of the world, a veritable *subject* capable of ensuring the satisfaction of its needs, which are recognized as material, that is, as admitting of satisfaction. Needs are in my power; they constitute me as

the same and not as dependent on the other. My body is not only the way for the subject to be reduced to slavery, to depend on what is not itself, but is also the way of possessing and of working, of having time, of overcoming the very alterity of what I have to live from. (*TI* 116-117/89)

Despite the more abstractly negative schema given above (), in which nourishment appropriates the energy of what is other, enjoyment is lived concretely as the subjective wonder of sensuous interiority, having time and space in which to indulge itself.

I want to stress again that this dimension is not denied by Hegel. There seems to be a place for it precisely in the analysis of desire and satisfaction that founds his account of self-consciousness as enjoyment founds Levinas's account of interiority. Yet Hegel refuses to find in desire and its satisfaction, in the sensual density that Levinas characterizes as enjoyment, a dimension that has real philosophical significance. At least it does not have philosophical significance for subjectivity as negativity, which is wholly taken up with its development towards self-knowledge. The satisfaction of desire figures in this development only negatively, as a step on the road towards absolute knowing. Hyppolite emphasizes that "the end point of desire is not, as one might think superficially, the sensuous object—that is only a means—but the unity of the I with itself. Self-consciousness is desire, but what it desires, although it does not yet know this explicitly, is itself: it desires its own desire."<sup>14</sup> But even if this evolution is necessary to the knowing subject in quest of certainty, need it render insipid the object of desire and the joy taken in it? Levinas says that there is a self-sufficiency and finality in enjoyment

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<sup>14</sup>*Genesis and Structure*, 160.

“precisely because life dispenses with the intellectual search for the unconditioned” (*TI* 139/112). In Levinas’s thought, the negativity of need opens out into the concrete body of happiness luxuriating in the element that not only meets its needs, but exalts them as enjoyment.

This concrete dimension of lived existence—*Erlebnis* as opposed to *Erfahrung*—is one that has been visited again and again in the history of philosophy. Although it is often taken up in terms of some other philosophical schema—as the land of illusion, as the empirical ground sustaining logical inference, as the manifold of sensation ordered by reason—it has also been glimpsed in privileged moments in its own right. The flesh of perception in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* and the chiasm of the flesh in his unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible* can perhaps be understood as explorations of this dimension that Hegel hurried past on his way to absolute knowing. Henri Bergson’s notion of *élan vital* and Nietzsche’s affirmation of life over truth are again moments in which the philosophical significance of concrete sensibility have been glimpsed.<sup>15</sup> But the deeper exploration of such a dimension does not in itself call into question the necessity of moving on toward a standpoint that provides a stronger warrant for knowledge claims than does the immediacy of concrete life. It especially does not make clear an ethical deficiency in the dialectic that invests its energies in the claims of

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<sup>15</sup>I could also mention Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, and Jaspers, all of whom see in the notion of *Existenz* a concrete dimension that eludes a strictly conceptual ontology, and all of whom remain closer to Hegel in their resistance than they would perhaps like to believe. However, it seems to me that none of these thinkers locates this dimension primarily within the flesh of sensibility. Bibliographic references for some of the pertinent works of all these thinkers are given in the Bibliography.

thought. If anything, it suggests that the ethical critique conducted in an exchange of ideas is essential to calling human beings beyond the animal complacency of enjoyment.

In fact there is a similar movement beyond enjoyment towards intersubjectivity for both Levinas and Hegel. Even though living from... affords a depth of satisfaction that Hegel seems to elide, this seemingly pure grace of enjoyment hides its origin in the prior gift of the other. It does this because the other appears at first discreetly, effacing its alterity in the sheltering solicitude of the home. Yet, as in Hegel, the full implications of the debt of self-consciousness are only recognized in the face to face encounter with the other that demands an ethical response. To be sure, there are differences here as well. The other first occasions in Hegel a struggle for recognition that only becomes convicted of its ethical responsibility in the face of the other much further down the road of its developing self-awareness. And for Levinas, enjoyment is not frustrated or unsatisfied, but interrupted, which means precisely that it "already" inhabits a dimension where such an interruption signifies concretely, in the flesh: "To give, to-be-for-another, despite oneself, but in interrupting the for-oneself, is to take the bread out of one's own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one's own fasting" (*OB 56/AE 72*). But neither can enjoyment by-pass consciousness and the plane of "commonplaces" necessary for intersubjective dialogue on the way to ethical responsibility. As we shall see, it is the indissoluble knot of these three dimensions that is absolute, and not any one in isolation.

#### b. Enjoyment and Consciousness

Fundamental to Levinas's articulation of enjoyment as a mode of existence distinct from or irreducible to the consciousness of an object is his comparison of the

intentionality of representation to that of enjoyment or living from.... This distinction is crucial to his thesis that the structures of thought only dissimulate the experience from which, of which they live; for here he attempts to sketch the relation between these two modes of subjectivity and especially the limits of that relation. If there is an imperfect translation between enjoyment of... and consciousness of..., this dissimulation may signal where there may also be a rupture in the terrain of Hegel's phenomenological transitions.

Levinas observes that "What we live from and enjoy is not the same as that life itself" (*TI* 122/94), and then asks if this relation is not analogous to the relation between consciousness and its objects as explicated by Husserl under the title of *intentionality*. The Husserlian thesis of "the primacy of the objectifying act" affirms that "the object of consciousness, while distinct from consciousness, is as it were a product of consciousness, being a 'meaning' endowed by consciousness, the result of *Sinngebung*" (*TI* 123/95-6). In the clear and distinct light of representation, "the exterior being presents itself as the work of the thought that receives it" so that its "resistance as an exterior being vanishes" (*TI* 123-124/96). There is thus in the constituting intentionality of consciousness a spatial and temporal priority, a priority that constitutes the very dimensions of the space and time in which objects are given. What is given as exterior is nevertheless understood to be the product of the interiority of consciousness, is exterior because of this interiority. In this movement the I that thinks is "pure spontaneity," and representation "is a pure present" (*TI* 125/98). In its constituting intentionality, consciousness manifests itself as *a priori* to the objects it represents, the thoughts it thinks.

Although this account strikes the reader immediately as a lucid interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology, Levinas also presents it as a structure valid for consciousness in general, for thought as a whole. Husserl is the exemplar, and he is praised because his rigorousness and fidelity to the springs of thought manifest paradoxes that might otherwise lie hidden. Levinas writes that “intelligibility and representation are equivalent notions” and that “intelligibility, the very occurrence of representation, is the possibility for the other to be determined by the same without determining the same,” entailing “the disappearance, within the same, of the I opposed to the non-I” (*TI* 124/97).

We must ask, therefore, how well such a definition encompasses the shapes of consciousness that Hegel traces in the *Phenomenology*. I will take the components of Levinas’s definition in reverse order. The assertion that intelligibility or representation entails “the disappearance, within the same, of the I opposed to the non-I” might also be used to describe the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness that Hegel presents in the *Phenomenology*. There, as we saw, “In each of the previous modes of certainty, what is true for consciousness is something other than itself” (*PS* 104/*PG* 103). When we take up the standpoint of self-consciousness, this opposition of the I to the non-I “disappears within the I,” or, “the concept of this truth vanishes in the experience of it” (*PS* 104/*PG* 103). Thus far at least, Hegelian self-consciousness, which is not only the truth of consciousness, but the “native realm of truth” mirrors the structure Levinas attributes to objectifying consciousness in general.

The first part of Levinas’s general description of representation—the determination of the other by the same without the same being determined by the other—is a bit more problematic. One’s first suspicion is that this is ultimately not true of Hegelian

spirit, which is so thoroughly subjected to determination that the whole of its experience is described as “the Calvary [*Schädelstätte*] of Absolute Spirit” (*PS* 493/*PG* 434).<sup>16</sup> However, even this determination is “inwardized” [*Erinnert*] or taken up into the subjective truth of Absolute Spirit. If consciousness of spirit is everywhere being determined in the *Phenomenology*, it also everywhere then sublates this determination as something external or other, and makes it its own. It is this very dynamic—characteristic of Husserl’s transcendental subjectivity as well—that Levinas is referring to when he qualifies his definition:

To be sure, representation is the seat of truth: the movement proper to truth consists in the thinker being determined by the object presented to him. But it determines him without touching him, without weighing on him—such that the thinker who submits to what is thought does so ‘gracefully,’ as though the object, even in the surprises it has in store for cognition, had been anticipated by the subject.

However, even if the submission of Hegel’s subject to what it thinks is more marked by dialectical opposition than grace, it nevertheless accomplishes this essential inversion by which it can say to every determination coming from outside, “Already with thee!”

Levinas confirms this inclusion of Hegelian spirit in the schematic of constituting intentionality he has laid out when he describes the first movement of the same in representational consciousness as “negative: it consists in finding and exhausting in itself the meaning of an exteriority” (*TI* 125/98). In contrast to enjoyment and sensibility, the

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<sup>16</sup>Mladen Dolar connects this phrase with the seemingly dead-end analysis of phrenology in the chapter on Reason, where we find the determination that “*the being of Spirit is a bone*” (*PS* 208/*PG* 190). His point is to find in such radical finitude the condition of the infinite judgment essential to absolute spirit. See “The Phrenology of Spirit,” in *Supposing the Subject*, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: Verso, 1994), 71-72.



subjective structure of consciousness and thought is marked, for Levinas as well as for Hegel, by negativity. Its ability to constitute by a prior intentionality that which would condition it signifies also its actuality, and its conversion of exteriority to interiority signifies its movement—*hic et ubique*—wherever it goes, it is always already there. What Levinas describes as consciousness or representation exhibits all the vital characteristics of the Hegelian subject or spirit. The insight wrung from tracing the experience of consciousness through the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*—that the actuality, movement and negativity of the subject are everywhere at work in the supposed independence of external objectivities—can be expressed in the formula, “The truth of consciousness is self-consciousness.” This is exactly what Levinas’s analysis of constituting intentionality shows. In its consciousness of an object, the I is determined solely by that which it itself determines: consciousness is self-consciousness.

Certainly Levinas does not let this seeming omnipotence of consciousness be the final word on the subject. Nevertheless, there is something astounding and privileged about the spontaneity of representation, spontaneous despite its being suspended on enjoyment, free despite its dependence on what it lives from. This spontaneity inheres in its ability to remain “the same” in the face of opposition by myriad objects which it nevertheless outflanks, its ability to determine the other without being determined by it, in what Hegel calls the magical power to achieve “pure self-recognition in absolute otherness” (*PS* 14/*PG* 22). This spontaneity means that the representation explicated by Levinas is not restricted to the picture-thinking [*Vorstellen*] superseded by absolute knowing in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. It is, rather, the pure power of presence as well as making-present or re-presentation [*Vergegenwärtigung*] that Husserl shows

consciousness exhibits in forging the structure of internal time,<sup>17</sup> a power that is at work already in Platonic *anamnesis* and finds one of its strongest expressions in the “recollection” [*Erinnerung*] by which spirit transforms its history or kenosis into thought.<sup>18</sup>

By contrast, the “intentionality”<sup>19</sup> Levinas ascribes to enjoyment has no such constitutive spontaneity: “It consists in holding on to the exteriority which the transcendental method involved in representation suspends” (*TI* 127/100). The way that I live from the world about which I also think is the concreteness of the body. I do not live in my body or by means of it, as if it were some kind of shell or appendage; rather, I dwell bodily on the earth, already rooted in what thought would constitute and take charge of. The very privilege of representation, including undertaking a quest for certainty, is lived as one of the possibilities afforded me by my dwelling concretely in the world. It is living from..., enjoyment, and not only death that is not to be outstripped,

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<sup>17</sup>See Edmund Husserl’s *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (trans. John Barnett Brough [Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991]). Levinas offers a brief explication and critique of this work in *Otherwise than Being*, 32-33.

<sup>18</sup>Compare Jacques Derrida’s study of Husserl, *Speech and Phenomena* (trans. David B. Allison [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973]) which argues that Husserl’s phenomenology marks the culmination of a tradition of the “metaphysics of presence” that dominates the entire Western philosophical tradition. There is here a similar contention that disparate thinkers nevertheless can be seen as addressing the same problematic: how to ensure the full presence of being to thought, that is, how to warrant truth.

<sup>19</sup>Although Levinas sometimes writes simply of “the intentionality of enjoyment,” he also marks it with quotation marks, making it clear that this relation lacks what is essential to representational intentionality, is “*une intentionnalité «tout autre»*” (*TI* 126/98)

even though we may, as Levinas says, choose to deny ourselves the pleasures of enjoyment, even die rather than live without them (*TI* 111/83).

The articulation of an intentionality that eludes consciousness and rational thought in a philosophical account requires all the resources of language, and the images Levinas uses to describe the intentionality of living from... are among the most poetic in the whole of *Totality and Infinity*. “The body naked and indigent,” he writes, “identifies the *center* of the world it perceives, but *conditioned* by its own representation of the world, it is thereby as it were torn up from the center from which it proceeded, as water gushing forth from rock washes away that rock” (*TI* 127/100). On the next page he maintains that the essence of the body is

to give me as it were a vision already and henceforth borne by the very image that I see. To posit oneself corporeally is to touch an earth, but to do so in such a way that the touching finds itself already conditioned by the position, the foot settles into a real which this very action outlines or constitutes—as though a painter would notice that he is descending from the picture he is painting. (*TI* 128/101)

These images suggest the way in which enjoyment or living from... inverts the movement of constituting intentionality that reigns in representation and thought. The very freedom of thought is conditioned but not compromised by living from..., dwelling on the earth.

In this way, if there is a spatial and temporal priority asserted in consciousness whereby exteriority is produced already within the same and the pure present of representation precedes what is given to it, this movement is reversed in enjoyment. Here the priority of constituting intentionality is found to be suspended on and nourished by a reality that it does not constitute. In enjoyment Levinas discovers a sense or direction [*sens*] that is not given by consciousness, a discovery that will be repeated in the “to the

other” of ethical responsibility. Speaking of the paradox that intentional thought

“constitutes” the very world in which it is immersed and from which it lives, he writes:

The body is a permanent contestation of the prerogative attributed to consciousness of ‘giving meaning’ [*prêter le sens*] to each thing; it lives as this contestation. ... The intentionality aiming at the exterior changes direction [*change de sens*] in the course of its very aim [*visée*] by becoming interior to the exteriority it constitutes, somehow comes from the point to which it goes, recognizing itself past in its future, lives from what it thinks (*TI* 129/102).<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between interior and exterior in enjoyment is not one that of constitution, even though enjoyment or living from... can be said to be the condition of consciousness. Nor is the relation between enjoyment and representation one of past and present, unless one goes all the way to the “absolute past” that “had not traversed the *present* of representation” (*TI* 130/103). The past that representation and memory recalls is already of the order of consciousness, already intentionally constituted in retention: it is a past present, a past that was present. Enjoyment pulsates in the absolute past, the elemental density in which the thinking being always already finds itself immersed.

Enjoyment is not the sensate reciprocal of representation. It does not cause, determine, or constitute consciousness, but nourishes it. Living from... is “alimentation” (*TI* 128/101). Thus it is wrong to see in sensibility only inchoate consciousness or even the raw material of reason. Sensibility has a “sense” all its own that is precisely enjoyment. This is a point on which Levinas insists repeatedly and one which clearly differentiates the place sensibility occupies in his thought from the place it occupies in

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<sup>20</sup>The English translation often does not signal this double meaning, and so the reader must be alert to recognize it in lines such as “The play [of constitution] changes its sense. The body indigent and naked is this very changing of sense” (*TI* 129-130/102-3).

Hegel's. Hegel writes of sensibility at the beginning of the *Philosophy of Mind* that "Sensibility (feeling) [*Empfindung (Gefühl)*] is the form of the dull stirring, the inarticulate breathing, of the spirit through its unconscious and unintelligent individuality." He goes on to claim that "*Everything is in sensation* (feeling): if you will, everything that emerges in conscious intelligence and in reason has its source and origin in sensation" (*PM* §400). In fact, although he admits that a fully human experience of such matters as faith and religion requires heart as well as head, sensibility by itself, apart from reason and consciousness, does not distinguish humans from animals, and is "inadequate to [its peculiarly human] content" (*PM* §400, *Zu.*) The remaining discussion of sensibility is primarily a description of this content—both external and internal, both what we have in common with animals and what is peculiarly human—in its still immediate form. Sensibility at this stage in Hegel's system is precisely inchoate consciousness; that is, it has not yet separated out the I from its object, which it will do first in sense-certainty.<sup>21</sup>

It may be this very description that Levinas has in mind when he begins his section entitled "Sensibility" by saying that stipulation of the element as quality without substance does not mean that sensibility is "mutilated or still stammering 'thought' correlative of such phenomena" (*TI* 135/108). Nor is sensibility opposed to thought: it is of a different order than thought: "One does not know, one lives sensible qualities: the

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<sup>21</sup>This distinction also makes it difficult to maintain that self-consciousness in the form of desire is primarily animal appetite. As self-consciousness, it at least distinguishes itself as desire from the objects of its desire, which make up its life. It is conscious of living its life, which Hegel would deny to the form of sensate life of which animals partake.

green of these leaves, the red of this sunset” (*TI* 135/108). True, one can know or think “red” and “green,” even the red that sunsets have in general and the green of generic leaves, but Levinas is talking about a *this* sunset, which in enjoyment is perhaps not even yet a particular, belonging to a class called “sunsets.” And if one suspects that sunsets and leaves are mere poetic fancy, who has yet been able to give an adequate answer to the doctor’s inevitable query, “What kind of pain is it?”

### c. Enjoyment and Experience

I have suggested that Hegel presents experience as the continuous recuperation of loss, the leveling of a ruptured terrain, because he considers experience as *Erfahrung*, the knowledge or truth of where one has been. Levinas, on the other hand, I claimed, asserts that the structures of thought can only dissimulate the experience from which they live because he takes experience not solely as *Erfahrung*, but also and primordially as *Erlebnis*, the living encounter with the radically other. Why then does Levinas write that “sensibility is of the order of enjoyment and not of the order of experience” (*TI* 137/110)?

The answer to this is that Levinas is here wary that “experience” will be taken in the sense of *Erfahrung*, something that belongs to consciousness and that can thus be recollected and comprehended after the fact. He suspects that Husserl, from whom I have borrowed the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, eventually reduces *Erlebnis* to a horizon of consciousness and so shapes it to the order of noematic intentionality, a point

of origin nevertheless already aimed at by thought.<sup>22</sup> The meaning of *Erlebnis* would be captured in what consciousness makes of it, in consciousness's experience of experience, or *Erfahrung*.

This suspicion of the term "experience" (French does not distinguish between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* any more easily than English) remains constant throughout Levinas's œuvre. I have already cited the Preface to *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, where Levinas writes that the "proximity" of the other person "does not concern a new 'experience' opposed to the experience of objective presence," but rather puts experience itself into question "as the source of meaning [*sens*]." <sup>23</sup> Although his concern here is with the proximity of the other person rather than the immersion of enjoyment, the misgivings about the term *experience* are consistent. It too easily remains in the realm of the same, as what is intended, constituted, that is, endowed with meaning by the same. However, Levinas always rejects the label "experience" in the sense that I have ascribed to *Erfahrung*, as something that has entered into the order of thought and takes its *sens*,

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<sup>22</sup>See *Otherwise than Being*, Chapter II, "Intentionality and Sensing," section 3a. "Sensuous Lived Experience" (31-34). Here Levinas cites Husserl as claiming that although there is "an open chasm of meaning" between the lived and the sensed, sensibility itself reaches all the way back as *sensing* into *Erlebnis*, the "living present" or point of absolute origin. However, for Husserl intentionality remains in force even here, and the primal impression does not lead back to the "hither side" of consciousness, but through retention and protention, to the fully constituted order of conscious life and thought.

<sup>23</sup>*HdAH*, 14. See above, . Levinas also uses *time* intriguingly in this preface, calling his thoughts an "untimely meditation" [*considération inactuelle*]. He disputes specifically the priority of *actuality* (as *being-in-act*), and thus opposes as the non-actual not the non-present but the non-presentable, "the *untimeliness* [*intempestif*] that interrupts the synthesis of presents that constitutes memorable time" (*HdAH*, 11). This interrupts the actuality of the Hegelian subject with a specifically non-actual responsibility.

its meaning and direction, from thought. If enjoyment is life and not simply consciousness of life's contents or the meanings ascribed to them, we may still call this an *Erlebnis* separated from the structures of a thought that turns back and tries to comprehend both what it lives from and the rift that divides it from this element.

To say that Hegel misses the depth of enjoyment and apprehends in desire and its satisfactions only the incomplete self-certainty of self-consciousness is not to claim that he wanders from the concrete world of life into a land of illusion. Enjoyment has a density, a finality, an "intentionality" or sense of its own, but this does not mean that it repudiates the direction and dimensions in which consciousness and self-consciousness move. Rather, it *nourishes* them. If enjoyment and sensibility signify the body of thought, the body *in which* thought is immersed even as it thinks, they also signify in another sense—the body *that* thought thinks as its concrete condition, the sensibility that nourishes its activity of thinking and does not merely supply it with data. It plays this role specifically in Levinas's *thought*, which despite the liabilities with which it burdens consciousness remains a product of consciousness, a work spelled out with all the precaution that memory and representation make possible. This ambiguity will repeat itself in the relationship between the totality of consciousness and the infinity of ethical responsibility which is nevertheless presented in the form of a book, a product of thought. There the ambiguity is resolved—if it is resolved! if it is not maintained or exacerbated as the essence of philosophical discourse!—by recognizing that the propositions of discourse are precisely pro-positions, meanings addressed to the other:

And if I set forth, as in a final and absolute vision, the separation and transcendence which are the themes of this book, these relations, which I claim form the fabric of being itself, first come together in my discourse presently



addressed to my interlocutors: inevitably across my idea of the Infinite the other faces me—hostile, friend, my master, my student. (*TI* 81/53)

Here, however, this ambiguity takes another shape, not yet so clearly dialogical, an ambiguity that manifests itself in the “concrete” life of the human, which comprises enjoyment and thought.

Despite insisting on the concreteness and reality of enjoyment, Levinas tells us that enjoyment as such “does not render the concrete human being” (*TI* 139/112).<sup>24</sup> Even though it opens up and embodies the dimensions of separation and interiority, enjoyment does not designate a world apart, a primitive and pristine existence to which the human, a noble savage untrammelled by thought, might return. Levinas acknowledges that, “In reality, the human already has the idea of infinity, that is, lives in society and represents things to himself, herself” (*TI* 139/112). One could say that enjoyment and thought are simultaneous, if this did not already invoke the time-scheme in which representation reigns. Rather, we can say that they converge in the concrete person without coinciding.

Enjoyment and consciousness are two distinct and independently valid moments, independent despite being intertwined in the concrete life of humankind. Neither is reducible to the other, which is what the inversion of sense that marks their different intentionalities signifies. To stand in the world [*se tenir*] is different from thinking or

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<sup>24</sup>I will sometimes emend Levinas’s texts to be gender inclusive without acknowledgment, here substituting “human being” for “man” [*homme*]. This is not always possible, for example, in the designation of the discreet presence of the Other in the home as “feminine.” In making these changes, I am avoiding or ignoring the suggestion of Luce Irigaray that there may be an essential exclusion in the sexual differentiations of Levinas’s language, without thereby passing judgment on her critique. See her “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love,” trans. Margaret Whitford, in *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 109-118.

intending the world (*TI* 137-138/111), or standing in the world and thinking it have different senses, mutually inconvertible or non-fungible, despite one's accomplishing them "at once." The concrete human exists as this ambiguity, this chiasmus that is perhaps expressed in the double genitive of saying the human being is the body *of* thought.

### 3. Towards Consciousness: Dwelling in the Home, Possession and Labor

If the body which nourishes thought but recedes from the full presence of representation is ambiguous, this ambiguity extends into the dwelling, possession, and labor. These phenomena occupy a peculiar place in between immersion in the element and the essential distantiation of consciousness. They both secure and suspend enjoyment, hollowing out an interval that is also indispensable to the freedom of representation. However, in between enjoyment and thinking, they cannot function simply as a mediation between these two, which would suggest the kind of dialectical system that Levinas wants to avoid.

The home or dwelling is clearly "between" the formless depth of the element and the ordered sphere of public discourse and activity. One moves from "bathing in the element" to "recollection in a dwelling" and from here proceeds to order the world, calculate its distances, enter eventually into the commerce of society. The home thus is a privileged place, the primordial place. It is only with the inhabitation of the dwelling that the *apeiron* of the element surrenders its absolute indeterminability: "[The human] gets a foothold in the elemental by a side already appropriated, a field cultivated by me, the sea in which I fish and moor my boats, the forest in which I cut wood.... One plunges into

the elemental from the domicile, the primary appropriation” (*TI* 131/105). In this way the home provides a refuge from the uncertain future of the *there is* that lurks in the depths of the elemental, the “always coming on” not only of night but of day and of anonymous being. But if the home is a refuge it is not an asylum where one substitutes the bland but predictable plasticity of commodities for the sensual density of the element. The home is a harbor still turned towards the elemental, still attuned to enjoyment.

The home makes possible possession and labor. I began this chapter with the assertion that possession and labor, which are precisely the way the I maintains itself in its site (not yet explicated as a dwelling), belong to the realm of consciousness and not enjoyment insofar as they suspend the alterity of things and either make them mine or shape them according to my purposes. However, possession and labor exhibit an essential ambiguity that leaves them with one foot, as it were, still in enjoyment. Levinas does not yet want to grant to them the full status of thought: they are concrete, and reach back into the elemental. Labor and possession postpone enjoyment, but they seem still to be oriented primarily by it. The hand grasps: “it gathers the fruit but holds it far from the lips, keeps it, puts it in reserve, possesses it in a home” (*TI* 161/135).

But because the hand in labor and possession is a hand that grasps and not one that touches, “it is no longer a sense-organ, pure enjoyment, pure sensibility, but is mastery, domination, disposition—which do not belong to the order of sensibility” (*TI* 161/135). Labor and possession are described by Levinas as ontological, although I suspect that his increasing distrust of the language of being would make him want to revise statements such as “labor in its possessive grasp suspends the independence of the element: its being” and “Possession neutralizes this being: as property the thing is an

existent that has lost its being” (TI 158/132). In fact, the hand that grasps seems rather to articulate being than neutralize it. It shapes things in order to possess them, and suspends not their being but the “pure quality of the element [that] does not cling to a substance that would support it” (TI 132/105). Possession and labor takes this pure quality and fixes it in things, in entities and objects whose meaning it determines or works on. We might borrow terms from Heidegger to say that hand grasps beings out of Being, *Seiendes* out of *Sein*.<sup>25</sup> The ontological labor of the hand, grasping things out of the element, prefigures the grasp of the concept, the self-possession of the I in thought. It does not simply lay hold of the substance of independent being, but in its very grasping is “the informing of the formless... emergence of the graspable, the *existent*, *support* of qualities”: this signifies precisely “the latent birth of the concept in the primordial hold effected by labor” (TI 161/135). However, labor and possession taken by themselves cannot fully account for the birth of the concept as consciousness. This birth will require, as Levinas says, “a new energy, oriented upstream” (TI 169/144), and it is the other person who supplies this energy.

This extraordinary possibility of consciousness, representation and thought also dawns in the home and would be unthinkable without it. But this event does not arise spontaneously, as if a being defined by the possibility of rational thought were implanted in agar and sheltered from the elements carefully enough for thinking to germinate.

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<sup>25</sup>This is not as strange as it may sound. When Levinas describes the insecurity of the elemental future as the *there is* [*il-y-a*] that troubles enjoyment, he concludes, “But it always has the recourse of labor and possession” (TI 142/116). These neutralize *Being* precisely by producing *beings*.

Rather the recollection made possible by the dwelling occurs in an already human space, a space humanized by the intimacy and welcome, and also the discretion, of the other whom Levinas calls “the Feminine,” “the Woman” (*TI* 154-156/127-129). Without enumerating the diverse reactions such a designation may elicit from contemporary readers, particularly women readers, I do not think it requires us to accept gentleness and discretion (which here means almost literally self-effacement, an “other whose presence is discreetly an absence”) as essentially feminine traits. Nor does it designate the other whose presence is emphatically not an absence but rather a calling into question and an interruption of the same as essentially masculine.<sup>26</sup> What it does claim is that the home is made a home and a dwelling by the intimacy of an Other who welcomes me without affronting me, whose presence is gentleness rather than a challenge, and whose first gesture is solicitude, not interruption. The familiar and gentle presence of the Other in the home produces in its intimacy the space—which is also a space of time, a delay—in which I may not only recollect myself and enjoy the solitude of contemplation, but into

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<sup>26</sup>I have already cited Luce Irigaray’s essay addressing this question (see note above). Levinas does distinguish between “femininity” and the factual presence or absence of a woman in the home (*TI* 158/131). See also the essay by Catherine Chalié, “Ethics and the Feminine” that follows Irigaray’s in *Re-reading Levinas*, 119-129. I do not see, however, that designating femininity here as “ontological” rather than “ontic” helps resolve the issue. The question seems to me to be rather whether intimacy and femininity have an essential relation or a symbolic and therefore cultural affinity, one that resonates but does not define. The same issue can of course be raised apropos Hegel’s discussion of ethical substance and the conflict between the family and the *polis*, where the sister (Antigone) represents the household gods or Penates while the brothers (Eteocles and Polyneices) pass over into the world of the city (*PS* 267-289/*PG* 241-260). This is, in part, the topic of the final essay in the “Levinas and the Feminine” section of *Re-reading Levinas*, by Tina Chanter, “Antigone’s Dilemma,” 130-146.

which I may welcome the Other who faces me as destitute: stranger, widow, orphan—homeless and alone.

#### 4. Work and Family as Dialectical Moments of Spirit

Again we can find a natural parallel to the topics Levinas discusses in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Here it perhaps seems more immediately clear that work and the family do not play the same role in Hegel's scheme as they do for Levinas, for the complete dialectics of both consciousness and self-consciousness have been run through before the family becomes philosophically significant, and work, although it does come on the heels of the immediate satisfactions of self-consciousness as desire, springs more from the challenge of the confrontational other than it operates out of the home as a shelter from the anonymous menace of the elements. Yet these apparent differences should not make us dismiss too hastily the question of whether these phenomena might not illuminate the same terrain of human experience, traversed or inhabited, however, by quite different subjects.

Work in the *Phenomenology* is the activity by which the bondsman relates to the lord through the mediation of the thing. Moreover, work, although negative because it does not leave the thing alone but *works* on it, nevertheless maintains and even requires the independence of the thing: "*only works on it*" (PS 116/PG 113). The pure negativity of desire remains the prerogative but also the doom of the lord, while the mediate negativity of work shapes the independent and durable thing. The result of this process for the bondsman's consciousness is a concrete sense of independence.

This *negative* middle term or formative activity is at the same time the *individuality* or pure being-for-self of consciousness, which now, in work, steps outside of itself into the element that abides. Through this, the working consciousness arrives at the intuition [*Anschauung*] of independent being *as its own self*. (PS 118/PG 115)<sup>27</sup>

The pure being-for-self here externalized is the correlate of the bondsman's fear not only of the lord and master but of death, the absolute lord. Without this internal negation, the negative independent thing would have remained something external to self-consciousness, for it would know no absolute negativity within itself that it could recognize in the thing worked on. But with this insight, it becomes conscious of itself as free and independent precisely as the pure being for self of self-consciousness, or as thought. It has a "mind of its own" [*eigner Sinn*] (PS 119/PG 115) and the transition is made to Stoicism.

When we compare this to the role of work in Levinas, we notice straightaway that both he and Hegel claim that work in some way effects the transition from the immediate satisfaction of desires and needs to the independence of thought. Work is ambiguous for both thinkers. It is born of either the disquiet induced by the uncertain future, "the anonymous rustling of the *there is*" (TI 160/133), or the absolute fear and dread of death, but it issues in the security of the home, the equanimity of the Stoa. For Levinas labor is

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<sup>27</sup>This is my own translation, as Miller's is a bit too loose. Miller: "This *negative* middle term or the formative *activity* is at the same time the individuality or pure being-for-self of consciousness which now, in work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence. It is in this way, therefore, that consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its *own* independence" (PS 118). Hegel: "*Diese negative Mitte oder das formierende Tun ist zugleich die Einzelheit oder das reine Fürsichsein des Bewußtseins, welches nun in der Arbeit außer es in das Element des Bleibens tritt; das arbeitende Bewußtsein kommt also hierdurch zur Anschauung des selbständigen Seins, als seiner selbst*" (PS 115).

“enjoyment interrupted”; for Hegel it is “desire held in check, fleetingness staved off” (PS 118/PG 115). And as Levinas argues that the grasp of the hand in labor is only the latent birth of the concept without the confrontation with the Other, Hegel says that work without absolute fear engenders willfulness instead of an independent mind—*Eigensinn* instead of *eigne Sinn* (PS 119/PG 115)—and remains mere “skill” with some things instead of becoming “a universal formative activity, an absolute concept” (PS 119/PG 116). It is not until we enter the new shape of Stoicism that we arrive at the freedom of thought that involves only concepts.

These parallels do not mean that Levinas and Hegel achieve exactly the same thing with their analyses of the relations between desire, work and thought, or that Hegel has anticipated and preempted Levinas’s critique of the priority of thought and knowing. Sensibility and enjoyment designate for Levinas an aspect of concrete life that is interrupted, not *aufgehoben* by labor and possession. Labor interrupts but extends enjoyment, and we glimpse an enjoyment even of work that Hegel either ignores or discounts. The heft of the hammer, the arc of the scythe, the fatigue of muscles and mind all remain within enjoyment at the same time they accomplish work. But for Hegel, it is desire as the *truth* of the independent object of consciousness, work realizing the *truth* of desire’s relation to life, free thought achieving the *truth* of the worker’s independent being-for-self that drives spirit on to the standpoint of absolute knowing as one that comprehends all previous standpoints. If Levinas maintains that lived experience is only dissimulated by the structures of thought, this is because in enjoyment and labor one is immersed in a different order than the order of certainty and knowledge, an order that is not the dialectical counterpart of the order of thought but that nourishes thought. By



enjoyment and labor one dwells in the world and so gives thought the time and the place it needs to exercise its freedom.

When Levinas introduces the notion of “Habitation” and “The Dwelling,” he criticizes the notion of a subjectivity that would seem to come at the reality of the world from a utopia, “from an intersideral space where it would already be in possession of itself and from which at each moment it would have to recommence a perilous landing” (*TI* 152/125). He does not deny that thought or recollection needs a little distance from the world that presses upon it so immediately. But his subject dwells in the concrete interiority of a home, an interiority hollowed out by the gentleness of the intimate and welcoming Other, and not “in an indifferent region, in a void, in one of those interstices of being in which the Epicurean gods reside (*TI* 154/128). And the dwelling is not simply an incubator necessary to develop a subject capable of thought. All three possibilities of the human subject that Levinas examines converge in the home: it is the domicile from which one plunges into the element of enjoyment, the site where one exercises the “I can” of consciousness, the home into which one welcomes the destitute, the stranger.

Although Levinas does not name Hegel specifically here, one must ask where this consciousness that senses, perceives, understands, desires, recognizes, works, thinks, and reasons actually comes from or actually operates. It is not specifically located for us, or its location does not make any difference in its experience of what truth might mean, until Hegel introduces spirit proper as the correlative “ethical substances” of the community and the family. There are grounds for this development, for the *Phenomenology* is not the *genetic* account of any particular consciousness, but the *education* of the modern

consciousness that begins, Hegel recognizes, with far too abstract an idea of what knowing means. Gradually it learns that truth is possible only if it comprehends itself as within the ethical substance of a real human community, which involves both the consciously mediated substantiality of the nation [*Volk*], and the natural and immediate substantiality of the family. The consciousness that has been shaped or educated to this standpoint is Spirit, and “Spirit is the *actuality* of [ethical] substance” (*PS 263/PG 238*).<sup>28</sup>

Thus the first two concrete moments of ethical substance—nation and family—emerge in answer, as it were, to the criticism of abstraction that Levinas levels at idealism generally. If the dialectics of consciousness, self-consciousness and reason seem to unfold in an intersideral space, “the interstices of being,” Spirit does not; it emerges from the home (□□□□□) and moves to the city (□□□□□). The attempt to grasp the certainty of knowing as Reason led through self-actualization to activity concerned with the “issue itself” [*die Sache selbst*], whose essence involves not only particular individuals acting singly, but all individuals or universality (*PS 252/PG 227-228*). The “issue itself” thus evolves into “ethical substance.”

It is substance permeated by individuality, subject in which there is individuality just as much as itself or qua *this particular* individual, as qua *all* individuals; and it is the universal which has *being* only as this action of all and each, and an actuality insofar as *this particular* consciousness knows it to be its own individual actuality and the actuality of all. (*PS 252/PG 228*).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Hegel actually writes more directly, “But Spirit is the ethical *actuality*” [“*der Geist aber ist die sittliche Wirklichkeit*” (*PG 238*)].

<sup>29</sup>Translation and emphasis slightly emended following the German text, especially rendering *Wirklichkeit* as “Actuality,” which I will do throughout.

This leads naturally to the discussion of reason as both “giver of laws” and “tester of laws,” but it is exactly the disembodied formalism of this schema that is sublated in the transition to Spirit, which is “self-consciousness [as] the actuality and existence of the [ethical] substance, its *self* and its *will*” (PS 262/PG 237). Kant’s Practical Reason retains for Hegel an abstract or formal universality, lacking the concrete universality that spirit attains in ethical life.

This development shows that Hegel is fully aware that consciousness as well as self-consciousness exists in reality only within a concrete human substance or community. It also shows that the subjectivity that had emerged as the implicit truth of Consciousness still drives the dialectic. This subjectivity had first to plumb the essentially negative depths of the shapes of Self-consciousness and then to try and reestablish its relation with the objective world as both theoretical and practical Reason. The rational subject strives first to understand itself in the actual, rational order of things and then to actualize itself through rational activity and thereby establish a secure relation with the external world. In the transition to Spirit, self-consciousness learns that the external world is actually the substantial life of the human community: ethical life. We seem to have discovered, contrary to what Hegel announced in the Preface, that substance is the truth of subjectivity. However, this substance is no longer an external objectivity, but the self-conscious human community. It is spiritual substance that is the truth of subjectivity: We that is I and I that is We.

Although both thinkers find it impossible to think of an isolated subject—the human subject “is” only among others—they understand this in significantly different senses. For Hegel, subjectivity is not only the structure of each member of the family or

society but also the structure of the whole. He says that “the ethical connection between the members of the Family is not that of feeling, or the relationship of love,” but “the ethical principle must be placed in the relation of the *individual* member of the Family to the *whole* Family as the Substance” (PS 269/PG 243). True, in the *Philosophy of Right* he seems to have changed his mind: “The family, as the *immediate substantiality* of spirit, has as its determination the spirit’s *feeling* [*Empfindung*] of its own unity, which is *love*” (PR §158).<sup>30</sup> But in any case, what is at issue is the shape of the particular individual’s self-consciousness as it relates to the self-consciousness of the corporate “individual,” the family. By contrast, for Levinas, the Other in the home does not mirror my interiority but shelters it; I and the Other who welcomes me into an intimacy are not members of a substantial unity any more than I and the Other who faces me are.

Nevertheless, both the home in Levinas and the family in Hegel provide the starting point for the concrete possibility of the ethical subject. And if we accept the relationship of love between the family members that Hegel restores in the *Philosophy of Right*, we may see in this some resemblance to the gentleness and intimacy of the dwelling that Levinas describes. In an addition to one of the sections on children contributed from the lecture notes of Hegel’s students, we find the statement that, “As a child, the human being must have lived with his parents in a circle of love and trust, and

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<sup>30</sup>One reason for this shift is that the section on the family in the *Phenomenology* is governed by Hegel’s analysis of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, especially as illustrated by the *Antigone* of Sophocles, while the family in the *Philosophy of Right* is understood as the basic unit of the modern European (Prussian) state. It may also be the case that once Hegel has worked through the *Realphilosophie*, he is more comfortable acknowledging that feeling (*Empfindung*) is an embryonic shape of spirit.

the rational must appear in him as his own most personal [*eigenste*] subjectivity” (*PR* §175, Addition).<sup>31</sup> There is an undeniable similarity here to the intimacy of the dwelling that Levinas explicates. But there is also a significant difference, one that parses the distinction between Levinas’s project and Hegel’s. Rationality takes the shape of love and trust in the child as part of its own ongoing development to the concrete universality of self-knowing spirit. From the standpoint of the *Philosophy of Right* (which is where the points of contact become most apparent), it is already the absolute idea that determines the shape that spirit takes in the family. But for Levinas, gentleness and intimacy are concrete ways of dwelling in the world that remain forever “past” or inaccessible to the essential freedom of thought. Ideas come later, allowing the recollected being to gather a portion of its experience and offer it to the other person. It is the home as the site where I dwell that makes possible both enjoyment and consciousness, and finally, even ethical responsibility. These remain distinct possibilities of the I, not aspects unified in an ethical substance.

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<sup>31</sup>There is a point of contact, too, between Levinas’s notion of fecundity and Hegel’s reflection that only in the child does the love-relation of the parents become objective. See *TI*, Section IV, subsections C, “Fecundity” and E, “Transcendence and Fecundity,” and *PR* §173, including the Addition. The parallel is not exact by any means, for fecundity denotes a sort of extra-ethical relation (“Beyond the Face”), while the child as a member of the family remains in the most immediate sphere of ethical life, one that Hegel calls in the *Phenomenology* “the *unconscious*, still inner conception [of the ethical order, which] stands opposed to its actual, self-conscious existence” (*PS* 268/*PG* 243).

## 5. From Enjoyment to Consciousness: The Advent of the Other

Whatever the fluid medium of life, the energy of work, and the substantiality of the family provide for the development of consciousness to the standpoint of absolute knowing, they do not escape the essential possibility of consciousness as such. They are shapes that consciousness assumes, configurations through which spirit presses on towards the truth of its absoluteness. The absolute subjectivity of spirit remains the essential possibility in which all these shapes take shape, in which they are comprehended. It is in this sense that the absolute standpoint, the absolute self-knowing of spirit, is “within” the natural consciousness that undertakes the journey of the *Phenomenology* in the first place (*PS* 14-15/*PG* 23). This is what Levinas indicates when he says that consciousness seems to constitute the very possibility of its being determined in the first place. But ultimately for Levinas, consciousness comes to birth for the separated being dwelling in the home on the basis of a very different possibility, one that it does not anticipate or constitute. This possibility appears in the face of the Other.

Representation, we have seen, is conditioned or nourished by an enjoyment which it does not constitute. The movement by which thought claims to represent to itself the very life from which it lives is not simply an illusion, but a freedom nourished somehow by separation, “an exceptional possibility of this separated existence” (*TI* 168/143). We must take this “ex-ception” in the literal meaning of the term: it is a possibility beyond the grasp of the I immersed in enjoyment, beyond the grasp of the laboring hand and its possessions. (Theory is therefore neither the prologue to praxis nor its rarefaction in abstract thought.) Still this exception requires an energy by which an existence that always lives “from” what it does not contain nevertheless returns prior to this event,

returns “after the event” (*après coup*) in a feat of memory to its own condition. That representation is produced in the separated being as memory, as the retrieval of time, shows that in the event of separation, time itself temporalizes or comes to pass:

That representation is conditioned by life, but that this conditioning could be reversed after the event—that idealism is an eternal temptation—results from the very event of separation, which must not at any moment be interpreted as an abstract cleavage in space. The fact of the *après coup* does show that the possibility of constitutive representation does not restore to abstract eternity or to the instant the privilege of measuring all things; it shows, on the contrary, that the production of separation is bound to time, and even the articulation of separation in time is produced thus in itself and not only secondarily, for us. (*TI* 169/144)

The time recouped in the feat of memory is thus not an external determination that somehow befalls an ideal subject, nor is it an independent medium into which a subject one day appears only to vanish another. Time’s temporalizing is the very event of separation. But how does this occur?

Levinas seeks the answer in the ambiguity of the dwelling, close to the element but sheltered from it. To be in time, to have time, is to dwell in a home:

The feat of having limited a part of this world and having closed it off, having access to the elements I enjoy by way of the door and the window, realizes extraterritoriality and the sovereignty of thought, anterior to the world to which it is posterior. *Anterior posteriorly*: separation is not thus “known”; it is thus produced. Memory is precisely the accomplishment of this ontological structure. A marsh wave that returns to wash the strand beneath the line it left, a spasm of time conditions remembrance. (*TI* 169-170/144)

We should be careful not to read this backwards. The home is not a project where the I, anxious for the uncertain future of its enjoyment, builds time into the structures that support its existence. Where would the I get time? How would the I manufacture it, living from what the I itself cannot constitute? Rather, time comes to pass in the home. Time’s temporalization hollows out the space of the dwelling and makes recollection—

heretofore unthinkable—a concrete possibility. Time, which is not a characteristic of the pure element, makes thinking and knowing possible.

Thus time is produced as an *event*. Withdrawal from the element into the recollection of the dwelling is not the dialectical reciprocal of possession, which would thus be construed as a presence to things. This event which produces the energy “oriented upstream,” against the current of my living from... does not come from the I’s essence as actuality, self-movement or negativity. Rather, it involves the other person, and in two distinct ways or moments. First, Levinas reflects, “I must have been in relation with something I do not live from. This event is the relation with the Other who welcomes me in the Home, the discreet presence of the Feminine” (*TI* 170/145). In the home the other welcomes me into an intimacy that makes possible a distance with regard to that from which I live, a distance which is the event of time, a delay or postponement of enjoyment but still oriented by it. But, in order to reverse this orientation, to produce the freedom of thought, “to refuse both enjoyment and possession,” Levinas continues, “I must know how *to give* what I possess. ...For this I must encounter not the discreet presence of the feminine but the indiscreet face of the Other that calls me into question. The Other—the absolutely other—paralyzes possession, which he contests by his epiphany in the face” (*TI* 171/145). In this way the freedom of thought is conditioned not only by the enjoyment that nourishes it, but by the moral relation that interrupts enjoyment and possession, calling into question the emprise of the same.

The whole concrete life of the I opens up in the dwelling, pulsates between the diastole and systole of these two moments of the encounter with the Other. But this life opens up in several different senses or directions, senses which all emanate from the



home without being resolved into a system there. The gentleness of the discreet Other welcomes the I threatened by anonymous futurity into a human intimacy that both postpones and preserves enjoyment because it affords the delay of labor and possession. This dimension of the home remains oriented towards enjoyment, but also hollows out the space needed for recollection, which means that I can turn towards the destitute Other who disturbs this dream of solitude, and open the home itself in generosity, especially the generosity of language, “the primordial donation” (*TI* 174/149). In speech is enacted the relation of transcendence, which offers the world to the Other by “speaking the world to the Other” (*TI* 173/148). But there exists also, Levinas says, the possibility of closing oneself up in the home, of refusing the generosity of language. Separation would be “dialectically correlative with transcendence” (*TI* 173/148) if this were not possible. Still, insofar as this movement of closing oneself up is a recoil from the importunity of the other who disturbs my complacency, it seems to have two modes: one the mute stubbornness of self-indulgence, and the other the “objectivity” that admits language and the generality it makes possible, but does not let it go all the way to the other.

According to Levinas, the constitution of the object of thought is from the first apperception and gift: Facing the other in her destitution, I apperceive what is mine as suitable also for her, and only then can I offer things into the common place thus produced. Here, between me and the other, is born the concept and language: The generality of thought arises in the very possibility of communication and does not precede it as an ideal condition.

To recognize the Other is to come to him across the world of possessed things, but at the same time to establish, by gift, community and universality. Language is universal because it is the very passage from the individual to the general, because

it offers things which are mine to the Other. To speak is to make the world common, to create commonplaces. (*TI* 76/48-49).

The concept thus does not simply span a range of things alike in themselves, or even the gap between the subject and the object it conceives. First the concept spans the distance between people, between the I and the Other. And for this movement of generosity, this transcendence, recollection in a dwelling remains a concrete and not a transcendental “condition of possibility.”

Detached from the concrete condition of dwelling in the home, the miracle of memory that Levinas describes resembles Hegelian recollection. Taken ideally, outside of a site, the *après coup* of memory comprehending its origin would seem to attest the triumph of thought in which spirit recollects the time into which it was emptied out. Hegelian recollection is also “anterior posteriorly”; after the event it completes the circle and comprehends what produced it. Consider the following description from the end of the *Phenomenology* when spirit grasps itself as the shape of absolute knowing:

But this substance which is Spirit is the process in which Spirit *becomes* what it is *in itself*; and it is only as this process of reflecting itself into itself that it is in itself truly *Spirit*. It is in itself the movement which is cognition—the transforming of that *in-itself* into that which is *for itself*, of Substance into Subject, of the object of *consciousness* into an object of *self-consciousness*, i.e., into an object that is just as much superseded, or into the *Concept*. The movement is the circle that returns into itself, the circle that presupposes its beginning and reaches it only at the end. (*PS* 488/*PG* 429)

This Hegelian account seems to confirm the exceptional possibility of thought described by Levinas. Nowise an immediate possibility of the I, the freedom of thought is produced precisely in its history, returning in recollection to comprehend that history.

But the description I just cited comes immediately after Hegel has explained why spirit “appears in time so long as it has not grasped its pure *concept*” (*PS* 487/*PG* 429).

When it grasps its concept, spirit completes the circle, returns to its beginning, and makes recollection possible. In accomplishing this, recollection achieves the ultimate victory of Olympian thought over the Titan Cronos—it annuls the very time in which it appears. For Hegel, thought’s freedom to comprehend its own conditions is tied not only to the production of time, but to its annihilation; the very exercise of thought would be its destruction. Perhaps this paradox explains Levinas’s apparent allusion to Hegel when he asks: “Is the freedom with which [thought] is linked an absence of relation, an outcome of history in which nothing remains *other*, and consequently a sovereignty in the void?” (*TI* 169/143). It is hardly fair—and hardly comprehensible—to characterize Hegelian thought as “the absence of relation,” but if for Levinas a relation necessarily occurs between separated beings, and time articulates separation, the annulment of time would annul relation.

However, the whole thrust of Levinas’s argument is that the freedom of thought cannot be detached from the concrete condition of dwelling in the home. In his account, time is not simply the differing of the identical, but arises from and goes toward the other: “The instants do not link up with one another indifferently, but extend from the other unto me” (*TI* 283/259-260).<sup>32</sup> There is here a diachrony not reducible to synchrony, not produced as the auto-externalization of the idea from the ether of logic. Rather than the kenosis of spirit there is dwelling in the home and the generosity this makes possible.

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<sup>32</sup>I have extracted this sentence from a later section in *Totality and Infinity* which situates it in the context of the discussion of fecundity, the defeat of history signified in the child who is born of but remains other than the parent. Although I have doubts about Levinas’s notion of fecundity, the assertion that time extends from the same to the other is upheld by the preceding analysis of the conditions of thought.

Both the ethical relation and the freedom of thought are economic possibilities: “No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted [*ne saurait se jouer*] outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home” (TI 172/147).

Thus we are led by enjoyment and representation to consideration of the third mode of subjectivity: ethical responsibility. This does not mean, of course, that the ethical relation comprehends enjoyment and representation, that it is the truth of these ways of existing. The inseparability of these phenomena does not unite them into a dialectical whole, but articulates the very texture of existing, its density in space and time. Levinas writes that his method is deductive in that it seeks the condition of empirical situations. However, “it leaves to the developments called empirical, in which the conditioning possibility is accomplished—it leaves to the *concretization*—an ontological role that specifies the meaning of the fundamental possibility, a meaning [*sens*] invisible in that condition” (TI 173/148). In this interweaving without reduction we begin to see what Levinas means when he says that the structure of thought dissimulates but does not contain the experience from which it lives. For Hegel, all sense and experience tends towards the unity of absolute thought, and indeed discovers that its first impetus comes from the inchoate idea, while for Levinas, signification moves in several directions, moves in fields that overlap without negating each other’s claims.

Levinas does not believe that the Owl of Minerva flies only at dusk. One might rather argue on the basis of his discussion of enjoyment and sensibility that this nocturnal creature flies in the pre-dawn hours just as surely as at night. His phenomenological method allows one to glimpse a sense that does not just occur behind the back of consciousness, but beneath the surface on which it is suspended, a sense that extends into

the depths of the element where the intentionality proper to representation and thought cannot go.

Can philosophy go where thought cannot? In the preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas employs the word “consciousness” to the opening up of dimensions or senses—enjoyment, responsibility—that are not comprehended in representation or irradiated by the light that discloses being to thought (or action). Consciousness, he says, consists “in overflowing this play of lights” in which representation is at home, and “in accomplishing *events* whose ultimate signification...does not lie in *disclosing*.” Indeed, “No prior disclosure illuminates these essentially nocturnal events” (*TI* 27-28/xvi). Although his increasing chariness of ontological language would almost certainly cross out “consciousness” in this context—it is already surprising in *Totality and Infinity*—and replace it with some trope of preoccupation or wakefulness, even these terms suggest some relation or connection with the life of thought. Although responsibility and enjoyment are neither originally nor ultimately subject to the jurisdiction of thought’s freedom, they have a bearing on it, and thus on philosophy itself. They are the burden of philosophy and its feet of clay.

In fact, Levinas would say, the Owl of Minerva, whether it flies at dawn or dusk, cannot accomplish the work of philosophy, which consists in vigilance and discourse. This work is not accomplished by the clutch of the talon and the scrutiny of the eye, but in the face to face of hearing and telling, in the daylight of the agora, the arena of human exchange. Hegel, too, although he excuses himself from prescription and prophecy in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* by saying that philosophy paints its grey on grey only at the dusk of an age, does not wait in the *Phenomenology* for the Owl of Minerva to

accomplish the task of thought, but instead looks to Spirit, which “leaves behind it the colorful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present.” It is to this spiritual daylight, this essentially and plurally human world, that we turn next.

#### CHAPTER 4: HEGEL AND LEVINAS: RECOGNITION AND THE FACE OF THE OTHER

In being led from enjoyment to the ethical relation with the other person, we do not enter a region Hegel refused to consider in the *Phenomenology*. The ethical relation is the very heart of spirit: We that is I and I that is We. Hegel does not arrive at the standpoint of absolute knowing by considering the experience of the solitary consciousness, but rather by examining consciousness's experience of relations with the other in the struggle for recognition, and in the shapes of true spirit, morality, and religion. He agrees that knowledge and thought only make sense in an interhuman space. Disparaging the philosophical pretensions of genius and sound common sense, which refuse to expose the sources of their certainty to the scrutiny of others, Hegel writes in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, "It is the nature of humanity to press onward to agreement with others; human nature only really exists in an achieved community of minds" (*PS 43/PG 48*).

Of course, this criticism is one that Hegel would also seem to level at what Levinas proposes as the irreducibility of enjoyment—enjoyment that nourishes thought but cannot be adequately represented in it. In doing so, he necessarily treats sensibility as inarticulate thought, the false theory of "fumbling objectification" that Levinas criticizes (*TI 187/161*). In the Preface Hegel writes, "The anti-human, the merely animal, consists in staying within the sphere of feeling, and being able to communicate only at that level" (*PS 43/PG 48*). However, as we have seen, enjoyment is not aphasic knowing, but immersion in the element, living from.... The thinking that approaches it *après coup* in recollection can sublimate or re-constitute within itself

only its representation of what sustains life, not living from... itself. It is not that a deficiency in sensibility is sublated in thought; rather, the advent of the other person calls forth a wholly new energy. Thereafter, it is true, this human infinity disturbs the destiny of enjoyment and summons it to a new responsibility. But this destiny can be *new* only if the sense of enjoyment itself is unassumable, only if its sense cannot be *aufgehoben* within a more comprehensive system of thought but must be interrupted and summoned to a wholly new relation.

Enjoyment thus remains a concrete mode of existence, the hither side of thought. Yet for Levinas it is not enjoyment that is first philosophy, but ethics. Hegel says that spirit begins to know itself as spirit when I becomes We. Levinas claims that we enter the most important realm of philosophy with the consideration of interhuman relations, when we venture beyond enjoyment to the relation with the other who interrupts enjoyment. But how do its structure and its dynamic differ from or converge with thought and knowing?

Although the advent of the other person introduces the very possibility of objectivity and the universality of thought to the I recollected in the home, the arena of thought established by these “commonplaces” does not determine for Levinas all the possibilities of my relation to the other. There arise between us two modes or levels of relation that cannot be fully integrated even though they also overlap in the concrete life of people: 1) the direct encounter and relation with the other, and 2) the relation each of us has to the objective structures of knowing that arise between us. The latter relation consists of the two-way intercourse or communication of consciousness, while the former arises as the ethical responsibility that Levinas says is essentially a one-way street—to the other, for the other. Hegel, on the other hand, strives always for the synthesis and reconciliation of these two levels of relation: my relations to the other must be comprehended in the relations of truth, in absolute knowing.



In this chapter I shall trace Hegel's exploration of the relation with the other person as it is taken up in Chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology*, "Self-consciousness." The problematic of this chapter remains determinative for the *Phenomenology* as a whole, for only with its resolution—a resolution that is not effected within self-consciousness but only in spirit proper—can the transition be made to absolute knowing. Yet Hegel does not conceive of absolute knowing as some separate realm entered after the battles of experience are over. It will show itself as that perspective which comprehends—and is thus presupposed by—all others. And Hegel insists that it shows itself this way precisely as the resolution of the problem of mutual spiritual recognition introduced in "Self-consciousness." It is this initial experience of the relation between the same and the other that I will explore here. And to Hegel's problematic I will juxtapose Levinas's understanding of the face to face as the basis of the ethical encounter between the same and the other, an encounter that moves not towards resolution, but into an infinite sense of responsibility.

### 1. Recognition and Its Misfire

It is almost certain that no single element of Hegel's *Phenomenology* or his philosophy as a whole has received more attention in the mid- and late-twentieth century than the struggle for recognition in the section entitled "Lordship and Bondage."<sup>1</sup> What is crucial for our examination

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<sup>1</sup>The name most commonly associated with this focus is Alexandre Kojève, whose lectures published in English as *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* have already been cited in Chapter 1 (see above, , n). Kojève's interpretation of the dialectic of Mastery and Slavery is the lens through which he views the whole *Phenomenology*, as he himself makes clear in his Chapter 1: "In Place of an Introduction." This chapter does not come from the notes and transcripts compiled by Raymond Queneau, but was written by Kojève himself, and it consists of a "translation with commentary" (without the two strains being at all distinguished within the one text) of Hegel's section IV.A., "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage." I have mentioned that Michael Roth's *Knowing and History* traces Kojève's influence in France. Rather than attempt a summary of Kojève's and others' interpretations of the section, which would require a separate bibliographic essay, I will

of Hegel is an understanding of how this section takes up the rupture or break in the conceptual scheme of the previous section, as well as how its attempt to heal this break remains determinative for the *Phenomenology* as a whole, even though we must understand that there is no closure in the recognition attempted here, nor in the chapter on self-consciousness as a whole.

Recognition is an attempt to heal a division that self-consciousness, supposing it has bridged the immense gulf that yawned again and again in the shapes of consciousness, experiences in trying to understand itself as desire and its world as life. Yet, this division, so apparent in the disjunction of lordship and bondage, is not healed in the transition to the “independent” shapes of self-consciousness, only submerged. It might be more correct to say that stoicism and skepticism succeed for a space in distracting themselves from the fact that they not only live along this rumbling fault-line, but that it has already riven the very ground on which their independence stands. Only with the unhappy consciousness does this division again become apparent, as internal disruption, “the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being” (*PS* 126/*PG* 121). The recognition that is first attempted in the “struggle to the death” and then in the relation of master and slave misfires, and the painful brokenness and futile struggles of the unhappy consciousness represent the dialectical consequences of this failure.

Although this projection presupposes much of the analysis which is yet to come, I think it would be helpful to project even further and indicate where this reading is heading. The rupture

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mention again the recent anthology edited by John O’Neill, *Hegel’s Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, which collects commentaries (in English or translation) from Marx through contemporary sources, including chapters from Kojève, Hyppolite, Sartre, Lukács, Gadamer, Habermas, H. S. Harris, L. Siep and others, some of which focus more on other writings on recognition and work from the Jena period than on the *Phenomenology* specifically.

that disturbs the immediate unity of self-consciousness runs all the way through the oppositions of the domains of reason and spirit, until the moments of reconciliation in the final three chapters of the *Phenomenology*: “Morality,” “Religion,” and “Absolute Knowing.” Each of these three moments of reconciliation explicitly recalls the shape of the unhappy consciousness, and each in its own way effects the reconciliation to which this inwardly disrupted aspired, but found impossible. The final reconciliation in “Absolute Knowing” unites the first two reconciliations—in “Morality” and “Religion”—and thus heals the wound that is most deeply felt by the unhappy consciousness. But this wound, although it is prefigured in the separation of consciousness and desire from their objects, first sustains its human character as a wound in the struggle for recognition in self-consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

a. From the Object of Desire to the Other Person

The conception of self-consciousness as desire failed, we have seen, because the satisfaction that self-consciousness actually seeks is not to be found in the sensible object or in life as a whole, as a process. The satisfaction that self-consciousness as desire actually seeks is conceptual: the certainty that in taking itself as desire and life as its object, it will have access to truth. Desire does not fail *because* desire desires to be desired (this is the famous

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<sup>2</sup>The general trajectory of this reading is not original with me, although neither do I find it summarized with precisely these emphases or concerns by other commentators who take this course. Those who agree generally with my reading include Hyppolite, H. S. Harris, H-G. Gadamer, Robert Williams and others. Jean Wahl seems to have been the first to have noted the importance of the unhappy consciousness for the work as a whole. See his *La malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1929, 1951).

“anthropogenetic” thesis of Kojève<sup>3</sup>) even if “desiring to be desired” describes an essential aspect of the next conceptual scheme that is examined. Rather, self-consciousness as desire fails because it discovers that the object of desire will not adequately reflect its own self-sublating structure. For the object to reflect the structure of self-consciousness, it must maintain its independence precisely in and by negating itself, not leave negation and independence as separate moments split between consciousness and its object. “But,” Hegel writes, “this universal independent nature in which negation is present as absolute negation is the genus as such, or the genus as *self-consciousness*. *Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*” (PS 110/PG 108).

We should note that there is here a striking parallel with Levinas’s account in this development, even though there are also significant differences. Neither desire and its satisfactions nor enjoyment can provide a sufficient foundation for consciousness and the freedom it requires to assure itself that it has access to truth. It is important to remember that while there is a progressive movement in the *Phenomenology*, a *Bildung*, there is also a retrogression insofar as self-consciousness has proven to be a presupposition for the claims of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> What I mean by “retrogression” is not that what we thought we had gained is

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<sup>3</sup>Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 5-7. Although he does not cite or even agree with Kojève, Merold Westphal also explains the failure of desire’s satisfaction by importing a new desire, the human desire for recognition that supersedes animal desires for food, reproduction, etc. One trouble with such interpretations for Hegel’s method is that the original, animal desire would not then be unsatisfied, and thus there would be no necessary *Aufhebung*, only the contingent and fortuitous appearance of a new desire already determined (how?) as human.

<sup>4</sup>On self-consciousness as the ground of consciousness, see Heidegger, *HPS* 130/*GA*.32.186; later he elucidates this relation by saying that it is not simply that self-consciousness accompanies every consciousness, but that “consciousness *essences* [*west*] as self-consciousness” (*HPS* 134/*GA*.32.193). Without explicating further Heidegger’s notion of the verb *to essence* [*wesen*], we can note that the relation is much more complex than simple progress. By extension, the whole path will be present at the

once again lost or proven invalid, but that all progress in the *Phenomenology* is progress *back* into the ground of experience. Sensation, perception and understanding are not wrong; they simply cannot ground their claims sufficiently. Self-consciousness emerges as the truth of consciousness, or as a way of grounding these claims. Now the question has become whether self-consciousness can ground its own claim to know the world, and we see that it cannot, at least not immediately. When we arrive at the final reconciliation of consciousness and self-consciousness in Absolute Knowing, we will have found a standpoint, Hegel claims, which grounds itself, and thereby grounds all the previous standpoints which it preserves and comprehends.

This retrogression means that the failure of self-consciousness to ground its self-certainty in desire is also a failure to ground the freedom of thought in desire. When we speak of freedom of thought we mean precisely its dependence on nothing outside itself, its self-groundedness. And even though Levinas finds the freedom of thought nourished by enjoyment, he agrees that we cannot derive this freedom directly from enjoyment; thought and enjoyment have different intentionalities. For both thinkers, the advent of the other person provides the energy needed to set the freedom of thought in motion. It is true that Hegel, because he does not grant to desire the alter-intentionality and sufficiency unto itself that Levinas does to enjoyment, places desire and recognition next to one other in a continuum of development; nevertheless, there is also for Hegel a very strong break signaled here, one that ushers us into the “*geistigen Tag*” of spirit.

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end, *essencing* as absolute knowing.

In a different vein, see Joseph Flay’s discussion of this grounding in terms of presuppositions and interest in *Hegel’s Quest for Certainty*, 84-5, as well as 303n12.

## b. Recognition in Itself

The insight that self-consciousness needs another self-consciousness to be able to provide a ground for true knowledge results from the experience [*Erfahrung*] of self-consciousness as it tries to understand its access to truth as desire. But with this insight we have not yet determined in what the relation between these two self-consciousnesses consists, or why that relation will provide the satisfaction [*Befriedigung*]<sup>5</sup> it promises. This Hegel lays out in the first seven paragraphs of the next section, “Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage.” He begins by repeating the insight from the previous experience and specifying the process that will enable us to understand what this new conceptual standpoint entails: “Self-consciousness is in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it is so for another; that is, it is only in being acknowledged [or recognized, *es ist nur als ein Anerkanntes*]” (PS 111/PG 109).<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup>*Befriedigung* refers to the filling of a need and thus the overcoming of a negativity. However, the root *Friede[n]* (peace) suggests a wider and more human meaning that Hegel may well be exploiting here. *Frieden* is particularly appropriate to relations between human subjects, as its original sense of “solicitude” (*Schönung*) or “friendship” is mirrored in its earliest legal meaning, “*den Zustand der ungebrochenen Rechtsordnung als Grundlage des Gemeinschaftslebens* [the state of undisturbed law and order as the foundation of life in community]” (from the *Duden Herkunftswörterbuch*). This intersubjective harmony is the same meaning that is reflected negatively in the English expression, “disturbing the peace.” *Befriedigung* would thus signify the securing of this foundation for community living.

<sup>6</sup>Translation slightly emended (*is* instead of *exists* for *ist*). Robert R. Williams’s *Recognition* contains a careful analysis of these seven paragraphs, including an independent translation that often corrects errors or highlights connotations missed in Miller’s and Baillie’s versions. Williams identifies these seven paragraphs as Hegel’s “eidetics” of intersubjectivity, that is, “a bracketing of fact and an elaboration of meaning” (147). While this seems an over-elaborate way to describe Hegel’s regular method of presenting a concept first *für uns, oder an sich* and thereafter *für es* or for the consciousness that is undergoing the experience, there is something significant about this exposition of the concept of recognition because the experience of consciousness that follows it does not complete the mutual or reciprocal [*gegenseitig*] movement of recognition that is outlined, but leaves this to be fulfilled much later. Williams’s work on this section is very insightful and has contributed much to my understanding of it, although I disagree with him that Levinas’s work amounts at best to an elaboration of Hegel’s original insight.

relation or *movement* of recognition is then worked out in such a way that we not only see the infinite and “spiritual unity” [*geistigen Einheit*] Hegel hopes to realize in mutual recognition, but also the danger of spiritual disruption or incompleteness that threatens if this recognition remains only one-sided, which is exactly what happens in the experience of lordship and bondage.

What recognition strives to enact or realize is the concept of *spirit* that Hegel has just announced, which is also the *realization* of the infinity discovered at the end of Chapter 3 on force and understanding.<sup>7</sup> In spirit both the unity and the difference or contradiction of two self-consciousnesses are preserved and actual, for each side is subjectivity, the magical power or movement that at once negates and survives its own negation. Only the doubling of self-consciousness can produce the spiritual or living [*geistigen*] unity—the spiritual infinity—that will not collapse these moments into an undifferentiated nullity: “The twofold significance of the distinct moments lies in the nature of self-consciousness to be infinite, or directly the opposite of the determinateness in which it is posited” (*PS* 111/*PG* 109).<sup>8</sup> The gap between this ideal spiritual unity and the self-knowledge and freedom attained in self-consciousness’s experience of the struggle for recognition and independence will drive the dialectic through this section and beyond.

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<sup>7</sup>This point is missed in Miller’s translation because he inexplicably drops a phrase from the German: “*Der Begriff dieser seiner Einheit in seiner Verdopplung, der sich im Selbstbewußtsein realisierenden Unendlichkeit, ist eine vielseitige und vieldeutige Verschränkung...*” (*PG* 109). Compare: “The Notion of this its unity in its duplication embraces many and varied meanings” (*PS* 111). Williams notes that “duplication,” the translation of *Verdoppelung* that both Miller and Baillie employ, does not give enough emphasis to difference, and uses “doubling” instead (*Recognition*, 164n 35).

<sup>8</sup>The Oxford (Miller’s) translation misprints “has” for “lies” [*liegt*] here, obscuring the sense.

It is important to realize that this ideal of unity, even if it is a unity of difference and unity, remains the goal of the *Phenomenology*, the only way that the possibility of truth can be secured. A warranted principle of unity must be the goal of the *Phenomenology* if its aim is to justify *knowing*, that is, if knowing is the only and ultimate aim to which philosophy can aspire. In making *ethics* first philosophy, Levinas asks what might lie beyond or before the unity that secures knowledge. If he does not do so, he concedes that ethics is a species or shape of knowing, and thus fits within the system. We might even say that Levinas argues for the difference in the unity of unity and difference, a formulation that situates difference at or beyond the paradoxical level where Hegel conceives spiritual unity.<sup>9</sup> With regard to the primacy of unity in Hegel, Joseph Flay argues that the unity of the ground of both the world and its intelligibility is the unexamined and ultimately untenable presupposition of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. See *Hegel's Quest for Certainty*, 249-67. Thus Levinas will not seek a unitive *reconciliation* as the consummation of the encounter with the other, but *responsibility*, which emphasizes the difference and non-correlation within relation. I will return to this distinction in the next chapter.

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<sup>9</sup>In fact, Levinas says as much in a passage I noted only after writing this: "Obsession is not a notion that would be introduced here to express proximity, according to the well-known ritual, as the dialectical unity of unity and difference. Obsession, in which difference shudders as non-indifference, does not simply figure as a relation among all the reciprocal or at least reversible relations that form the system of the intelligibility of being" (*OB 83/AE 105*). Non-indifference is thus not "above" the unity Hegel discovers as a more comprehensive dimension, but forever on its "hither side" (*en deça*).

The primacy of unity that Hegel asserts, even if he transposes this unity into a whole new key, means that Levinas is not altogether mistaken when he casts Hegel as a representative of the "ancient privilege of unity" (*TI 102/75*). The question is whether Hegel's unity is the same as the ancient one. (See Williams, *Recognition*, 299.) True, Hegel's conception of unity is extremely dynamic and paradoxical, but it can be argued (often by Hegel, but especially by Heidegger) that Parmenides' One is not as simple as it may seem, or perhaps a "simplicity of simplicity and complexity."



Each individual move in the whole movement or process of recognition as Hegel lays it out now is doubled. This doubling starts with the second self-consciousness that is opposed to or emerges from the first, and continues through the series of double and double-sensed supersessions that constitutes the recognition.<sup>10</sup> The verb *recognize* here also functions doubly, both reflexively and transitively—self-consciousness comes to know itself at the same time that it acknowledges the independence of another self-consciousness—and in fact can only be reflexive by being transitive. But even this is not enough, Hegel says; the whole transitive/reflexive movement must itself be doubled, so that “each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both” (*PS* 112/*PG* 110).

Hegel presents a careful if abstract analysis of the moments of recognition in the second through fourth paragraphs of the section (§§179-181 in *PS*), before moving on in the next two paragraphs (§§182-183) to specify the reciprocity that must obtain if the whole process is really to work, and finally recapitulating the whole process by comparing it to the play of forces that was analyzed when we looked at consciousness as understanding (§184). Instead of anticipating the embodiment of this process in the relationship of master and slave (an embodiment that will

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<sup>10</sup>*Doppelsinn/doppelsinnig*, which I have here rendered literally “double-sensed,” Miller translates as “Ambiguity/ambiguous” and Williams as “equivocal meaning/equivocal.” In either case one must be careful not to understand this to mean unclarity. The senses involved are, as always with *aufheben*, quite determinate, even in their doubleness or “two-foldedness.”

remain partial), I will try to specify the main moments and their ambiguities, giving examples to fill out some of the abstraction.<sup>11</sup>

In confronting or dealing with an other, I become aware of what it means to be an independent self-consciousness and not just an appetite. The other is not me, and in this “not-me-ness” or otherness I see the mirror image of my independence. I see myself *in the other*, but in the other, I see *only myself*. This is the first ambiguity or double-sense. At this level, it is as if the other as a self-consciousness simply mirrors me. Looking in a mirror I look not at myself but outside myself into something other, yet in this mirror I see only myself, unless I am cleaning the mirror or doing something else that takes my attention away from my own image. Now although the other is not an inanimate or unselfconscious entity like the mirror, what I see in the other is my self-consciousness. We may see some of how this works if we take that aspect of self-consciousness that is acute self-awareness, the common meaning of “self-conscious” in American English. As I walk through town looking in shop windows, I may be aware of what I

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<sup>11</sup>I will try to stay with examples of general relations. Several interpreters have pointed out that Hegel’s concept of recognition can be traced back to the conception of love in the Frankfurt writings, as well as in the Jena “System-Projections.” See Williams, *Recognition*, 76-86; H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development* and “The Concept of Recognition in the Jena Manuscripts”; Peperzak, *La jeune Hegel*; Dieter Henrich, “Hegel und Hölderlin” in *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 9-40. However, the root of an idea and its fruition are not always the same. Williams tries to show that love as explicated in the later writings (*Philosophy of Right, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*) is consistent with but presupposes the resolution of conflict that recognition aims at in the *Phenomenology* (*Recognition*, 180-185). Harris and Merold Westphal (*History and Truth*) explicate recognition in the *Phenomenology* in terms of love without supplying much internal evidence that this matches Hegel’s intentions here. Hyppolite remarks that Hegel could have used the dialectic of love to explicate the doubleness and unity of self-consciousnesses, but that “Love does not dwell sufficiently on the tragic nature of separation,” *Genesis and Structure*, 164. Whatever the reason, it must be observed that Hegel nowhere hints at a relation of love in this section. And whatever Hegel thinks of love, the assimilation of it to recognition would seem to miss too much of what makes love an exceptional relation. Levinas, on the other hand, situates eros as a relation “Beyond the Face” (*TI* 254-73/232-51). Love cannot then be reduced to the ethical, but without the face it would become exploitation.

want or desire, but when I notice down the block, against the lamppost, a homeless person with a plastic cup, my situation immediately changes, and I become self-conscious—aware of myself as a self-consciousness. I can only explain this by saying that I see my self-consciousness somehow in the *other* person, but also, what I am principally aware of is *myself* in or through that other. I am conscious that I will have to do or say something. This is not simply a psychological phenomenon, I think, but an example of what Hegel is talking about. I am aware of what it is to be a human subject when I meet another.

This ambiguity—I see myself in the other, but only myself, not the other—is again doubled in the next development. As self-consciousness, “[I] must supersede this otherness [*Anderssein*] of [myself]” (*PS* 111/*PG* 109). While supersession means death in the life-and-death struggle that Hegel considers immediately after this abstract analysis, it cannot necessarily mean this, or else the discussion of recognition would be a literal dead end, which Hegel, at least, does not think it is. We may say generally that any way we find to discount or negate the otherness we confront in the first moment—the other as myself, myself in the other—will leave me as the independent or certain figure, the essential one. In my example of the encounter with the homeless person, I consider that what is essential is how *I* act. Even if I am not callous to the point of selfishness, it is *my* action that I consider, and it is this that I think will be defining, at least for me. As a character in John Barth’s novel *The End of the Road* reflects, even when he attends a friend’s wedding, it is as if he were agreeing, for the moment, to take a secondary role in the drama of his own life. In fact, one can even become conscious—or self-conscious—of how this humble condescension will highlight one’s own affability, social aplomb, or pitiful self-deprecation. In Sartre’s example of the jealous man suspicious of his wife or lover’s fidelity who knows another has seen him peeping through the keyhole of the hotel-room door, the peeper

could defy the raw, unexpressed judgment of the other—voyeur? thief?—and so negate for himself this otherness, becoming a defiant, misunderstood, but independent self.<sup>12</sup> Sartre’s analysis of the “look” or “gaze” of the other has made this moment of the dialectic of recognition the most compelling for our collective imagination. It is reflected perfectly in the following review of a recent film based on Dorothy Allison’s novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*:

[Daddy Glen is not a villain] but a big, weak, needy, pathetic man. This makes him all the more terrifying. He’s in search of affirmation and approval and looks into every face for a read on himself. Then he looks at Bone, this little girl who understands what he is and lacks the ability to disguise her knowledge. ... Faced with such a radiant intelligence, Glen can only try to break her. H[e] attempts to deny the reflection in Bone’s eyes, to destroy her and her spirit.<sup>13</sup>

While it may seem that such a recognition of self in the other is threatening only because of the determinate content of the one who sees his or her reflection, this example suggests that it is precisely the void of the self that is reflected in and penetrated by the glance of the other.<sup>14</sup> In other words, it is self-consciousness itself and not some particular content that lies at the root of the dialectic of recognition.

The second sense of the negation or supersession of otherness is that one also negates oneself, for one sees oneself thus far only as other, in the other. One may even desire this self-

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<sup>12</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 259-261, passim.

<sup>13</sup>Mick LaSalle, “Girlhood with Grit in Carolina,” review of television movie *Bastard Out of Carolina*, based on the novel by Dorothy Allison (New York: Dutton, 1992), in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 December 1996, C1.

<sup>14</sup>Slavoj Žižek has explicated the Hegelian subject as “a determinate void.” See his *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), especially Part I, chapter 1, “Cogito: The Void Called Subject: ‘I or He or It (the Thing) Which Thinks,’” 9-44.

cancellation, like the child who closes her eyes to make herself invisible. If all that is important in my action is that I disentangle myself from the other—whether I drop a few odd coins in the cup, hoping I have enough spare change left for bus-fare, or mumble some excuse, “Sorry!” (for whom?), or even hunch down in my collar and ignore the other completely (with all the energy and focus such ignorance requires)—if all that is important is that I act so as to negate what the other thinks or demands of me, I lose the certainty of what I am. I deny the otherness of myself that I perceived in the other, refuse to identify myself with this role that I am in fact playing, and thus no longer see myself reflected in the world. This sublation of otherness that is also a sublation of self is the second ambiguity.

The third ambiguity plays on this second and turns it around, for self-consciousness also doubly returns into itself. First, “by superseding *its* otherness, it again becomes equal to itself” (*PS* 111/*PG* 109). This return to itself is thus a reflected self-certainty. But the other self-consciousness also returns into itself: “secondly, however, it [the first self-consciousness] gives the other self-consciousness back again to itself, for it was itself in the other, but sublates this *its* being in the other, and thus lets the other again go free” (*PS* 111/*PG* 109).<sup>15</sup> What is often

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<sup>15</sup>The grammar here is slightly equivocal (in a sense one presumes Hegel did not intend), and Miller translates it differently. Hegel: “*zweitens aber gibt es das andere Selbstbewußtsein ihm wieder ebenso zurück, denn es war sich im andern, es hebt dies sein Sein im anderen auf, entläßt also das andere wieder frei*” (*PG* 109). Miller: “secondly, the other self-consciousness equally gives it back again to itself, for it saw itself in the other, but supersedes this being of itself in the other and thus lets the other go free” (*PS* 111). Compare Williams: “Second, it gives the other self-consciousness back to itself, for it was conscious of itself in the other; it cancels its being in the other, and lets the other go free” (*Recognition*, 154). Not only is it hard to square construing “the other self-consciousness” as the subject of the first clause when it is clearly the object in the last three clauses of the sentence, but Hegel immediately goes on to tell us that the description so far has represented the action all on the side of the first self-consciousness. However, in Miller’s defense, re-appropriating itself as being-for-self and being given back this same being-for-self by the other is exactly what happens in the first stages of the lordship-bondage dialectic.

overlooked in this formulation is that this double return into self which produces freedom will necessarily take place on another level than the second ambiguity, where both other and self are superseded. It is not accomplished within the dialectic of lordship and bondage, which remains an entangled dependence and independence, not the freedom of self-consciousness that is sought. Section B of Chapter IV, on the *freedom* of self-consciousness, is an attempt to fix the level of this double return to self as the realm of thought. Free self-consciousness is “a consciousness which, as the infinitude of consciousness or as its own pure movement, is aware of itself as essential being [*welches sich...das Wesen ist*]; a consciousness that *thinks*” (PS 120/PG 116). However, the attempt to establish this freedom as the freedom of thought, as pure interiority, will prove unsuccessful as we work through the shapes of stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness. Nevertheless, this failure is still a step in the right direction, for the ultimate unity and freedom that is achieved in the journey of the *Phenomenology* is the unity of absolute knowing, where thought is raised to the level of comprehensive conceptual knowing [*begreifendes Wissen*] (PS 484/PG 427).

Within the framework of recognition as a process of self-consciousness, we can see why this return into self, this freedom, manifests itself as a freedom of thought. What I receive and what I give in the movement of recognition is the freedom that is only possible reflectively, the freedom to think in the midst of one’s actions and interactions with others in the world. No matter how I act in my encounter with the homeless person, this action does not simply determine me, but is given back to me as a thinking person. I can approve my action, excuse it, put it out of mind, criticize it, decide to promote societal change so that any action I take might have greater effect; the other can be contemptuous of my stinginess or my generosity, relish my

discomfort, brood over our disparity, or resolve on a certain sense of dignity in spite of all. But all these possibilities are given to us as persons who think.

It is especially important to try and understand this process of recognition as one in which all three ambiguities or double-senses are to be operative, for examples usually show us one of the three moments in sharper relief. We are tempted to assume that a mistake is made if one endeavors, for example, to supersede one's being-in-the-other, and Hegel leads us in this direction with his presentation of the life-and-death struggle. In the struggle to the death the great danger is that supersession will be total and final, an "abstract negation" excluding the preservation that characterizes a "negation coming from consciousness" (*PS* 114/*PG* 112). But the structure of the whole movement of self-consciousness is such that if there is no supersession at all of one's being-in-the-other, there will also be no return into self, and ultimately, no self-certainty and transition to freedom. The doubleness of sense that manifests itself at each stage is not to be understood as if a right and a wrong direction were presented as options to a self-consciousness in quest of self-certainty. The doubleness is more essential than that: to see oneself as self-consciousness is at the same time to see oneself as an other. The movement of *Aufhebung* that ensues (keeping in mind that this is a dialectical order, not a temporally "real" one, for it is quite likely that all moments are in some sense simultaneous) is not optional, but a necessary component of my recognizing myself in the other. And because I am present to myself only in going out of myself and into the other, supersession or cancellation of my otherness is ipso facto and ambiguously cancellation of my selfness. Since this is a negation achieved by consciousness, the return of both parties into themselves, although it can be short-

circuited if recognition fails,<sup>16</sup> is then the double dialectical truth of the supersession of otherness in self and of self in otherness, or a freeing of both into themselves as thinking self-consciousnesses.

With this basic if complex structure explicated, Hegel goes on in the next paragraph to add the requirement of reciprocity outlined above. However, this requirement is not really something added on to recognition but is of its essence. The key sentence in the paragraph is the assertion that “The first [self-consciousness] does not have the object before it merely as it exists initially for desire, but as an object with independent being-for-self. Therefore, it can do nothing to this other for itself, if this other does not in itself do what the first does to it” (*PS 112/PG 110*). If the action were not reciprocal, self-consciousness would be thrown back to the situation it faced as desire; nothing would reflect to it the infinite negativity, the spirituality, of its being-for-self. Without this reflection, it would get back from the relation not its own freedom, but its dependence on the object of desire, which is eventually exactly what happens to the “Master” consciousness. The realization of spirit that is to be accomplished would fail if the action is one-sided, “because what is to happen can only be brought about by both” (*PS 112/PG 110*).

### c. Recognition for Self-consciousness

What is to or should happen [*was geschehen soll*] is *mutual* recognition; the two self-consciousnesses “*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another [*anerkennen sich*”

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<sup>16</sup>Robert Williams (*Recognition*, 87) points out that Hegel discusses the necessary possibility of this failure (*Nichtanerkennung*) in the *System of Ethical Life (1802/3)*, (with *First Philosophy of Spirit*, trans. H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox [Albany: SUNY Press, 1977]), 124.



*als gegenseitig sich anerkennend]*” (PS 112/PG 110). However, what *does* happen, throughout the section entitled the “Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness,” is one-sided recognition. The mutual recognition that is to incorporate the ground of knowing into the relation with the other fails to bridge this gap. Even when we move to consider the free self-consciousness in stoicism and skepticism, this is a freedom experienced only by one side of the original master-slave relation. It is not until we reach the shape of the unhappy consciousness that the doubleness of self-consciousness required for mutual recognition returns. I will now trace briefly this development.

As he turns to examine the “pure concept of recognition” as it “appears for self consciousness,” Hegel cautions us, “At first, it will exhibit the side of the *inequality* of the two, or the splitting-up of the middle into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only *recognized*, the other only *recognizing*” (PS 112-3/PG 110). The “at first” has made many readers think that this faulty attempt at recognition describes only the life-and-death struggle that follows, whereas it actually describes the situation of the master and the slave, as we shall see. The struggle to the death fails for a different reason, for if it is carried out to completion, the two self-consciousnesses “are done away with as *extremes* wanting to be *for themselves*” and instead of giving one another the freedom of thinking individuals, “leave each other free only indifferently, like things” (PS 114/PG 112). The lesson in the struggle to the death is not that equality or mutuality is essential to recognition, for lordship and bondage is not predicated as an equal relation, but specifically as an unequal one. Rather, the first lesson is that “*life* is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness” (PS 115/PG 112). Here, we note, Hegel seems to glimpse the distinction between the nourishment or sustenance of self-consciousness and its pursuit of self-certainty, although he does not explicate these as two different dimensions

of subjectivity. Instead, he takes them up as a pure and an impure self-consciousness—master and slave, the slave being a self-consciousness that has taken refuge from the dread of death in work.

As Hegel presents the interaction of the master and the slave from the point of view of the master, an interaction which is mediated by the thing worked on and enjoyed, he shows that the master does indeed receive recognition from the other. The servant negates his own being-for-self by giving himself over to working on the thing, and he also certifies the master's being-for-self by allowing the master's relation to the thing to remain the sheer negativity of enjoyment. This success does not mean, however, that the pure concept of recognition—a concept that is the essence of spirit—has been realized in the relation: “For recognition proper the moment is lacking, that what the lord does to the other he also does to himself, and what the bondsman does to himself he should also do to the other. The outcome is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal” (*PS* 116/*PG* 113). In this one-sided recognition, however, the master fails to achieve the truth of independence. Because his action enslaves the other instead of setting him free, the master's own freedom is compromised.<sup>17</sup>

The natural assumption is that the final development of the “Lordship and Bondage” section achieves the full recognition explicated at its beginning. After all, the seemingly dependent self-consciousness of the slave is transformed into the independent self-consciousness of the stoic through work, as we saw above (Chapter 3). It is tempting to say that the moments

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<sup>17</sup>Simone de Beauvoir puts this succinctly in her *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948): “Only the freedom of others keeps each one of us from hardening into the absurdity of facticity,” (71), and again, “The existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom” (91).

Hegel said are lacking above are supplied when 1) the master realizes the truth of his dependence and so does to himself what he did to the slave and 2) the slave's self-abasement and fear is gotten rid of by his working on the thing. But there are problems with this reading. For one thing, Hegel completely drops the terminology of recognition at this point and shifts to the terminology of dependence and independence. If he intended this shift to signal the consummation of recognition, it seems odd that he would do so without an explicit avowal of this consummation, especially since he was so careful to point out the failures of recognition. For another, the freedom of self-consciousness in stoicism and skepticism, while it does go beyond the compromised freedom of the master, remains only a one-sided freedom. "Whether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of its individual existence," Hegel writes of the stoical consciousness, "its aim is to be free, and to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence...into the simple essentiality of thought" (*PS* 121/*PG* 117). However, despite this resolve or rather because of it, this freedom of thought proves itself to be an abstract freedom: "*Withdrawn* [*zurückgezogen*] from existence only into itself, it has not there achieved its consummation as absolute negation of that existence" (*PS* 122/*PG* 118-9). This withdrawal [*Rückzug*] is not the double return [*Rückkehr*] into self that Hegel had prescribed at *PS* 111/*PG* 109, and therefore we are led to conclude that the transformation to the shapes of free self-consciousness does not directly entail the accomplishment of mutual recognition.

Skepticism, although it "is the realization of that of which stoicism was only the concept, and is the actual experience of what the freedom of thought is" (*PS* 123/*PG* 119), also lacks the mutuality that Hegel required of recognition. The skeptical self-consciousness can take either side of an issue, and in fact knows that both sides can be justified, but it waffles, taking each side

in turn, and thus only appears as self-consciousness on one side at a time. It is skeptical because it cannot recognize itself in its other, for it carefully and even frantically shifts the truth from one side to the other, advancing this very skeptical agility as its freedom.

The final shape of self-consciousness, the unhappy consciousness, unites the schizophrenic sides of the skeptical consciousness and thus seems to recover the possibility of achieving mutual recognition. Only now we do not seem to have two separate self-consciousnesses, “self-consciousness that has come out of itself” (PS 111/PG 109), but both in one:

The unhappy consciousness itself *is* the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself *is* both, and the unity of both is also its essential nature. But it is not as yet explicitly aware that this is its essential nature [*es für sich ist sich noch nicht dieses Wesen selbst*], or that it is the unity of both. (PS 126/PG 122)

In fact, so unaware is the unhappy consciousness that it is the unity of both self-consciousnesses that it experiences its essential nature as conflict and struggle. Its bond and connection with itself it experiences as entanglement, its harmony as dissonance, its unity as alienation. So haunted is the unhappy consciousness by its elusive other, so wrapped up in its internal disruption, that one wonders what right it has to be treated in the section on the *freedom* of self-consciousness. Enjoying neither abstract freedom nor the liberty of unthinking refutation, the unhappy consciousness is an *actually* independent [*selbstständig*] self-consciousness, with nothing to stand on but the rift of itself. It is, as Sartre described the human, condemned to freedom.<sup>18</sup>

For the most part, interpretations of this section have been attempts to understand what particular sort of malaise this unhappy consciousness represents. The leading candidate is

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<sup>18</sup>Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 509.

religion, often taken in a specific epochal guise by those who read the *Phenomenology* as an historical anthropology. The internal contradiction of the unhappy consciousness, the unresolved coincidence of the eternal in the temporal—“God’s treasure in earthen vessels”—is a profoundly religious awareness, taking “religion” in the broadest sense. And the three major phases of experience that the unhappy consciousness passes through are universal ways in which religion tries to bring the individual to truth, or unity with the divine: devotion, which is the pure thought of stoicism purified of itself; desire and work in a sanctified world, where things are not simply objects of desire or freedom but sacraments, divinely infused with a significance not constituted by the individual; and asceticism, in which work is exercised on the body against desire and self-will is surrendered according to the counsel of the spiritual mediator. But the religion of the unhappy consciousness really should be understood in terms of freedom, for its Grail is the reconciliation of its freedom with the unchangeable. In the end, the unhappy consciousness surrenders this freedom to the mediator or minister, “truly and completely depriv[ing] itself of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom, of the actuality in which consciousness exists *for itself*” (*PS* 137/*PG* 130).<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, consciousness will only win this freedom back as it moves towards the fullness of recognition in the realm of spirit proper.

However, the doubleness of self-consciousness in the unhappy consciousness marks a partial if temporary retrieval of the problematic of recognition, and the emergence of the theme

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<sup>19</sup>The literature on Hegel’s *Phenomenology* does not contain much discussion of the freedom of the unhappy consciousness, but seems with Hegel to have forgotten that this is the explicit theme of the section. The seeming shift away from an announced schema—the unhappy consciousness’s vain effort to free itself from itself is the only explicit mention of freedom in this subsection before its surrender—is one of Hegel’s vexing habits (compare the disappearance of the paradigm of recognition from the slave’s perspective), but the attempt to trace the lost theme is usually rewarding.

of reconciliation coupled with the renewed foreshadowing of the concept of spirit also point in this direction. Hegel remarks that “the doubleness of self-consciousness within itself...is essential to the concept of spirit,” and goes on to say that despite the unhappy consciousness’s futile attempts at achieving a peaceful unity, it does exhibit the unity and difference that marks the dialectic of spirit.

Its true return into itself, or its reconciliation with itself will, however, put before us the concept of spirit that has become a living spirit and has achieved an actual existence, because in it there is already this, that as one unpartitioned consciousness, it is a doubled consciousness. (*PS* 126/*PG* 121-2)

This return [*Rückkehr*] into itself recalls the double return to self that was prescribed for mutual recognition, instead of the withdrawal [*Rückzug*] from existence that characterized stoicism and the backsliding or “relapse,” [*Zurückfallen*] into inessentiality of skepticism (*PS* 125/*PG* 121). However, the unhappy consciousness itself cannot realize this return into self, or at least it cannot grasp itself as this return, and so it struggles as much to escape itself as it does to return to itself. In Hegelian language, the unhappy consciousness is not yet this return into itself *for itself*, and so does not yet accomplish the reconciliation and freedom of spirit towards which it strains.

Since the shape of the unhappy consciousness takes up again with this language the pursuit of recognition, we must add the concept of *reconciliation* [*Versöhnung*] to what is accomplished in the fully realized process of mutual recognition. Reconciliation represents both the conscious unity or accord of the two aspects of self-consciousness and the affirmation of the integrity of each, the freedom into which they are released. Here Hegel refers to reconciliation as self-consciousness’s “true return into itself.” When he outlines the three stages in which the

unhappy consciousness experiences its relation to the unchangeable, the third stage, in which consciousness finds its own individuality *in* the unchangeable, he calls a “reconciliation”:

The first Unchangeable it knows only as the alien Being who passes judgment on the particular individual; since, secondly, the Unchangeable is a form of individuality like itself, consciousness becomes, thirdly, spirit, and experiences the joy of finding itself therein, and becomes aware of the reconciliation of its individuality with the universal. (*PS* 128/*PG* 123).

The experience of joy anticipated here is a clue missed by many interpreters, who presume that this lays out a blueprint accomplished in the conclusion of the section on the unhappy consciousness. However, the advent of joy signals that, as with the return into itself, this final stage is not attained by the unhappy consciousness for itself, and we must await the reconciliation that is accomplished once the concept of spirit confronts itself in “Morality,” “Religion” and “Absolute Knowing.” The reconciliation achieved in the “Unhappy Consciousness” remains external to this consciousness itself, the work of a mediating third. The unhappy consciousness for its part ends the section still in misery—“its enjoyment remains pain” (*PS* 138/*PG* 131).<sup>20</sup>

In this way the section on the unhappy consciousness adds another ambiguity to Hegel’s treatment of recognition. While the unity and freedom of spirit is present “for us,” it is in default “for itself.” The changeable aspect of consciousness returns to itself not so much (as was prescribed) because it has sublated what *it is in the other*—it is precisely in the other that it sees itself as changeable, arbitrary, unworthy—but because it is unable to sublimate this, its otherness.

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<sup>20</sup>John E. Russon notes the incomplete agenda of this paragraph in the remainder of the “Unhappy Consciousness” section, and says that the third development is “the proper subject matter of the rest of the book.” See “Selfhood, Conscience, and Dialectic in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 29 (1991), 533-550, especially 547-8n8.

What happens is that the other, in the person of the intermediary, the counselor, sublates the otherness of the changeable consciousness, or at least receives credit for this sublation.

Recognition, which earlier failed because it too thoroughly negated the other without allowing the other to negate itself, here fails for the opposite reason. And instead of a mutual release into freedom, we are left with the surrender and self-sacrifice (*Preisgeben, Aufopferung* and *Aufgeben*) of this very freedom, of its consciousness of being for itself.

This surrender seems to be a complete failure of what we mean by recognition, for self-consciousness does not recognize itself at all. But in fact, the ground of the sought-after unity on which the unhappy consciousness founders is already there—its own actual existence in the world as an individual consciousness whose very experience is this diremption, struggle, and sacrifice. Only we—the we of the *Phenomenology*—can see this possibility, which confirms, at least “for us,” that self-consciousness is indeed the native realm of spirit. This assurance, even the conception of spirit, escapes self-consciousness here altogether. The last pages of the section reiterate the *an sich* but not *für sich* character of this unity for the unhappy consciousness,<sup>21</sup> which is led to posit the ground of this unity in a mediation that is “in itself” as an independent third, a counselor or counsel itself (*Rat*).

With the *an sich* but not *für sich* structure, we return to a conceptual schema that emphasizes objectivity, for it was just this structure that characterized the external object of consciousness in the first three chapters. The purely subjective or negative criteria for truth

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<sup>21</sup>Miller almost always renders *an sich* here as “in principle” until the last line of the chapter, where it appears again as “in itself” (*PS* 137-8/*PG* 131). This obscures the ambiguity by which self-consciousness here takes the ground of unity to be something—counsel—that is *in itself* (*an sich*), but fails to recognize that it is *in itself* (*an sich*) this ground.



explored in “Self-consciousness”<sup>22</sup> seems to have exhausted itself without providing a solid ground for knowledge, and—within the perspective of the unhappy consciousness, for whom “the overcoming [*Aufgehobensein*] of these [the pain and futility of its thought and action] in a positive sense remains a *beyond*” (*PS* 138/*PG* 131)—the structures of thought indeed seem only to dissimulate the experience from which it lives. But the surrender of self-consciousness to reason is not a retreat to the claims of consciousness (that is, it is not logical positivism), for reason itself has the structure of self-consciousness, of an idealized self-consciousness. The external reconciliation effected by the counselor becomes objective for reason, which takes over the mediating role of the counselor as self-consciousness outside of itself.

Its truth is that which appears in the syllogism whose extremes appear to be held absolutely asunder, as the middle term which proclaims to the unchangeable consciousness that the single individual has renounced itself, and, to the individual, that the Unchangeable is for it no longer an extreme, but is reconciled with it. This middle term is the unity directly aware of both and connecting them, and is the consciousness of their unity, which it proclaims to consciousness and thereby to itself, the consciousness of the certainty of being all truth. (*PS* 139/*PG* 132)

At the beginning of the examination of simple consciousness, in sense-certainty, consciousness considered itself to be in immediate and receptive contact with external truth (*PS* 58/*PG* 63). At the beginning of self-consciousness, the I overarched “the whole expanse of the sensuous world” and was its truth (*PS* 104-5/*PG* 103-4). Now, as we begin the examination of reason, self-consciousness is the dynamic middle term of the syllogism that connects itself and its object. Reason proclaims that the unchangeable consciousness is “reconciled” with the individual consciousness, thus healing the rift that haunted the unhappy consciousness. Reason

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<sup>22</sup>See the second paragraph of the “Reason” chapter (*PS* 139/*PG* 132) for a summary of this pervasive negativity in the structures of self-consciousness.

proclaims this reconciliation not by seeking the external truth of an objective world, nor by seeking its own truth within itself at the expense of the world. Rather, it seeks *its* truth in the objective world. In reason, “the *existence* [*Bestehen*] of the world becomes for self-consciousness its own *truth* and *presence* [*Gegenwart*]; it is certain of experiencing only itself therein” (*PS* 140/*PG* 133). Truth has an objective shape, the constancy of the world, but this shape embodies the truth of idealized self-consciousness.

The complete program of mutual recognition laid out for us at the beginning of “Lordship and Bondage” has failed, yet there is here a surrogate reconciliation, a rational reconciliation. Self-consciousness as reason no longer seeks to recognize itself in another self-consciousness facing it, but in the objective world. What is thus posited in the conceptual scheme of reason is an objective mediation—an *Aufhebung*—of the essentially spiritual movement of recognition and reconciliation. It is *as reason* that self-consciousness proposes to be reconciled with its other. The surrender to reason is not a suppression of self-consciousness, nor of the drive of human nature towards agreement and “an achieved community of minds” (*PS* 43/*PG* 48), for “reason appeals to the *self-consciousness* of each and every consciousness” (*PS* 141/*PG* 134). Yet it does place this relationship between self-consciousnesses in an essentially objective context. This objective context will have to be transcended or superseded in turn, for reason of itself will not attain to the spiritual substantiality in which alone self-consciousness can recognize itself as spirit.

The long pilgrimage of reason through observation and activity, individuality and rational legislation, returns from this external objectivity to self-consciousness in the plural form of spirit: “Essence that is *in* and *for itself*, and which is at the same time actual as consciousness and aware of itself, this is *spirit*” (*PS* 263/*PG* 250). And only with the emergence of spirit proper—the We

that is I and the I that is We—will Hegel begin to develop the structure that makes it possible to return to the unfulfilled project of mutual recognition and thus build an intersubjective bridge over the gulf of experience.

## 2. The Face to Face Relation

Levinas considered Hegel's account of the quest for recognition one of the signal moments in the history of philosophy, one of the moments when the exteriority of ethics has interrupted the ontological drive towards unity and totality,<sup>23</sup> but his account of the face to face relation is not simply a commentary on or revision of Hegel's theory of recognition. Although both thinkers find that the encounter with the other person is necessary to ground the freedom of thought and the possibility of truth, for Hegel this necessity stems from the failure of the object of desire to reflect back to self-consciousness its own freedom and absolute negativity, while for Levinas, the possibility of thought interrupts the complacency of enjoyment as the shock of a wholly new, unforeseeable energy.

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<sup>23</sup>See Emmanuel Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, 185 (cited above, n). See also *La mort et le temps*, the text of a course offered by Levinas in 1975/6, where he reflects on the relation between death and time, using as a starting point texts of Heidegger, Kant, Hegel, and Ernst Bloch. Levinas aptly summarizes the importance of mutual recognition for Hegel when he writes, "Each individual consciousness is at the same time for itself and for the other. It could not be for itself except in the measure that it is for the other. Each requires recognition by the other to be itself, but it must also recognize the other, for the recognition by the other does not count unless the other is itself recognized." He goes on to explain the transition from this confrontation of two self-consciousnesses to what Hegel terms "spirit" proper, which occurs when "this reciprocal recognition of consciousnesses is maintained and transcended (*aufgehoben*) in its accords [*rappports*] and its conflicts." (Emmanuel Levinas, *La mort et le temps*, ed. Jaques Rolland, [Paris: l'Herne, 1991; Livre de Poche edition, Paris: Librairie Général Française, 1992], 91.).

The quest for recognition in the *Phenomenology* arises from the failure or dissatisfaction of desire, and instills the hope that the process of recognition can assure self-consciousness that, in its dealings with its life-world, it is in possession of its own truth, that it exists as true in and for itself. Self-consciousness wants both to assert its own independence and to have that independence acknowledged or confirmed. But the quest for recognition, although it leads to labor and thought and devotion, to self-sacrifice and reason and eventually to spirit—to society in family and city, people and nation, to morality and religion and comprehended history—is perpetually animated by another energy, the project of cognition and the search for a warranted ground for truth. Self-consciousness realizes that if it can achieve the recognition of its being in and for itself, it will have vindicated not only its activity as desire, but the whole sphere of its consciousness: sensation, perception, and understanding. It will have established itself as the truth of all these moments. Thus the relationship with the other appears from the first as a moment of consciousness's quest for certainty, a factor in the formation of natural consciousness to the standpoint of self-knowing spirit.

The relation to the other that Levinas calls for is oriented in a different direction. Its energy does not come from the I and its projects but from the other whose face and word interrupt the solitude of enjoyment, interrupt even the exceptional possibility of representational thought which the shelter of the dwelling occasions and nourishes. In fact, according to Levinas, it is the ineluctable obsession with the other that first gives birth to the I as a *self*. For him, the self is not constituted as a subject in search of certainty, but as the subject of responsibility, the one who must be itself for the other. Nor does the other appear first for Levinas as *another* self-consciousness, a doubling of a self-consciousness that would already be for itself. The relationship between the same and the other is not accomplished by mirroring self-

consciousness's own intrinsic structure. While most philosophical ethics construe responsibility as an event that draws self-consciousness out of itself, according to Levinas, although responsibility certainly does call the I to the other, it also throws the I of enjoyment back on itself as a subject for the first time. Surprised in responsibility, the I recurs to itself as the one who must respond.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology* the I of desire is also turned back on itself, but in a movement that is proposed as affirmation and recognition, not accusation and responsibility. The education of natural consciousness makes the transition from desire to recognition when self-consciousness takes up its other as another self-consciousness and thus as an occasion of self-certainty. This taking-as is, we have seen, a movement essential to thought and the guarantee of the continuity of experience. Here it returns self-consciousness to itself by furnishing a mirror, as it were, that reflects back to self-consciousness its own being-for-self and need for recognition. However, in Levinas's schema, only later will the I be called to think of the other as another self-consciousness, when it meets the other in the presence of the third person and undertakes the common project of justice. First I meet the other face to face, in responsibility. In the face to face relation the other does not come out of the I; the other faces me and speaks.

#### a. The Face of the Other

What does it mean to say that the other *faces* me? It would seem natural to assume that the face of the other person is presented to perception, to vision, and thus subject to the processes of cognition and consciousness that operate here. But Levinas maintains that the face is not wholly given to vision. The face the other presents is not like the side an object presents to the view, a side that is correlative of all the other possible adumbrations that are co-intended and that

make up the horizontal consciousness of the thing. To be sure, the face as an image stands in for the whole person, a function that makes possible the whole modern apparatus of identification. But the face is not wholly this image, this phenomenon, and Levinas writes that “it is the very collapse of phenomenality. Not because it is too brutal to appear, but because it is in a sense too weak, non-phenomenon because less than a phenomenon” (*OB 88/AE 112*).<sup>24</sup> Less than a manifestation of the other, a display, the face is an approach, an appeal. In her face the other comes towards me or shrinks away.

If the face the other presents to the same were only an image, a form in which she made her appearance, it would succumb to the hegemony effected by the same in intentionality. The face would be disclosed in the light of the gaze cast upon it, or in the neutral light of being, “the luminous horizon where [the existent] has a silhouette, but has lost its face” (*TI 45/15*).<sup>25</sup> But the face of the other, while essential to the enterprise of cognition, comes to that enterprise from beyond the horizons in which being is disclosed to human thought. More than a form or an image, “face” [*visage*] designates “the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*” (*TI 50/21*); it thus teaches the idea of the infinite. “The face of the

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<sup>24</sup>Is the face *sublime*? Kant defines the aesthetic experience of the sublime as the presentation of the unrepresentable, the summoning of my powers to represent a reality of which they are incapable. This summons awakens me to the dignity of my vocation as a human being—aspiration despite finitude. But the face calls my powers into question in a different way, not as a phenomenon exceeding them in magnitude or dynamism. Perhaps this is another reason why Levinas is right in saying that the face is “less than a phenomenon.” See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §§23-29, “Analytic of the Sublime.”

<sup>25</sup>After *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas rarely used the term “existent” to refer to the other, who exceeds being. The neutral light of being is always, for Levinas, a reference to Heidegger and a criticism of his thought. The face announces the difference, for Levinas, between the otherness of the other and the otherness that being (*Sein*) might be said to have in distinction from beings (*Seiendes*).

Other,” Levinas says, “at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me.... It does not manifest itself by these qualities, but *καθ’ αὐτό* [of itself<sup>26</sup>]. It *expresses itself*” (*TI* 51/21). More than an image, the face is always already language, expression. More than a form appearing to consciousness (which would thus already “intend” this form, according to the Husserlian paradigm) or a disclosure in the light of being, the face as expression precisely exceeds the modes in which it appears..

The face is a living presence; it is expression. The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated. The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse. He who manifests himself comes, according to Plato’s expression, to his own assistance. He at each instant undoes the form he presents. (*TI* 66/37)<sup>27</sup>

The face does not contain or signal a message, but is the very attendance of the person to every sign he gives, every word he utters. If the face appeals to thought, as face and expression it already contests the prerogative of the thought to which it appeals.

This insistence on the face as the break-up of form and expression as an originary excession of the image offers a strong protest against Husserlian phenomenology. Later in

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<sup>26</sup>Peperzak translates *καθ’ αὐτό* as “being as it is in itself” and calls it a “Platonizing expression” (*To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* [West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993], 159n26), related also by Levinas to the Kantian “thing in itself” (see *TI* 181/156-157). But *καθ’ αὐτό* seems to me more pertinently an Aristotelian expression, where it is used in the linguistic sense that Levinas evokes or recoups; for example, in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle says that “The essence of each thing is that which it is said to be *καθ’ αὐτό*” (Book Z, 1029b14). Such predication *per se* is contrasted to predication *κατα συμβεβηκός* (*per accidens* or per qualities in general). Peperzak does note that Levinas regularly misses the aspirant on *καθ’ αὐτό*, regularly rendering it *καθ’ αὐτό*.

<sup>27</sup>This allusion to Plato, repeated often in *Totality and Infinity*, is to the *Phaedrus*. There, “coming to the assistance of one’s word” does not simply signal the superiority of speech to writing, as is often asserted, but the superiority of dialectical thought—“discourse accompanied by knowledge”—to both rhetoric and writing. Written in the soul of the listener, dialectical thought is “the living, breathing discourse of the one who knows,” and thus “discourse capable of helping itself” (276a, 276e); see Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995).

*Totality and Infinity*, section III.A: “Sensibility and the Face,” Levinas’s preoccupation with the non-phenomenality of the face is again largely a quarrel with Husserl (although Heidegger is the most frequently named). What we must question is the extension of these arguments to Hegel’s analysis of the encounter with the other. Already in Hegel the problem of the encounter with the other person is not thematized as a perceptual or constitutional problem of distinguishing person from thing, other subjectivity from body-object. In the *Phenomenology*, the other is from the first the other person.

Nevertheless, the other from whom self-consciousness seeks recognition and whom it must also recognize is curiously faceless and voiceless. In spite of Hegel’s assertion that the advent of the concept of spirit ushers us into the “spiritual daylight of the present,” the struggle to the death and the encounter between the master and the slave in Hegel’s section on the independence and dependence of self-consciousness transpire as strangely nocturnal or hallucinatory events. The two self-consciousnesses neither face nor speak to one another.<sup>28</sup> Hegel does not examine the face in the *Phenomenology* except as the penultimate dead-end of observing reason, and, despite the discussion of the divergence of language and meaning in “Sense-certainty,” does not broach the question of speaking to the other until Chapter VI.B, on “Culture.”<sup>29</sup> The two self-consciousnesses “confront” or oppose one another [*es tritt ein Individuum einem Individuum gegenüber auf*] (PS 113/PG 111) as living objects, shapes

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<sup>28</sup>Sartre adds the objectifying glance of the other to the struggle to the death, but this hardly introduces the expression *καθ’ αὐτό* or the self-revelation of the face to the encounter of the same with the other. See *Being and Nothingness*, 252f.

<sup>29</sup>See below, f.



assumed by life, and they struggle to or towards death. This confrontation is neither the welcome of the face into the home nor the importunity of the naked, destitute stranger interrupting enjoyment. It is the raw confrontation of desire, the confrontation of the concept of being-for-self with itself.<sup>30</sup>

But let us trace further Levinas's account of the relation with the face before attempting to adjudicate whose version is "correct." To say that the face is expression □□□□ □□□□ distinguishes it first of all from expression according to or as something else, which properly speaking is not expression at all, but interpretation, thematization. Levinas contrasts the face as expression with the phenomenality it transcends, with the phenomenality of works one might produce and from which one's being or essence might be read off or deciphered. Here, "phenomenality" designates "a *mode of being* where nothing is ultimate, where everything is a sign, a present absencing itself from its presence" (TI 178/153), whereas in the epiphany of the face, the one who expresses himself comes to the assistance of this expression, attends her revelation. The face makes possible an encounter "in person."

Of things we ask "What is it?" but confronted by the face of the other we must ask not "What?" but "Who?" This distinction is important for discerning the significant difference between Levinas and Hegel in their descriptions of the primordial contact with the other, even though Levinas himself misleads us about that difference. He writes:

To this quest [*what?* or *quid?*] corresponds a content, sensible or intellectual, a "comprehension" by a concept. ... This content cannot be detached from the context,

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<sup>30</sup>See Robert Bernasconi's article, "Levinas Face to Face—with Hegel," in the *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 13 (October 1982): 267-276. Bernasconi agrees that the master-slave dialectic, by itself, does not supply the ethical encounter with the other that Levinas finds in the face to face relation, and points to the later section entitled "Conscience," where the program of mutual recognition is fulfilled, as the better point of comparison.

from the system in which the works themselves are integrated, and it answers to the question by its place in the system. To ask *what* is to ask *as what*: it is not to take the manifestation for itself. (TI 177/152)

The words “comprehension,” “concept,” and “system” all seem to indicate that here Levinas has Hegel and not only Husserl and Heidegger in mind. On the previous page, he had written that “the product of labor is not an inalienable possession, and it can be usurped by the Other” into the “anonymity of money” and the “tyranny of the State” (TI 176/151). A little later Levinas makes this allusion even more apparent:

It is only in approaching the Other that I attend to myself. This does not mean that my existence is constituted in the thought of others. An existence called objective, such as is reflected in the thought of others, and by which I count in universality, in the State, in history, in the totality, does not express me, but precisely dissimulates me. (TI 178/153)

All Levinas’s favorite Hegel signs are here—“State,” “history,” “totality,” “universality”—plus an implicit reference to the *Phenomenology*’s account of recognition itself.

If all this seems clearly intended as an allusion to Hegel, whose Hegel is it?<sup>31</sup> It is a long and dubious step from the servile self-consciousness bringing the master the things it has worked on to the appropriation of this work by the state, history, and totality. The labor of the slave consciousness is a movement in which it works its independence precisely because it gets rid of inessential existence with the thing and retreats into “the simple essentiality of thought” (PS 121/PG 117). An account of “works” as the concretization of an individual’s “true being” would perhaps fit into the discussion of active reason, which, knowing that “thinghood is spirit’s very

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<sup>31</sup>One suspects that Levinas has conflated Hegel with some of his Marxist interpreters—not only Kojève, but the whole complex of Hegelianism (left or right) in France at mid-century—as well as hermeneutical theory generally. And although Levinas does not often mention Sartre by name, the phrase, “that my existence is constituted in the thought of the others” certainly suggests that Sartre, and Sartre’s reading of Hegel, may also be part of what Levinas has put together here.

*being-for-self*,” “knows itself to be reality in the form of an individuality that directly expresses *itself*, ...whose aim and object are only this expressing of itself” (PS 217/ PG 198). And the notion of “works” being interpreted according to the general social and representational context would certainly seem to require a consideration of “Culture.” Nevertheless, the distinction between the questions “what?” and “who?” can be used to differentiate between Levinas and Hegel without reducing Hegel to the caricature Levinas presents.

The question put by self-consciousness in its quest for recognition is indeed not “who?” but “what?” or “as what?” Self-consciousness seeks to know that, as pure being-for-self, it is assured of a complete comprehension of the world. This it will accomplish if it can grasp its object not as the fluid organic process of life but as “the universal independent essence [*Wesen*] in which negation is present as absolute negation, ...the genus as *self-consciousness*” (PS 110/PG 108). Thus, the quest for recognition is not, as Kojève has it, a struggle for prestige,<sup>32</sup> but an attempt by self-consciousness to know or re-cognize [*anerkennen*] its own nature or essence in the other that confronts it. Each self-consciousness *exposes* [*darstellt*<sup>33</sup>] itself to the other “in the form of pure being-for-self, or as self consciousness”(PS 113/PG 111) and thus “does not *see* the other as an essential being, but in the other *sees* its own self” (PS 111/PG 108, emphasis added). What Hegel emphasizes is the exposition and apprehension of the conceptual shape that has come forward as a ground for the unity of experience and thus truth. The problem, from a Levinasian viewpoint, is not merely that self-consciousness interprets the other “subjectively,” in

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<sup>32</sup>Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 7, 45.

<sup>33</sup>Miller translates this and its noun form (*Darstellung*) variously as “present/ presentation” and “expose/exposition.” The more literal “expose” (i.e., “put out there”) captures better the sense of “staking one’s life” in the struggle to death.

terms of its self, but that it *sees* both the other and itself *as* exemplifications of a conceptual schema. It does not ask the other, “Who are you?” but “What are you?” or even, “What am I?”

This is why there is no face glimpsed in the confrontation Hegel presents. The face would answer to the “who?” but the concept “pure being for self” answers to “what?” or “as what?” Self-consciousness in search of independence takes the other as a shape of consciousness like itself, as a promise of certainty. The struggle for recognition elicits no expression in Levinas’s sense of coming to the assistance of one’s own word, attending one’s presence, although self-consciousness’s “exposition” seems close and suggests a missed opportunity, an elision of the ethical moment in the adventure of knowing. This exposition is specifically exposition *as* the concept of pure being-for-self, but it is accomplished in person. Yet Hegel simultaneously acknowledges this personal presence and seems to render it all but null:

And it is only through staking one’s life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, nor its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it that could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-self*. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. (PS 114/PG 111)<sup>34</sup>

The point is unmistakable: what is at stake here is the truth of developing consciousness’s *conception* of itself as “pure being-for-self,” and not the encounter with the other as other.

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<sup>34</sup>Hegel’s emphasis on the recognition of the *person* here is curious. It cannot yet refer explicitly to the bearer of rights and responsibilities who shows up at the end of “True Spirit” as the abstract individuality of “Legal Status.” This shape is related by Hegel not to the struggle over life and death, but to the abstraction of stoicism from its conceptual world (PS 290f/PG 260f). In any case, *person* here seems to refer to a merely inessential aspect of individuality.

Ultimately, the encounter with the other as presented throughout the section on self-consciousness is situated already within the context of the experience of consciousness: I do not face the other but test my own conception of self-consciousness and its independence or dependence against the recognition I receive from the other. It is this conceptual testing that allows the experience of the other to be taken back up within self-consciousness in the independent shapes of stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness.

The face to face encounter with the other does not, however, go wholly missing from Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and we will see it return later in the section on conscience, at the end of "Morality." We must also observe that Hegel's failure to consider the face to face encounter of the same and the other in the dialectic of self-consciousness does not at all invalidate the experience that consciousness undergoes here. The pursuit of recognition through the struggle to the death and the master-slave dialectic need not explain the whole of human interaction, and Hegel never makes the claim that it does. If it is valid only for one aspect, one possibility of human self-understanding—and this seems undeniable, given its reception—there is every justification in the world for Hegel to use it as one of the shapes of consciousness that spirit traverses in its formation to absolute knowing. It is the full conception of spirit and not a half-baked one that Levinas must show to dissimulate the experience from which it lives. What is at issue is whether the face to face encounter precedes but eludes the conceptual schema of mutual recognition as its unassumable condition and provocation, or whether it develops dialectically out of spirit's self-generating quest for certainty and wholeness.

## b. Allergy and Peace

When Levinas criticizes traditional ontology by contrasting expression καθ' αὐτό with the inexorable impulse of philosophical thought to approach the other through a third term that purports to be neutral, he seems also to have Hegel in mind. “This third term,” he writes, “may appear as a concept thought, [where] the individual that exists abdicates into the general that is thought.” It may appear as sensation, “in which objective quality and subjective affection are merged,” or it may appear as the neutral light of *being* that Heidegger distinguished from *beings* (TI 42/12-13). In each case, the effect is what Levinas identifies as ontology: “a reduction of the other to the same by the interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being” (TI 43/13). The first reductive possibility suggests Hegel with “concept” and echoes what Levinas had noted in Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig’s critique of Hegel—that the existing individual should not be made to disappear within the impersonal system. Later in this section, Levinas explicitly recalls Hegel with the catchwords “State” and “totality”: “[Ontology] issues in the State and in the non-violence of the totality.... Truth, which should reconcile persons, here exists anonymously”(TI 46/16). Levinas clearly numbers Hegel among those who reduce the other to the same in conceptual and political unity.

Again, we could challenge this reading of Hegel and seek to exonerate him from Levinas’s criticism, but this might cause us to undermine the ground on which these two thinkers can meet. The issue here is not whether Levinas is justified in implicating Hegel in state tyranny, nor whether Hegel escapes even the ontological critique by insisting that the true concept is no neutral term, not even one that is simply generated by the contradiction that it holds

in dynamic unity, but the self-mediating movement or soul of this very opposition.<sup>35</sup> The issue is rather Levinas's assertion of a relation with otherness that refuses unity altogether and does so peacefully. The relation with the face that Levinas calls for in contesting the prerogative of the same, of unity, is a "non-allergic relation with alterity, ... where power, by essence murderous of the other, becomes, faced with the other and 'against all good sense,' the impossibility of murder, the consideration of the other, or justice" (*TI* 47/18).

This passage suggests that Hegel's allergy to alterity is inherent in the negativity of self-consciousness—which is power or *pouvoir*—and exemplified in the life-and-death struggle, pitting one self-consciousness against another. Enmity towards the other seems immediate and instinctive, a reaction both fearful and menacing, essentially egoistic.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, self-consciousness begins, Hegel says, as "simple being-for-self, self-equal through the exclusion *from itself* of everything *other* [*durch das Ausschließen alles andern aus sich*]" (*PS* 113/*PG* 110).<sup>37</sup> When self-consciousness comes out from itself and seeks recognition by being

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<sup>35</sup>See the *Science of Logic*, 834-838 (*GW*.12.245-248).

<sup>36</sup>While Levinas could derive this from Hegel alone, I suspect Sartre's reading of Hegel is again in the background here. In *Being and Nothingness*, developing his notion of relations with the other from Hegel's account of recognition, he writes: "Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (364). In later writings Sartre does acknowledge the need to affirm positively the freedom of the other. See Thomas Anderson's, "The Obligation to Will the Freedom of Others, According to Jean-Paul Sartre," in *The Question of the Other*, ed. Arleen B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 63-74. Christina Howells notes such a shift as well, and attributes the possibility of rapprochement between the thought of Sartre and Levinas to the former's renunciation of Hegel: "*L'Être et le néant* is still excessively Hegelian in terms of its conception of relations with the Other primarily as conflict." See her "Sartre and Levinas," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 95.

<sup>37</sup>Miller does not reproduce the emphasis in Hegel's text and uses "else" instead of "other" for *andern*.

for another self-consciousness what it is for itself, its essential negativity towards otherness assumes a double shape of death: seeking the death of the other and staking its own life in this endeavor. However, what Hegel emphasizes is not a latent animosity manifesting itself but that “each seeks the death of the other” because this is the double action of self-exposition “insofar as it the action of the *other*”(PS 113/PG 111), while risking one’s own life is this action insofar as it is one’s own deed. There is no denying that this contest would entail mutually assured destruction pushed to its conclusion, yet the incitement is not hatred of the other, but, as we have seen, the affirmation of a certain self-conception. The double (or doubly-doubled) violence is inherent in the negativity of the two self-consciousnesses, which “must engage in this fight [*Kampf*], for they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth” (PS 114/PG 111). Each realizes that attachment to its own being, except as “a vanishing moment,” will falsify its self-conception as “pure being-for-self” or thoroughgoing negativity. The “other” is not feared or fought as an obstacle to the evident positivity of a self—or at least the other is not this way “for us”—but rather apperceived as both the focus and the energy of one’s own self-transcendence. This is indeed the lesson that is learned throughout “Self-consciousness,” and developed further in “Reason,” the lesson that must be relearned at the more concrete level of “Spirit.”

What this means is that the dialectic of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* might be said to be *allergic* in another sense—in the etymological sense of the term. It is an activity or actuality (*ἐνεργεία*) that generates its own other (*αὐθός*), as well as an activity and actuality *energized* by this *other*. Ultimately neither fearful of alterity nor scandalized by it—that is, not *allergic* in either of these senses, like Schelling’s absolute—Hegelian spirit lives both in and from alterity. As even the incomplete recognition attempted by self-consciousness in the life-and-death



struggle shows, spirit's ultimate unity is born of its experience of "pure self-recognition in absolute otherness," in which alone "it lives and moves and has its being." As *en-ergeia*, spirit is *all-ergeia* through and through.

Levinas knows this meaning of "allergy" and includes it in what he imputes to Hegel, although he never divorces allergy from the privilege of unity and antipathy to alterity. Later in *Totality and Infinity* he writes:

The relation with the [absolutely] other...is not exposed to the allergy that afflicts the same in a totality, upon which the Hegelian dialectic rests. The other is not for reason a scandal which launches it into dialectical movement, but the first rational teaching, the condition for all teaching. The alleged scandal of alterity presupposes the tranquil identity of the same, a freedom sure of itself which is exercised without scruples, and to whom the foreigner [*l'étranger*] brings only constraint and limitation. (*TI* 203/178)<sup>38</sup>

Here, Hegel's dialectic is allergic to alterity because it is predicated upon unity; consciousness already comprises, unbeknownst to itself, every other it encounters. What is other always *appears* to consciousness as a challenge that must be overcome—that is, *aufgehoben* and rendered *true*—even when what is other to consciousness is consciousness itself.

Levinas's accusation that Hegel presumes "the tranquil identity of the same, a freedom sure of itself" is not without warrant. At the end of the *Phenomenology* the concept releases itself from its logical form—the form of its "self"—into the other-burdened first shape of consciousness—sense-certainty—by virtue of its "supreme freedom and assurance" (*PS* 491/*PG* 432), and at the end of the *Science of Logic* the idea "freely releases itself in its absolute self-

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<sup>38</sup>The "scandal" of reason or philosophy is an allusion not to Hegel but to Kant's remark in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* about idealism's acceptance of the existence of external things merely on faith (à la Descartes). See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1996), B xl, note (citing the standard original edition page numbers).

assurance and inner poise [*in sich ruhend*]” into nature (*SL* 843/*GW*.12.253). One could say that the absolute idea at the culmination of Hegel’s system is indeed allergic to otherness or scandalized by it if it were not already supremely invulnerable to such strife.

Most of the *Phenomenology*—and most of the *Logic* as well—seems to present a different picture. Just before Hegel asserts the concept’s “supreme freedom and assurance,” he describes spirit as “its own restless process [*Unruhe*] of superseding itself, or *negativity*” (*PS* 491/*PG* 432). Here the dynamic meaning of allergy—*all-ergeia*—seems more appropriate. Yet, if we look closely, it is precisely the “other” that is missing from this restless negativity. The upsurge of alterity is, in the end, not the shock of encounter, the face of the other, but spirit’s “own restless process of superseding itself,” incompletely understood until this end. Rather than “self-recognition in absolute otherness,” spirit shows itself to be “Absolute self-recognition in otherness.” Spirit is *all-ergeia*, dynamized by the other, only because this other is already comprehended in spirit’s *energeia*, the negativity and actuality of its self-movement.

Thus, no matter how dynamic the unity to which it aspires, Hegel’s dialectic is afflicted by this ambiguous allergy to the other, always reducing alterity to the immanent self-determination of spirit. By contrast, the peacefulness of the face and expression is a point that Levinas insists on from the very beginning of *Totality and Infinity*, when he identifies war with ontology and totality. But is this peacefulness and healing of allergy itself unambiguous? It sometimes seems hard to square with the interruption and critique that the other brings to bear on the same. Already in the preface Levinas speaks of the relation with the other and the idea of the infinite as a kind of violence, “the violence which, for a mind [*esprit*], consists in welcoming a being to which it is inadequate” (*TI* 25/xiii). He further acknowledges the paradox of peace and interruption, even disruption, when he says of the non-allergic relation with the Other that it “is

not pre-philosophical, for it does not do violence to the I, is not imposed upon it brutally from the outside, despite itself, or unbeknown to it, as an opinion; more exactly, *it is imposed upon the I beyond all violence by a violence that calls it entirely into question*" (TI 47/18; emphasis added). This hyperbolic violence-beyond-all-violence inheres in the interruption of the face as face, an attendance overflowing its presence as image or form, an attendance coming to the assistance of its word.

Although the relation with the other is said to be "fundamentally pacific," it is in this very relation that the I "discovers itself as a violence" (TI 171/46). Clearly Levinas does not mean that no disruption or confrontation occurs when the other faces me and speaks. The face of the other disturbs the complacency of the I, otherwise happy in the satisfaction of its needs, but it does so without affronting it, without threat. The face of the other does not oppose to me a freedom like mine and incite a struggle for supremacy and independence: "Rather than countering [the freedom of the I] by upsurging on the same plane as it, [the other] speaks to it, that is, shows himself in expression, in the face, and comes from on high" (TI 203/178). This expression effects a "critique" of the I's freedom, asks this freedom to justify itself, and this is why the I "discovers itself as a violence." Freedom is shamed in its naive spontaneity and summoned to the work of justice, not thwarted by an alien power and impelled to stake its life in its defense. But in this way too, the face of the other remains peaceful: "The presence of the Other...does not clash with freedom, but invests it" (TI 88/60). To invest my freedom is not to demonstrate that it has an absolute warrant. It is to situate that freedom not in the stoic's independence of thought nor in the skeptic's agile agnosticism, nor even in the prison of the

unhappy consciousness, but before the face of the other, subject to her critique, called to responsibility and justice.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, despite this affirmation of the essential peacefulness of the face, there is a profound relation between violence and the face, which still interrupts with “a violence beyond all violence.” It is not simply that Levinas frequently argues for the peacefulness of the face in a context that contests Hegel’s thought and thus enacts its own violence.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the face of the other initiates the ethical relation, in which alone violence signifies. When Levinas argues that the relation between the I and the Other is not one of negativity, apparently alluding to Hegel’s account of the life-and-death struggle, he writes: “Total negation, of which murder is the temptation and the attempt, refers to an antecedent relation” (*TI* 194/168). This antecedent relation with the face is an “ethical resistance”—the “resistance of what has no resistance”—and it forbids murder, for it announces “the purely ethical impossibility of this temptation and attempt” (*TI* 199/173). This prohibition and paradoxical “resistance of what has no resistance” recall the “violence beyond all violence” that inaugurates the possibility of peaceful relations.

Murder is impossible because it “still aims at a sensible datum, and yet finds itself before a datum whose being cannot be *suspended* by an appropriation” (*TI* 198/172), a phrase that

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<sup>39</sup>Levinas’s discussion here of “The Investiture of Freedom, or Critique” contrasts this ethical investiture with the “for itself” of the subject, which “in knowing or representing itself...possesses itself, dominates itself, extends its identity to what of itself comes to refute this identity. This imperialism of the same is the whole essence of freedom” (*TI* 87/59). This again suggests an opposition to Sartre as well as Hegel, to whom Levinas turns immediately: “The I can indeed, to justify itself, enter upon a different course: it can endeavor to apprehend itself within a totality” (*TI* 87/59).

<sup>40</sup>This is the crux of Derrida’s argument in “Violence and Metaphysics” (see above, p. 14f). Incidentally, although this in no way refutes Derrida, the context of Levinas’s assertions about peacefulness often also suggests Plato. E.g., “Commerce with the idea of infinity does not offend like opinion; it does not limit a mind in a way inadmissible to a philosopher” (*TI* 171/146).

suggests Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Yet if the impossibility of murder were only discovered in the projected failure of determinate negation, we would remain within the framework of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which sees that the struggle between self-consciousnesses, if it actually ends in death, "is an abstract negation, not the negation coming from consciousness, which supersedes in such a way as to preserve and maintain what is superseded, and consequently survives its own supersession" (*PS* 114-115/*PG* 112). The *ethical* impossibility of murder despite the vulnerability of the other to the flight of the bullet and the point of the knife is expressed by the nudity of the face, by the other's infinite transcendence to the projects of negation and appropriation. In this infinite transcendence the resistance and violence of the face are not "real" but precisely ethical. At the same time, the advent of the face and its ethical transcendence condition the temptation and attempt of total negation that seeks the death of the other: "The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill" (*TI* 198/172). If the face of the other gives the command, "Do not kill," it also transposes the determinate negation of otherness involved in the projects of cognition into a new key and makes murder an ethical possibility. The face to face inaugurates an ethical relation in which violence and murder have a signification not comprehended in the ruin of certainty and knowing. There is only ethical violence. No violence is purely objective, no matter how thoroughly it might reduce its victims to things. It is the face of the other, with its violence beyond all violence, that introduces the possibility of violence into my world.

These observations about murder, whose possibility appears simultaneously with its impossibility, are echoed in *Totality and Infinity*'s reflections on war and peace. The first part of the book had firmly linked war with the violence of ontology and the totality, and suggested that

this is carried out by politics and the state, which inscribes all difference in “the non-violence of the totality” (*TI* 46/16). Then, in Section II.C: “The Ethical Relation and Time,” Levinas writes:

The exclusion of violence by beings susceptible of being integrated into a totality is not equivalent to peace. Totality absorbs the multiplicity of beings, which peace implies. Only beings capable of war can rise to peace. War like peace presupposes beings structured otherwise than as parts of a totality. (*TI* 222/197)

This does not mean that Levinas has changed his mind and that Hegel’s ontological system is not violent, only that it is non-violent by its own account. It suggests that the very reduction of violence in the Hegelian system to the play of contradiction, to unity under construction, is a misrepresentation or dissimulation of the ethical situation in which violence and war occur. To admit the possibility of real violence, Hegel would have to admit the possibility of a signification outside the system. Because, for Hegel, every rupture is recuperated or remembered (*erinnert*) within consciousness on its way to absolute knowing, the ethical dimension of these ruptures is elided, the dimension in which alone violence signifies.

But Levinas’s juxtaposition of war and peace, murder and hospitality, the dawning of ethical possibility in a violence beyond all violence, mean that “fundamentally pacific” is the wrong way to describe the relation with the face, for it implies a serenity and an equanimity to the encounter that his more telling descriptions belie. Peace will turn out to be as dynamic as war. The encounter with the other is never far from struggle, although it begins with a revelation that is offered and not imposed. Still, at times in *Totality and Infinity* (but not in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*) Levinas will exaggerate the tranquility of the peace that the face brings. He says, “The face threatens the eventuality of a struggle, but this threat does not exhaust the epiphany of infinity, does not formulate its first word. War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the Other; it does not represent the first word of the

encounter” (TI 199/174). The problem here is the identification of struggle and war. Earlier he had described the face to face in terms that included struggle: the face is “the frank presence of an existent that can lie...without being able to dissimulate his frankness as an interlocutor, always struggling openly [*luttant toujours à visage découvert*]” (TI 66/38). This is not the conflict of equals, but the disturbance of ethical responsibility, of responding to the other.

Levinas concludes one section on the peacefulness of the face by writing: “I do not struggle with a faceless god, but I respond to his expression, his revelation” (TI 197/171). Ironically, this affirmation of revelation prior to struggle seems to be contradicted not by the Greek text of philosophy, but by the Hebrew story of Jacob wrestling all night with an unknown adversary (*Gen 32:24-32*). The opponent eventually dislocates Jacob’s hip and asks to be released, but Jacob refuses unless the man blesses him. The stranger gives Jacob a new name, Israel, saying: “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed” (v. 28); but when Jacob asks the stranger’s name, he receives only a blessing in reply. Jacob names the place of this encounter Peniel, and says: “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved” (v. 30).<sup>41</sup> One wonders whether such a struggle or striving is not from the first required by the face to face relation, instead of being merely an eventuality that threatens; for Jacob’s wrestling match is not unambiguously a response to a prior and gratuitous revelation. Levinas’s own meditation on the Jacob story in *Beyond the Verse*, where he sees it as a model of Talmudic interpretation and writes: “The

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<sup>41</sup>The Oxford edition of *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), glosses the name *Israel*: “*The one who strives with God or God strives,*” and *Peniel*: “*The face of God.*”

Talmud is the struggle with the Angel”—as well as his argument for arguing with God in “Loving the Torah More than God”—both view such contentiousness as proof against ideology, but no less ethical for that.<sup>42</sup>

### c. Sensibility, Substitution, and the Face

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* Levinas characterizes the advent of the other less in terms of the epiphany of the face and expression and more as sensibility, obsession, proximity, and substitution—as subjectivity. These austere, even severe tropes indicate a relation that is decidedly not pacific, although it is still peaceful and non-violent, that is, predicated not on the conflict of freedoms competing on the same plane, but on the receptivity to an other that remains absolute in this relation. These tropes of sensibility recall the insomnia occasioned by the anonymous *il y a* but this time on an ethical plane, obsessing the same, now characterized as the one-for-the-other, with an infinite ethical responsibility. Now, instead of delineating the face to face discourse of expression and generosity, Levinas evokes an implacability that goes all the way to persecution: “The one is exposed to the other as a skin is exposed to what wounds it, as a cheek is offered to the smiter” (*OB 49/AE 63*). These images introduce a dynamic that is not allergy, but animation and inspiration, a peace that lives by provocation.

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<sup>42</sup>The unnamed opponent in the Jacob story is sometimes called an angel, thus a pure spirit and symbolic of the danger of ideology. *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 78. “Loving the Torah more than God” appears in *Difficult Freedom*, 142-145, as well as in Frans Josef van Beeck’s *Loving the Torah More than God: Towards a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1989). This volume also includes “Yossel Rakover’s Quarrel with God,” the story by Zvi Kolitz to which Levinas’s talk refers.



In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas had disengaged sensibility from the recuperable dimensions of consciousness by plunging it into the depth of enjoyment, a depth which sustained the play of intentionality and constitution without being penetrated by them. A lived past and not a living present was shown to sustain the life of consciousness. *Otherwise than Being* reaffirms the privilege of sensibility as the unassumable condition of consciousness, but extends it into the ethical relation itself, in the suffering of responsibility. The emphasis on sensibility is in part allied to the renunciation of ontological language in *Otherwise than Being* that is a step further away from Heidegger—conceding to him the “amphibology of being and entities” while pointing to the ethical relation “beyond being.” But it is also an escape from the “metaphysics of presence” that Derrida had shown in *Speech and Phenomena* dominates western philosophy from Plato to Husserl.<sup>43</sup> This escape is effected as a reduction of the “said” of language, which articulates being and thus deploys it in consciousness, renders it present or “represents” it—a reduction to the “saying” that Levinas insists signifies this side of not only the being that is present and presentable to consciousness (what Heidegger calls *das Seiende im ganzen*), but this side of the event of being itself.<sup>44</sup> And the way of this signification that escapes the synchronization of consciousness is sensibility, a sensibility that is suffered in the flesh without

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<sup>43</sup>Levinas greatly admired this work of Derrida. Its analyses of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* as well as of *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* inform much of Chapter II, section 3 of *Otherwise than Being*: “Time and Discourse.”

<sup>44</sup>Levinas uses “reduction” in the technical phenomenological sense of returning to a prior, transcendental condition, although he also makes it clear that no *epochē* or parenthesis could accomplish this reduction. However, he will also—without intending ambiguity—use the verb *réduire* in the non-technical sense, as when he says that the “unsayable saying lends itself to the said, ...lets itself be reduced...” (*OB* 44/*AE* 57).

having the presence of mind to negate this suffering and convert it into experience and knowledge.

Ethics signifies already in the lived life, in the sensibility of the one-for-the-other, in the voiceless saying-to of responsibility. In the midst of enjoyment there is felt the pain of exposure to the other, an exposure that is already “exposure in response to...” (*OB 49/AE 63*). The images Levinas employs to describe this “passivity more passive still than any receptivity” are startling: “a denuding beyond the skin, to the wounds one dies from, denuding to death, being as vulnerability,” and reinscribe the peacefulness—or pacifism—of the relation with the face sketched in *Totality and Infinity* into a situation that, if it is not yet struggle, is nevertheless a wounding: “This being torn up from oneself in the core of one’s unity, this absolute non-coinciding, this diachrony of the instant, signifies in the form of one-penetrated-by-the-other” (*OB 47, 48/AE 61, 63f*). Here the relation with the other is literally a *discord*, a non-coinciding at the heart of the same that exposes it to the call of the other.

The emphasis on sensibility and the suffering of responsibility reaches its highest pitch in the chapter of *Otherwise than Being* entitled “Substitution.” Instead of the subject comprehending itself in a return from otherness, the ethical subject here signifies as a recurrence to myself in the face of the other, in bearing responsibility for the other. Rather than aspiring to the freedom of thought in the perfect identity of substance and subject, the ethical subject awakens to itself in substitution, in the persecution that is suffered as sensibility. “From the first backed up against itself, up against a wall, or twisted over itself in its skin, too tight in its skin,” the self recurs as “this torsion, this contraction, this fission,” “bound in a knot that cannot be undone, in a responsibility for others” (*OB 104-105/AE 133-134*). The very recurrence of the self means that in substitution for the other I am a subjectivity, not a freedom for itself, but me,

undeclinably me. The self begins in the accusative, not ‘I’=‘I’ but *me voici*, “*Here I am*, answering for everything and for everyone” (*OB 114/AE 145*).<sup>45</sup> On the accusative origin of the self, see also *OB 112/AE 142-143*. Levinas notes that “Everything is from the start in the accusative. Such is the exceptional condition or unconditionality of the self [*in-condition-du soi*], the signification of the pronoun *self* [*Se*] for which our Latin grammars themselves ‘know no’ nominative form.” And this substitution, the other in me, is not alienation but inspiration, for it calls me precisely as myself, the only one who will do, “summoned as one irreplaceable” (*OB 114/AE 146*).

Levinas is fond of citing Father Zossima’s story in *The Brothers Karamazov* to illustrate this radical sense of responsibility: “Each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all.”<sup>46</sup> Joseph Conrad’s novel of revolutionary Russia, *Under Western Eyes*, also portrays something like Levinas’s substitution. Razumov, a student, returns in the afternoon to his rooms to find that a fellow student, Haldin, a revolutionary who that morning killed a government official by throwing a bomb, has taken refuge there before he himself could arrive. Razumov finds himself obsessed with a responsibility he resents but cannot discharge or deny, even by betrayal—a lesson he learns by betraying the supplicant. Waiting for Haldin to leave his rooms to be picked up not by the escape sledge, but by the police whom he has tipped off, Razumov finds that he cannot disguise his agitation. When Haldin tells him not to be anxious, that he will leave, Razumov shrieks, “And you tell me, Victor Victorovich, not to be anxious!

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<sup>45</sup>“*Me voici*” means literally, of course, “see me here.” But Lingis has translated it with the traditional biblical phrase to which Levinas is almost certainly alluding. When the boy Samuel is called by God, he responds immediately, “Here I am!” (*1 Sam 3:1-18*). Similarly, the prophet Isaiah, when he hears the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send?” responds, “Here I am; send me!” (*Is 6:8*).

<sup>46</sup>Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 289.

Why! I am responsible for you!”<sup>47</sup> He finds that there is no escape with impunity, that although he escape suspicion, he cannot escape obsession, “the vocation that wounds” (*OB 77/AE 98*). Indeed, it is when he is provided with the perfect alibi and is assured of not only the trust but the love of the betrayed Haldin’s sister that he simply must confess, expose his guilt. When all hope that responsibility might somehow *occur* outside of him dies, Razumov is moved by the responsibility that *recurs* in him, that is incarnate in him.

The unconditionally accused self, extradited into its flesh as hostage for the other, is not a self in search of certainty. It can and in fact must be conscripted into the adventure of knowledge as consciousness. However, the self does not begin as a consciousness knowing the world in its experience, nor does the transition it makes onto the common plane of consciousness in the face of the third person absolve or resolve its ethical responsibility.<sup>48</sup> Recurrence is not the return from otherness but proximity, going toward the other who is never reached. Hegel’s negation and subsumption of alterity becomes for Levinas an incalculable indebtedness that is first of all suffered. The movement of self-consciousness negates difference by comprehending it: “I am I and not not-I.” But in responsibility difference is absolute; it cannot be comprehended, but obsesses the subject as non-indifference.

Levinas’s assertion of the non-indifference of the ethical subject does not mean that Hegelian subjectivity is simply “indifferent,” even though I suspect Levinas would think it does.

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<sup>47</sup>Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 99. The main character's name, Razumov, means “reason.”

<sup>48</sup>See below, f.

Absolute indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) is the category that immediately precedes essence in the

*Logic*:

This unity thus posited as the totality of the process of determining, in which it is itself determined as indifference, is contradiction in every respect; it therefore has to be *posited* as this self-sublating contradiction, and be determined as self-subsistence that is for-itself, which has for its result and truth not the unity which is merely indifferent, but that in-itself immanently negative and absolute unity which is called *essence*. (*SL* 379/*GW*.21.377; translation emended)

Thus *essence* [*Wesen*] is determinatively *not*-indifference. However, Levinas's ethical subject is neither "self-subsistence that is "for-itself" nor the "immanently negative and absolute unity" that preserves the indifference it sublates. The subject in substitution is the ruptured one-for-the other. Unlike Hegel's, Levinas's non-indifference does not issue in unity, and this is precisely what is meant by responsibility being suffered as a wound.

The irremissible non-indifference of substitution is the infinity of responsibility that is never discharged but augments as it is entered upon: "Its term is not an end. The more I answer the more I am responsible; the more I approach the neighbor with which I am encharged the further away I am. This debit which increases is infinity as an infinity of the infinite, as glory" (*OB* 93/*AE* 118-119).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Levinas cites Hegel's *Logic (Encyclopedia, §§ 93-94)* on the bad infinite in order to show that what he is describing is not that (*OB* 193n34/*AE* 119n). The other is not comprehended only to regenerate its alterity, but is never comprehended, utterly infinite. Hegel, however, would not recognize this absolute alterity as his concept of infinity, which, "as the consummated return into self, the relation of itself to itself, is *being*" (*SL* 152/*GW*.21.136). The *Encyclopedia Logic* (§95) puts it thus: "Something, in its passage into other only joins with itself. To be thus self-related in the passage, and in the other, is the genuine Infinity" (*Hegel's Logic*, trans. William Wallace [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975]; German text: *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 8: *System der Philosophie: Erster Teil, Die Logik*). In any case, the realized genuine infinite is "being-for-self" not "one-for-the-other." The difference between Hegel and Levinas could not be more succinctly expressed.

On the other hand, the *ought* of morality always signifies for Hegel the bad infinite, the progress to infinity. He remarks on Kant's analysis of the Sublime, where "the conflict of morality and sense is represented as the ultimate, absolute relation," but "which is powerless to overcome the qualitative opposition between the finite and the infinite..." (*SL 232/GW.21.226*). I will only remark myself that Levinas's infinite responsibility is not a rational self-determination, as Kant's is.

Levinas recalls the notion of a "violence beyond all violence" when he calls responsibility for the other "an interruption of essence, a disinterestedness imposed with a good violence" (*OB 43/AE 56*). At times it does seem that this violence is inflicted upon the same directly by the other, as if ethical responsibility were a call to martyrdom at the hands of the other. And this in turn suggests that we are brought back to the Hegelian situation where two self-consciousnesses confront one another, only now to seek the foundation of the self in abnegation rather than recognition. This impression is especially strong in the evocation of maternity and persecution to which Levinas turns in order to describe the pain of proximity and obsession:

Is not the restlessness of someone persecuted but a modification of maternity, the groaning of the entrails wounded by those it will bear or has borne? In maternity what signifies is a responsibility to the point of substitution for others and suffering both from the effect of persecution and from the persecuting itself in which the persecutor sinks. Maternity, which is bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor. (*OB 75/AE 95*)

If we pay attention to this figure, however, we see that it is not a question of one freedom subjected and submitting to an attack made by another freedom. Rather, the mother suffers the pain that the child's very vulnerability inflicts on her. Her bearing responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor is not hyperbole, but incarnate sensibility. If this were not so, the

mother's pain would be a decision to take on this pain, a pain that, despite being suffered, would revert to the activity of self-consciousness realizing itself. In suffering responsibility, one's pain, even if it is "by the other" is primarily "for the other" and not "for oneself." The pain of substitution "is due to my being obsessed with responsibility for the oppressed who is other than myself" (*OB 55/AE 70*).

Thus the persecution of substitution and ethical responsibility does not mean Levinas now agrees with Hegel that the encounter of the same with the other entails conflict and that the subject seeks to find itself in risking its death. For Levinas the pain of responsibility is a *dénucléation* or "coring out" (*OB 64/AE 81*) of the same that complements the image of enjoyment as a satisfaction coiling about itself (*OB 73/AE 93*). The proximity or approach of responsibility interrupts an enjoyment that is already sensible satisfaction—a savoring—and not the uncertainty of desire that can negate only the unconscious contents of life. The pain suffered in the one-for-the-other means that the subject *feels* its responsibility, without this feeling being reduced to a mode of cognition or to self-consciousness. Sensibility here is not even negation, let alone determinate negation. In the suffering of proximity, the self inhabits its responsibility from the inside, is thrown back on itself in hurting for the other.<sup>50</sup>

The emphasis for Levinas is on the incarnate disruption of sensibility, not the recuperation of the sense of this sensibility in consciousness or self-consciousness. Hegelian

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<sup>50</sup>This is not the masochism Nietzsche ascribes to the ascetic priest, where the noble spirit, lacking a worthy opponent, turns inward, persecuting itself in order to feel the pathos of conquest. See *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1967), Essay Three, "What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?" 97-161. This is an eventuality that could only occur *after* the non-coincidence with self suffered in the face of the other, and is rather an appropriation of responsibility, taking responsibility for responsibility, the very process Levinas warns against.

self-consciousness is compelled to develop itself through reason to spirit by what Levinas characterizes as an allergy to incompleteness, where what shows itself as other energizes the search to discover the moment when this otherness originated in unity, and therefore can be taken back up dialectically in the grasp of knowing. Ethical subjectivity in Levinas is a goodness that is likewise animated or inspired by the other, but not as a drive towards wholeness. The desire for the other aroused in proximity and obsession is not a return journey, but, as Levinas says repeatedly, “disinterested.”<sup>51</sup> It does not maintain the absolute otherness of the other so much as it is itself maintained or inspired by it. It is goodness and not knowing.

One additional point needs to be made here, however, regarding the relation with the face that was so important in *Totality and Infinity*. *Otherwise than Being*'s emphasis on bearing the other in my flesh, suffering for the other in substitution and even persecution can seem to overwhelm the invitation to discourse that the face promised. Indeed, when Levinas introduces the face in *Otherwise than Being*, he seems to do so primarily to characterize the overturning of the temporal order of consciousness—the face signifies a past that was never present. Because he is preoccupied with unraveling the fabric of consciousness and disrupting the synchrony of presence and representation, Levinas emphasizes that “my reaction [to the face] misses a present which is already the past of itself” and argues that while “the common hour marked by the clock is the hour in which the neighbor reveals himself and delivers himself in his image, ... it is precisely in his image that he is no longer near” (*OB* 88f/*AE* 112). Certainly the face remains the mode of the other's approach, a call to responsibility; yet here it seems more evasive or purely

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<sup>51</sup>The word “interest” signifies for Levinas “persistence in being,” a dynamic confined to the plane of being and essence: *inter-esse*; see *OB* 4-5/*AE* 4-6.



evocative than it did in the straightforwardness underlined in *Totality and Infinity*, where its expression both summoned and promised attendance, even while this promised attendance incessantly deflected it from the full light of being.

Several essays published around or between the two major works mark this same shift in Levinas's description of the face. In "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity" (1957) the face is described as it is in *Totality and Infinity*, as "the epiphany of what can present itself directly" precisely because "the epiphany of a face is wholly language," not image or phenomenon.<sup>52</sup> In "Phenomenon and Enigma" (1967) the face becomes an enigma: "a manifestation [that] turns into an expression, a skin left desolate by an irreversible departure which immediately denies it."<sup>53</sup> "Language and Proximity" (1967) characterizes the face as approach and obsession, simultaneously presence and absence, and says, with emphasis: "*It is to come facing, to manifest oneself by undoing one's manifestation.*"<sup>54</sup> Finally, in "Meaning and Sense" Levinas uses the notion of the trace to claim that, as face, "the other proceeds from the absolutely absent."<sup>55</sup> With this emphasis on absence, it almost seems as though the expression of the face that promises attendance—witness to peace—has been forgotten or subverted.

But these descriptions simply emphasize an aspect of the face that was already important in *Totality and Infinity*. The face was never said to be wholly given, wholly present, for in the

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<sup>52</sup>CPP, 55. French text in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 2d ed. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967), 173; hereafter *En découvrant*.

<sup>53</sup>CPP, 69; French text in *En découvrant*, 212.

<sup>54</sup>CPP, 120-121; French text in *En découvrant*, 230-231.

<sup>55</sup>CPP, 103; French text in *HdAH*, 58.

face the presence of the other remains always an approach, a manifestation that undoes the images it would appear in, a fragility: “The transcendence of the face is at the same time its absence from the world into which it enters, the exiling of a being, his condition of being a stranger, destitute, or proletarian” (*TI* 75/47). At the same time as it is a promise on the part of the other, the destitution and fragility of the face is a summons to me. In contradistinction to knowing, the face commands an approach without touch or grasp—proximity. Face to face, the same and the other remain absolute in their relation.

In a later article, “*De l’Un à l’Autre*,” Levinas reintroduces the notion of the face to describe the proximity of the other that obsesses as a fear for the other. In the face of the other, I am afraid not for myself, but for the other, afraid that in my being-for-myself, my being-in-the-world, I have already usurped the place of the other. Levinas specifically introduces this section as “a description of the irruption of the face in the phenomenal order of appearance—as I now see it.”<sup>56</sup> The face of the other is “extreme exposition,” vulnerability and defenselessness, to the point of “exposing itself to unseen death.” Here we can see perhaps more clearly the relation of the face to the obsession of substitution—the self in the accusative—suffering in responsibility:

The facing of the face in its expression—in its mortality—assigns me, orders me, lays claim to me—as if the unseen death faced by the face of the other—pure otherness, somehow separated from every ensemble—were “my affair.” As if, unknown by the other whom it already concerns in the nudity of his face, it “regarded me” before its confrontation with me, before being the death that stares at me myself. The death of the other person puts me in question and implicates me as if, by that death invisible to the other who exposes himself to it, I were to become, on the basis of my eventual indifference, its accomplice. As if, before even becoming committed to him myself, I had to answer for this death of the other, and not leave the other alone in his mortal

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<sup>56</sup> “*De l’Un à l’Autre: transcendance et temps*,” in *Entre nous: essais sur le penser-à-l’autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1991; Livre de Poche edition, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994), 155. The article was first published in 1983, and revised in 1989 for inclusion in *L’Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*.

solitude. It is precisely in that summons to my responsibility by the face of the other who assigns me, who orders me, who lays claim to me, it is in that putting in question that the other is the neighbor.<sup>57</sup>

My suffering in responsibility, even though I bear this suffering in my own flesh, is a hurting for the other, for whom and to whom I must answer.

This fear for the other awakened by his or her face approaching me is the same assignation evoked by the tropes of substitution and persecution in *Otherwise than Being*. The face disrupts the temporal order as a trace of itself, revealing that responsibility is in fact prior to freedom, for responsibility is exacted of me and not assumed by me. The face of the other traces a signification without a context in the responsibility that penetrates under my skin. This is what Levinas means by the saying prior to the said, signifying on the hither side of consciousness with a significance beyond being and essence, which is the play of being:

It is because in an approach, there is inscribed or written the trace of infinity, the trace of a departure, but the trace of what is inordinate, does not enter into the present, and inverts the *arche* into anarchy, that there is forsakenness for the other, obsession by him, responsibility and a self. The non-interchangeable par excellence, the I, the unique one, substitutes itself for others. Nothing is a game. Thus being is transcended. (*OB* 117/*AE* 149)<sup>58</sup>

It is in the one-for-the-other of substitution that Levinas finds the primordial signification of ethics, indeed the *sense* (direction and orientation) that devolves upon human discourse and consciousness in general.

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<sup>57</sup>“*De l’Un à l’Autre*,” 156.

<sup>58</sup>In a note here Levinas refers to the three essays in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (cited above) that describe the face as “the very ambiguity or enigma of anarchy—the illeity of infinity in the face as the trace of the withdrawal which the infinite qua infinite effects before coming, and which addresses the other to my responsibility.” *Illeity* (from the French third person pronoun *il* or the Latin *ille*) designates the absolute but personal alterity of the other. See “Phenomenon and Enigma,” *CPP*, 71-73/*En découvrant*, 214-215; and “Meaning and Sense,” *CPP*, 103-107/*HdAH*, 59-63.

How can responsibility signify prior to freedom? We can understand that such an absolute priority is necessary in order that ethics reach back prior to the commitments in which freedom would find itself already operative in the responsibilities it assumes. To explain how this is possible, Levinas invokes the notion of “finite freedom,” a freedom that consists not in spontaneity, but already oriented, claimed by the “sense” that signifies in the one-for-the-other of substitution. Philosophers have known such finite freedom, Levinas thinks, but they have repeatedly denied it:

Yet, every effort is made to reduce all commitment to freedom. Astonished to find itself implicated in the world of objects—the theme of its free contemplation—consciousness will search in its memory for the forgotten moment in which unbeknownst to itself it allied itself with objects or consented to apperceive itself in unity with them. Such a moment, when awakened by memory, would become, after the event, the instant of an alliance made in full freedom. Such a reduction refuses the irreducible anarchy of responsibility for another. (*OB 76/AE 95-96*)

The perceptual scheme of this description suggests it applies primarily to the transcendental ego articulated by Husserl (although Levinas generally feels that Husserl’s rigor and integrity lead him to preserve traces or betrayals of the “otherwise than being” within his descriptions). However, Hegel is certainly implicated here, as the reference to memory and earlier ones to “reminiscence” and “cancellation” indicate (*OB 76/AE 95*). As always with Hegel, the picture is not so simple, although finite freedom is eventually sublated (which means it is also preserved) in the infinity of the concept.

Hegel indeed knows several finite freedoms, but it is freedom’s experience of its own finitude that interests him. The above quotation could easily describe the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness, whose dialectic then takes up the exploration of this sovereign freedom, discovering it to be both a privilege and a prison. At the end of this exploration, this sovereign freedom, renounced by the unhappy consciousness in its surrender to

reason, is in fact submerged in the concrete reality of the rational world, from which it will gradually emerge, not as the freedom of abstract self-consciousness, but the freedom of spirit, the concreteness of the I that is We and We that is I. Ultimately, true freedom for Hegel is the rational self-determination of the concept, of the absolute idea, for both purely subjective and purely objective freedoms show themselves, precisely as such, to be limited.<sup>59</sup> The finite freedom of any particular act or responsibility—whether of an individual or a group—is transcended ultimately by virtue of the infinite freedom of spirit as absolute knowing, which “remembers” the vicissitudes of experience as its own immanent self-determination.

What Levinas tries to articulate is a different notion of finite freedom. Freedom subject to the infinitude of ethical responsibility is freedom that awakes to responsibilities it can neither assume nor discharge as its own free commitments and self-realization. Finite freedom here arises as already committed, as a response and not as an initiative. Levinas emphasizes that finite freedom is not simply an infinite freedom operating in a limited field—something that Hegel also rejected and that smacks of Kant. But the finitude of freedom does not undermine it: “To be responsible over and beyond one’s freedom is certainly not to remain a pure result of the world” (*OB* 122/*AE* 157). In fact, it is on the basis of anarchic but irrecusable responsibility that Levinas defines finite freedom and not vice-versa. Finite freedom “lies in an infinite

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<sup>59</sup>See the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* §§10-28. While Hegel more clearly criticizes the finitude of the subjective will, he knows that the objective will (and thus the whole of the socio-political world examined in the *Philosophy of Right*) is also finite, albeit at a higher stage of spiritual development (§26). True freedom of the will exists only for the idea: “When the will has universality, or itself as infinite form, as its content, object, and end, it is free not only *in itself* but also *for itself*—it is the Idea in its truth” (§21). This is clear also in the *Logic*, where true freedom arises with the sublation of necessity through reciprocal causality, or infinite self-relation and ushers thought into the realm of the concept (*SL* 570-571/*GW*.11.408-409; also the *Encyclopedia Logic* §§158-159).

responsibility where the other is not other because he strikes up against and limits my freedom, but where he can accuse me to the point of persecution, because the other, absolutely other, is another one (*autrui*)” (*OB* 124/*AE* 159). While Hegel ultimately situates finite freedom within the infinite freedom of dialectical knowing, of the concept, Levinas places it within a different infinity, that of responsibility. This is also the infinity of the Good, which is infinite without being complete. As finite, freedom is not justified in a higher freedom, but “borne by the responsibility it could not shoulder, an elevation and inspiration without complacency” (*OB* 124/*AE* 160).

#### d. Suffering, Goodness, Justice

The emphasis on ethical sensibility as a hyperbolic passivity and substitution as an infinitude of responsibility that deepens as it is entered into allow Levinas to make a case for a signification of ethics “beyond being” and on the “hither side of consciousness.” Substitution suffers a responsibility with no term—neither beginning in commitment nor ending in satisfaction. It is a rupture without recuperation, the fission of experience that Levinas says is only dissimulated in the structures of thought. However, we must ask what prevents this woundedness from being drawn only into a vortex of guilt, fear and pity. What prevents it from signifying only tragically as the impossibility of the ethical relation, rather than as the summons to ethical attention and action? Is the infinity of responsibility an infinite pity?

The face is surely a summons to generosity and hospitality, to giving the hungry the very bread from my mouth and welcoming the stranger into the very home that shelters me from the elements. Yet at every moment this generosity and hospitality revert—or threaten to revert—into self-service, discharging my responsibility instead of deepening it. This is the very meaning

of responsibility's infinitude. The face of the other is still there, unprovided for, anxious not just for today but for tomorrow, vulnerable before a death that neither she nor I can outstrip, despite the pretensions of fecundity and filiality sketched in *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>60</sup> Famished, never warm enough, tortured, dispossessed, the face of the other proliferates before our eyes today in Rwanda, Zaire and Burundi, in the killing fields of Cambodia, Bosnia, El Salvador, in hospitals, hospices and prisons, in the streets of our cities and the ghettos of rural poverty. The call of responsibility seems to demand sacrifice to the point of a saintliness of which few are capable and none capable by themselves.<sup>61</sup> Gustave Flaubert's *The Legend of St. Julian, Hospitator* presents the story of enjoyment interrupted, of a young man awakened to the arbitrary violence of his will and called in expiation all the way to sainthood, warming a leprous beggar with the last warmth of his own body. But does goodness summon us to religious devotion and martyrdom or to ethical behavior in society?

Despite the suspicion that Levinas is smuggling religion into what should be a dialogue between thinkers, posing a philosophical problem that admits only of a religious solution, he maintains that he is writing philosophy. Without disparaging his own religious reflections—carefully distinguished from his philosophical work—he repudiates any suggestion of mysticism in the summons of the ethical relation. Certainly he does not appeal to an eschatological hope where the infinite suffering of responsibility would be miraculously transformed to plenitude, re-inverted into enjoyment. But neither does he allow a rationalized “as-for-me” that would temper

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<sup>60</sup>See *TI* 267ff, especially 278-280 and 300-301/244ff, 255-257, 277-278.

<sup>61</sup>See Edith Wyschogrod's *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

the excesses of responsibility, excesses that go all the way to the trauma of persecution. Reason by itself cannot intervene to soften the demands of expiation, to push proximity into the privacy of bourgeois comfort.

Unwilling to surrender ethical responsibility to a reason competent to determine every possibility of signification, but also wary of a religiosity that would be accountable only to its own revelations, Levinas turns to the concreteness of human discourse and attempts to articulate a relation between the anarchic “saying” of responsibility and the “said” of common meaning that locates both in the concrete relations of people without merging them. The saying that signifies ethically in substitution as a “sign of the giving of signs” (*OB* 119/*AE* 153) also issues in a said where terms are weighed and compared, measured in the common measure of consciousness. Yet the ethical dimension of saying remains “diachronic” to the said in which it issues. The saying is not subsumed in the said, and thus retains all the anarchic priority of the ethical in the midst of the common enterprise of consciousness and society.

According to Levinas, the advent of the third person, facing me in the face of the other but facing the other as well, demands that the one-way infinity of responsibility measure itself as justice. Here is born the give-and-take of conversation, the convocation of thinkers in a search for truth, the community where “rights” are granted and measured and upheld, even the “rights” with which I am “endowed,” that are given me to be “for myself.” “Justice, society, the State and its institutions, exchanges and work are comprehensible out of proximity” say Levinas (*OB* 159/*AE* 202-203).

This short sketch can serve here merely as a suggestion of the way this “comprehension” is worked out without compromising the absoluteness and the infinity of proximity, the one-for-the-other of substitution and responsibility. In Levinas’s own texts this transition from the



ethical relation to the sociality of reason remains always suggested, evoked rather than explicated. I will attempt later to fill in more detail both of what Levinas claims regarding the origin and status of this justice—the social work of consciousness—and how it might be worked out somewhat more concretely, if still provisionally.

However, first we must return to Hegel, who also claims that self-consciousness comes to signify essentially in a social world, the realm of spirit. The move for self-consciousness is not motivated by a third party, but by its own ongoing quest to unite the antitheses of its experience into a whole that can be known and known absolutely. For Hegel, the social world of spirit develops, largely through language, the possibility of an absolute reconciliation of the contradictions of self-consciousness. This possibility of reconciliation is realized in the community of religious experience, and is ultimately grasped conceptually in the sphere of absolute knowing, which comprehends this history that is nothing other than its own self-development. In this process, if anywhere, there is articulated a “said” that fully comprehends the “saying” from which it issues, and thus a systematic exposition of experience in which ethical and social relations occupy a place that is perfectly justified within the whole. By examining the perfect commerce between the saying and the said that Hegel develops for us in the *Phenomenology*, we will have located precisely the place where Levinas’s critique, if it is not to suffer ineffectually like the pallid aspirations of a beautiful soul, must articulate its exception to the absoluteness of knowing. Such an exception must not only still allow us to think of ourselves as speakers and actors in a common world, but command this conception without being itself reduced to that concept thought.

## CHAPTER 5: FROM RECOGNITION TO RECONCILIATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

The dialectic of self-consciousness, as Hegel presents it, does not comprehend the ethical responsibility that is Levinas's constant theme. Yet it must also be noted that nowhere does this dialectic purport to be a full account of the ethical or social relation, although it does describe, by Hegel's own admission, the most primitive encounter of human beings. This point is most clear in the *Encyclopedia's* description of the fight for recognition as a life and death struggle:

To prevent any possible misunderstandings with regard to the standpoint just outlined, we must here remark that the fight for recognition pushed to the extreme here indicated can only occur in the natural state, where men exist only as single, separate individuals; but it is absent in civil society and the state because here the recognition for which the combatants fought already exists. For although the state may originate in violence, it does not rest on it.... (*PM* §432, *Zusatz*)

The hope articulated at the beginning of the *Phenomenology's* section on "Lordship and Bondage" for reciprocal recognition and a mutual "release" into freedom—which, for us, is the hope for an irreducible ethical moment within the quest for independence and certainty—is never accomplished by self-consciousness itself. This hope is ultimately given up by the unhappy consciousness when it surrenders to reason, which promises a reconciliation not effected by self-consciousness alone. However, the *Phenomenology* and its formation of consciousness to the standpoint of absolute spirit is not thereby finished with the project of mutual recognition. Since this recognition failed on the level of self-consciousness, Hegel now undertakes to develop abstract self-

consciousness through the permutations of reason until it emerges as concrete spirit.

With spirit, a dialectic aimed at mutual recognition will re-emerge, and do so specifically at the level of morality.

### 1. Reason, Recognition and Reconciliation

In the chapter on “Reason,” the concern for recognition is submerged in what is again primarily an attempt to resolve in an objective unity, a unity *an sich*, the conflicts that have emerged in consciousness’s development. The project of the *Phenomenology* as a whole developed in an endeavor to reconcile the contradictions that inevitably arise for philosophy between its experience and the conceptual schema by which it attempts to articulate and master this experience. The contradictions stemming from the attempt to account for the world using only objective schemata, as experienced in the shapes of “consciousness,” had led to the realization that self-consciousness is the truth of consciousness, and it was here that the paradigm of recognition first appeared as a means of unity that would simultaneously grant freedom. However, because the recognition that self-consciousness as such could achieve was always only one-sided, self-consciousness turns to reason (*Vernunft*) in the hope that reason can provide a ground for the unity it can not effect within itself. Reason is to be the middle term reconciling the extremes that disrupt the unhappy consciousness.

This development cannot yet provide the living and dynamic unity of opposites that is to be accomplished by spirit, even though reason is a shape even closer to spirit than the immediate subjectivity of self-consciousness. When, at the beginning of Chapter VI on “Spirit,” Hegel looks back over the territory of the first three major divisions of the

*Phenomenology*, he indicates in fact that spirit has always been present, although never explicitly.<sup>1</sup> The very isolation and consideration of these shapes “presupposes” spirit as the existence in which these states of mind “subsist” (PS 264/PG 239). But while the shapes of consciousness hold fast to the *an sich* character of “objectively existent actuality” and self-consciousness clings to its *Fürsichsein*, spirit that “has reason” is the “immediate consciousness of [...] being that is *in and for itself* [*des An- und Fürsichseins*]” or the “unity of consciousness and self-consciousness.” However, not even this unity is able to resolve fully the conflicts experienced by the previous shapes, and Hegel emphasizes that the verb “has” in the expression “spirit that has reason” designates consciousness “that has determined the object as reasonable *in itself*, or by the value of the category” even though the object here “does not yet have *for consciousness* the value of the category” (PS 264-265/PG 239).<sup>2</sup> In other words, spirit that thinks of itself as reason invests its object with reason—whether this be an object of observation or of action or of “real individuality”—while it itself, as consciousness of the object, remains separated and distinct from this rational object. The unity of

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<sup>1</sup>This observation puts in question Robert Williams’s thesis that “Recognition is the existential-phenomenological genesis of *Geist*; conversely, *Geist* is the result, the accomplishment of mutual recognition” (Williams, *Recognition*, 191). Rather, it should be said that fully effective mutual recognition *is* spirit and that fully developed or absolute spirit *is* nothing other than the thoroughgoing and effective process of this mutual recognition.

<sup>2</sup>Emphasis on “*for consciousness*” added. Miller misconstrues “*das Bewußtsein, ...das, ...den Gegenstand hat als an sich vernünftig bestimmt, oder vom Werte der Kategorie, aber so, daß er noch für das Bewußtsein desselben den Wert der Kategorie nicht hat*” as “consciousness which...has the object in a shape that is implicitly determined by Reason or by the value of the category, but in such a way that it does not yet have for consciousness the value of the category.” This confuses the gap everywhere apparent in reason between consciousness and its object.

consciousness and self-consciousness that characterizes reason is *immediate* or posited only within the object and not as the reflection of spirit within itself. Thus, reason is unable to fully unite itself with its object.

At the transition between observing reason and active reason, Hegel does spend several pages articulating a conception of reason that makes it seem not only identical with spirit, but on the verge of accomplishing the fully reciprocal recognition he had outlined for self-consciousness. He compares the stage of observation to the shapes of consciousness, and suggests that the new stage of active reason will take up the unfinished project of comprehending all experience as self-consciousness, of comprehending substance as subject. Self-consciousness here, developing its independence through reason, “knows that it is *in principle* [*an sich*] recognized by [its] object,” which is nothing other than rational self-consciousness itself: “It is spirit which, in the duplication of its self-consciousness and in the independence of both, has the certainty of its unity with itself” (*PS 211/PG 193*). But what is important to note here is not only what active reason is certain of *an sich*, but the process that will be required to fully realize this still latent shape of spirit.

When active reason transcends its mere individuality by “demand[ing] and produc[ing] its actuality in an other,” Hegel says, “it becomes *universal* reason.” As such, it will become

a consciousness that is already recognized in and for itself, which in its pure consciousness unites all self-consciousness, ...the simple spiritual essence, which, in attaining consciousness, is at the same time *real Substance*, into which the earlier forms return as into their ground. (*PS 211/PG 194*)

These descriptions seem to articulate something much closer to the final shape of spirit,

absolute knowing, than either the beginning or the end of active reason per se.

Progressing slowly towards this goal, Hegel here articulates it provisionally, *for us*, but active reason itself will remain mired in the individuality that is here described as transcended. Hegel makes this clear when he writes:

If we take this goal—and this in the *concept* which *for us* has already appeared on the scene—in its reality, viz., the self-consciousness that is recognized and acknowledged [*das anerkannte Selbstbewußtsein*], and which has its own self-certainty in the other free self-consciousness, and possesses its truth precisely in that other; in other words, if we look on this still inner spirit as substance that has already advanced to the stage of having an outer existence, then in this concept there is disclosed the realm of ethical life. (*PS 212/PG 194*)

The key word here is “if.” It indicates not only the ongoing importance of recognition for the full conception of spirit, but the inability of reason in its present shape to accomplish this recognition. What is in fact imagined in this description is not the content of the next two sections on reason, but spirit itself as substance or ethical life.

If active reason were able to realize this goal itself, there would be no need for the further development of the *Phenomenology* and we could immediately proceed to measure against the absolute responsibility Levinas proposes not self-consciousness’s struggle to the death or the dialectic of the master and slave, but the following utopian vision:

In the universal spirit, therefore, each has only the certainty of himself, of finding in the actual world nothing other than himself; he is as certain of the others as he is of himself. I perceive in all of them the fact that they know themselves to be only these independent beings, just as I am. I perceive in them the free unity with others in such wise that, just as this

unity exists through me, so it exists through the others too—I regard them as myself and myself as them. (PS 213-214/PG 195)

This truly idealistic vision, which culminates in the assertion that “In a free people (*Volk*), therefore, reason is in truth actualized” (PS 214/PG 195), is not taken up until the next major transition of the *Phenomenology*, to “True Spirit” and the “Ethical Order.” But even there, new contradictions will arise that must be resolved before recognition can be free and reciprocal, before this living unity can be made actual as absolute spirit. For the present, “reason *must withdraw from this happy state*,” or “else has not yet realized it; for both may equally well be said” (PS 214/PG 195). This curious equivocity—“withdraw” translates *heraustreten*—suggests that the shapes consciousness assumes from this point on are even more pregnant with spirit than was self-consciousness’s confrontation with itself in its struggle for independence. The grounds for this “not yet” or activity of reason “outside” of spirit’s self-awareness are that, as active reason, self-consciousness has not yet developed the intersubjective concreteness of spirit, but exists immediately:

It is separate and individual, ...the practical consciousness, which steps into its world which it finds already given, with the aim of duplicating itself in this distinct form of individuality, of producing itself as *this* individual, as this existent counterpart of itself, and of becoming conscious of this unity of its own actuality [and effectiveness] with the objective being of the world” (PS 214/PG 195).

If reciprocal recognition has become the key to developing a Hegelian conception of spirit that does not annul difference and can thus attempt to answer the call of Levinas’s ethical responsibility, the attempted self-effectuation of the rational individual will not yet accomplish this goal.

In general, reason attempts to reconcile self-consciousness with consciousness by substituting a paradigm of validation for the paradigm of recognition, a validation to be effected by strictly objective observation and purposeful activity. However, what reason experiences is a perpetual rift between its consciousness and what it can ascertain about itself—between its self-understanding and what it observes, between its purposes and what it can effect, between its assurance its reality and its ability to grasp this reality effectively. Although reason, as the implicit unity of consciousness and self-consciousness, initially seems sure of bridging the gap between experience and the criteria of knowing, it everywhere finds its experience lacking, or failing to live up to the expectations it is compelled to assert for itself. Earlier, experience had been too rich for consciousness, too “spiritual” or infused with the dynamism of subjectivity; experience thus overflowed the categories of consciousness and became self-consciousness. As reason, by contrast, what the immediate unity of consciousness and self-consciousness can experience is never spiritual enough—be it the bone left to observation or active reason’s capitulation to the “way of the world,” or the empty formality of laws that purport to govern the spiritual animal kingdom and cut through the deceptions of “the matter in hand” [*die Sache selbst*]. Only when these laws take on the actual substantiality of a people and a world—represented by the concrete intersubjectivity or ethos of ancient Greece—can experience hope to be reconciled with the demands of spirit, and it is no accident that immediately the theme of recognition reasserts itself as a means of this reconciliation.

All of this shows, as several recent studies have argued, that the unity of the absolute in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* depends upon the success of a conscious



dialectic of recognition as a means of reconciling contradiction without suppressing difference.<sup>3</sup> This requirement does not mean that Hegel has changed his mind about the importance of providing a comprehensive justification of philosophical knowing by grasping it as the absolute subjectivity of substance, or absolute spirit. However, he knows that absolute spirit, if it is to be absolute, must also be perfectly reflexive, a living unity that generates and is sustained by contradiction, a unity that undergoes absolute disruption (*Zerrissenheit*) and just as absolutely overcomes this disruption. Recognition, especially mutual recognition, precisely because it invokes the united separateness of human subjects, emerges as the process that effects reconciliation by raising the necessity of determinate contradiction to a living and explicit unity in both consciousness and self-consciousness—spirit's self-knowing. The unity of experience as knowing is the reconciliation of contradiction that is effected by recognition. How this process is then comprehended in conceptual thought is the final—and troublesome—argument of the book.

This emphasis on the reconciliation of contradiction indicates a fundamental and paradoxical difference in the ethical conceptions of Hegel and Levinas. For Hegel, ethical life and morality, although not yet the thoroughgoing comprehension of absolute knowing, are necessary moments in the reconciliation of contradiction that drives the development of spirit. Ethics and morality appear as critical phases of the drive towards

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<sup>3</sup>In addition to the studies by Robert R. Williams and H. S. Harris cited in the previous chapter, see Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), which sees Hegel's hermeneutical dialectic as neither monological nor metaphysical but everywhere concrete, local, and driven by recognition, as well as Terry Pinkard's *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (cited above, n).

healing and wholeness, and any halting short of this wholeness would constitute a failure for both ethics and knowing. For Levinas, on the other hand, ethics, although it does not originate in opposition or conflict, signifies as an eternal unrest, a wound that can never be healed. Reconciliation, healing, wholeness, unity—these are so far from being desiderata of Levinas's thought that they remain always suspect of dissembling the peace they promise. For Levinas, it is unity that must be overcome, not contradiction. The peace that Levinas's ethics both evokes and promises is necessarily an uneasy peace, and this uneasiness, far from being its Achilles' heel, is said to signify precisely as the goodness of the good, its inability to be satisfied with itself.

What we must pay attention to in our examination of Hegel and Levinas is, first, Hegel's account of the reconciliation effected within spirit and especially the transition from this reconciliation through religion to absolute knowing, to see whether indeed an irreducible ethical plurality is preserved in absolute spirit. We must also examine Levinas's account of how the ethical relation, which also issues in a common plane of consciousness and a fabric of knowing, can constantly interrupt this social sphere without rendering its common enterprise vain and derisory. Does Hegel invest too much in the reconciling efficacy of recognition and the concept? Does Levinas demand so austere an ethics that no relation beyond the one-for-the-other of substitution and expiation could signify?

## 2. Ethical Spirit's Unity and Disruption

The drive towards a unity that does not only comprehend difference but lives from it, experiencing in that difference and contradiction the pulse of conceptual thought,

means that Hegel's conception of love cannot simply serve as a concrete alternative to the recognition that fails in the life and death struggle, a proficient rather than a deficient mode of recognition.<sup>4</sup> If, in fact, Hegel consistently presents the family relation as a locus of mutual recognition—in the Jena *System of Ethical Life* and “Philosophy of Spirit,”<sup>5</sup> in the 1807 *Phenomenology* and the later *Encyclopedia* and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*—he never does so in such a way that either conjugal love or the family relation could be construed as the fulfillment of the “spiritual” requirements of mutual recognition and thus the vehicle of the absolute and dynamic unity of experience. This failure is the lesson of the *Phenomenology*'s section on the “True Spirit” and the “Ethical Order” of the ancient world. There the family is described as the immediacy of recognition, an immediacy that is natural and not yet fully self-aware, not yet raised to the level of *self-knowing* spirit, even if is already substantial or objective spirit. Hegel deliberately introduces the conjugal relation in terms that recall the unfulfilled project of

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<sup>4</sup>Robert Williams makes this claim (*Recognition*, 180-185, 189n42), even suggesting a parallel between the conception of love in Hegel's early writings and Levinas's phenomenology of eros in *Time and the Other* and *Totality and Infinity*. However, Levinas is clear that the dimension of eros extends “beyond the face.” Eros neither fulfills the demands of ethics nor points towards them, but emerges as a wholly gratuitous exception to the claims of both the true and the good. It is because love does not fulfill the ethical but extends beyond it that it can also threaten to regress into abuse, exploitation, violence. On the theme of love in the early writings of Hegel, see also Peperzak, *Le jeune hegel*, and Edith Düsung, “Genesis des Selbstbewußtseins durch Anerkennung und Liebe: Untersuchungen zu Hegels Theorie der konkreten Subjektivität,” in *Hegels Theorie des subjektiven Geistes*, Spekulation und Erfahrung, II.14, ed. Lothar Eley, 244-279 (Stuttgart-Bad Constatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>See *System of Ethical Life (1802/3)* and *First Philosophy of Spirit (1803/4)*, especially 111, 142 and 232-235. The introductions to each work by H. S. Harris are, as usual, invaluable. See as well Harris's essay, “The Concept of Recognition in Hegel's Jena Manuscripts” in *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, ed. John O'Neill, and Ludwig Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie: Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes*.

recognition from the chapter on self-consciousness: “The relationship of husband and wife is in the first place the one in which one consciousness *immediately* recognizes itself in another, and acknowledges this mutual recognition” (PS 273/PG 246).<sup>6</sup> However, the underlined immediacy here is not a recommendation, for “because this self-recognition is a *natural* and not an ethical one, it is only a *representation*, an *image* of spirit, and not actual spirit itself” (PS 273/PG 246).<sup>7</sup>

A higher ethical recognition in the family takes place between the children, and specifically between the brother and the sister, whose relation moves beyond the immediacy of desire to free recognition. Although the sister, as the embodiment of the feminine, is consigned to an “*intuitive awareness* of what is ethical”<sup>8</sup> rather than explicit ethical consciousness or knowing (*Bewußtsein*), while the brother moves into the city “to acquire and produce the ethical life that is conscious of itself and actual” (PS 274f/PG 247f)—a sexist distinction that troubles us more than it did Hegel’s contemporaries—

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<sup>6</sup>Translation slightly emended. Miller has “[the relation] in which there is knowledge of this mutual recognition” for “*das Erkennen des gegenseitigen Anerkanntseins.*” It seems important to distinguish such awareness from the “knowing” that is the goal of the *Phenomenology*.

<sup>7</sup>Miller here mistranslates “*nicht der wirkliche Geist selbst*” as “not actually Spirit itself” instead of “not actual [i.e., self-effecting] spirit itself.” On the family as the ethical spirit in its immediacy, see also the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* §158f. The immediacy of the familial unity runs throughout the section, and it is only with dissolution of the family and the transition to the recognition of the rights of the “legal person” that this immediacy begins to develop through mediation.

<sup>8</sup>The German word here, *Ahndung*, normally means “revenge,” although archaically or poetically it can substitute for *Ahnung* or “presentiment.” Hegel doubtlessly, with Antigone in mind, is exploiting the ambiguity of the word here.

their relation is presented in terms that seem to embody the earlier articulated ideal of mutual recognition:

The brother, however, is for the sister a calmly similar being in general; the recognition of herself in him is pure and unmixed with any natural desire. In this relationship, therefore, the indifference of individuality and its ethical contingency are not present; but the moment of the *individual self*, recognized and being recognized, can here assert its right, because it is linked to the equilibrium of the blood and a relation devoid of desire. (PS 274/PG 248)<sup>9</sup>

All rifts or oppositions in earlier shapes of consciousness signify a determinate lack of unity, an uncertainty that could only be overcome by the introduction of a higher unity that could subsume this opposition. But the opposition of brother and sister appears already to realize complementarity and mutuality rather than conflict.

Yet here too the very immediacy of this mutual recognition will mark its insufficiency, although the male's entrance into the community initially seems only to shift the self-perpetuating equilibrium of the family and its members into the relation between family and community:

The difference of the sexes and their ethical content remains, however, in the unity of the substance, and its movement is just the constant becoming of that substance. The husband is sent out by the spirit of the family into the community, in which he finds his self-conscious being.<sup>10</sup> Just as the family in this way possesses in the community its substance and enduring being, so, conversely, the community possesses in the family the formal

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<sup>9</sup>Translation emended. The brother's relation to his sister is "*ruhige*" or calm, i.e., not inflamed with a husband's desire, and not "passive," as Miller has it. Miller also translates *einzelne* first as "particular" and then as "individual," obscuring the contrast between two modes of individuality.

<sup>10</sup>There need be no difficulty in the fact that Hegel first speaks of the brother's entrance into the community and here specifies the husband's. Such a transition is simply part of the natural equilibrium of the family, although it also marks a limit of the sphere in which the mutual recognition of siblings operates.

element of its actual existence, and in the divine law its power and authentication. Neither of the two is absolutely valid in and of itself [*an und für sich*]; human law proceeds in its living process from the divine, the law valid on earth from that of the nether world, the conscious from the unconscious, mediation from immediacy—and equally returns whence it came. The power of the nether world, on the other hand, has its actual existence on earth; through consciousness, it becomes existence and activity. (PS 276/PG 248-249)

This social or ethical world seems remarkably stable, and Hegel remarks that “The whole is a stable equilibrium of all the parts, and each part is a spirit at home in this whole, spirit which does not seek its satisfaction outside of itself but finds it within itself, because it is itself in this equilibrium with the whole” (PS 277/PG 249).

Hegel does not seem to be writing ironically when he says that “the ethical realm is in this way an immaculate world, a world unsullied by internal dissension” (PS 278/PG 250). He knows that such tranquillity is not the last word: his allusion to the *Antigone* which serves as the model for his development of the conflict in ethical spirit already signals how this immaculate world will be rent in tragic action. Rather, the tranquillity and equilibrium of ethical life in the family and community is the dream of these universal ethical spirits themselves—the dream of the *Familiengeist* and the *Gemeinwesen*. We hear the same rhetoric in panegyrics on family values in the late twentieth century United States, values that also invoke a self-perpetuating equilibrium predicated upon sex roles that are presumed to be both natural and traditional—that is, *sittliche*.<sup>11</sup> That Hegel subscribed to such rhetoric and regularly reproduced it (compare

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<sup>11</sup>I should note a distinction in terminology that could be confusing. Translations of Hegel render *Sittlichkeit* and *sittliche* as “ethical life” and “ethical” respectively, logically reserving “morality” for the later shape of *Moralität*. As should be clear, “ethical life” has to do with the actual, substantial *ethos* of an actual people, as this *ethos* is concretized in the family and

the discussion in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* §§158-181) may disappoint some readers, but his fundamental point is that this immediate unity cannot sustain itself precisely because it ignores the individual as an individual, or, as Hegel says, “Self-consciousness has not yet appeared in its right as *particular individuality*” (*PS* 279/251; translation modified). The spirit of the ethical substance is in this sense absolute; individuals count in the family and in the community as members, but not as the free and responsible individuals Hegel knows are required in modern social life and thus the life of absolute spirit itself.

The failure of the ethical world to take full account of individuality represents the opposite problem that occurred in the territory of reason. However, this is not simply a reversal, for Hegel has been able to bring spirit onto the stage in its immediate substantial form, that of a people existing essentially both as family and as community, and it is from this immediate substantiality of spirit that the antithesis involved in the ethical world will develop. The immediate unity of self-consciousness with the ethical substance experienced in the family relationships and the recognition that takes place there is only one-sided, for this recognition is confined to the spirit of the family, and recognizes the individual only as a bearer of its blood. Similarly, the community recognizes in the family the form of its own existence, and by accepting the male (according to Hegel’s

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community and, later, in the world of culture and the state. Levinas, by contrast, reserves “ethics” for the absolute demands of responsibility outside of and prior to any concrete intersubjective ethos or social fabric. That “morality” and “mores” can and in fact usually do describe the very concrete “ethical life” Hegel terms *Sittlichkeit* need cause no problems, so long as the reader is careful to distinguish between a concrete *ethos* or set of *mores* and a transcendent moral or ethical exigency.

historical model) as an active citizen, it authenticates or recognizes the family, while the family itself recognizes in the community the enduring context of its own being—both the social context in which the sexual relations essential to the family arise and the economic context on which it depends.<sup>12</sup> But when the individual asserts him or herself as either a member of the family or of the community and *acts*, the essential harmony of these two spheres is disrupted.

Action or the deed (*die Tat*) appears here in its characteristic role, for it is always particular and introduces contingency at the same time that it *actualizes* what would otherwise remain mute and implicit. “The *deed*,” Hegel says, “is the *actual self*.”

It disturbs the peaceful organization and movement of the ethical world. What there appears as order and harmony of its two essences, each of which authenticates and completes the other, becomes through the deed a transition of *opposites* [*einem Übergange Entgegengesetzter*] in which each proves itself to be the negation [*Nichtigkeit*] rather than the authentication of itself and the other. (*PS 279/PG 251*; translation modified)

The laws of the divine underworld and the human community each legislate universally, in such a way that within the whole, where alone the members of the family and community count as members, there is no conflict that is not immediately resolved. Like the predications attempted in the chapter on “Perception,” each legislates for the individual *as* a member of its own ethical sphere.

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<sup>12</sup>This economic dependence of the family on the community is not much developed in the *Phenomenology*, but it is described consistently (*PS 272/PG 246*) with the accounts in the *Jena System of Ethical Life* and the later *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.



This principle can best be illustrated if we apply it to the story of Oedipus himself, a story to which Hegel alludes in this section although both he and his commentators give it second place to the story of Antigone. Oedipus, as Hegel points out, is “the son [who] does not recognize his father in the man who has wronged him and whom he slays, nor his mother in the queen whom he makes his wife” (PS 283/PG 255).<sup>13</sup> The perfect and immediate recognition predicated within the family is precisely what fails in this tragic action, and the actual recognition that does ensue, for both Oedipus and Antigone (and Creon as well) is rather the individuating recognition of guilt: “The ethical consciousness must, on account of this actuality and on account of its deed, acknowledge its opposite as its own actuality, must acknowledge [*anerkennen*] its guilt: ‘*Because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred*’ [*Antigone*, l. 926]” (PS 284/PG 255-256). In other words, it makes no difference to the universality of the laws which particular member transgresses or executes its dictates. Fate is indifferent that the Oedipus it has led to greatness is one and the same individual it now ruins, indifferent that the Antigone who honored the dead and thus fulfilled the divine law is the Antigone buried alive as the bride of death, indifferent that the Creon who saved Thebes from civil strife is the Creon who witnesses his entire family commit suicide in the space of a single scene. It is not in the universal

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<sup>13</sup>Hegel does not use *anerkennen* here, but some sense of failed recognition is implicit when he says that “*Die Wirklichkeit hält daher die andere dem Wissen fremde Seite in sich verborgen, und zeigt sich dem Bewußtsein nicht, wie sie an und für sich ist,—dem Sohne nicht den Vater in seinem Beleidiger, den er erschlägt; nicht die Mutter in die Königen, die er zum Wiebe nimmt*”: “Actuality therefore keeps hidden in itself the other side, foreign to [the individual’s] knowledge, and does not show itself to consciousness as it is in and for itself, does not show to the son the father in the attacker whom he strikes, nor the mother in the queen whom he takes to wife” (PS 283/PG 255). As my more literal translation shows, the English makes more sense when the failure of recognition is explicit.

equilibrium of the ethical order that the opposition of these laws bears its tragic fruit, but only in the pathos of the particular individual.

The result of this dialectic is that the immediate unity of ethical life cannot sustain the unity of the whole of human experience. It is impossible to understand one's actual experience solely on the basis of being a member of an enduring, substantial spirit. Rather, the substantial spirits of family and community are swallowed up in an impersonal destiny that imparts knowledge only of guilt, imparts knowledge that can only be suffered. What Hegel derives from this as the basis for the transition to the next section is precisely the sense of *self* that comes to the fore in this tragic suffering. As a result of the failure of ethical substance to unify experience, "the life of spirit and this substance that is self-conscious in everyone is lost" (*PS 289/PG 260*), and now, instead of individuality determined by the immediate unity of spirit as ethical substance, we have individuality present in the atomic multiplicity of *persons*. In ethical substance, the individual was only a "*positive* universal," but, Hegel explains, "his actuality consists in his being a *negative* universal self." This result also emerges from the true character of destiny or fate: "That being which is reflected back into itself, that very necessity of blank destiny, is nothing else but the 'I' of self-consciousness" (*PS 290/PG 261*).

With this, we have a return to the importance of subjectivity, but now a subjectivity that emerges within and in opposition to the ethical or *spiritual* substance, rather than in opposition to the inert or objective substantiality that immediate consciousness thought it possessed as sense certainty. The subjectivity or self-consciousness of spirit, which emerges first in the tragic consciousness of the individual who acts on the basis of the ethical spirit in which she has her substantial being, embraces

in its development many of the deepest ruptures in the experience that consciousness undergoes in the *Phenomenology*; for, as Hegel had foreshadowed in the preface, only subjectivity—the pure ‘I’ now present in spirit as ‘We’ or *intersubjectivity*—possesses the magical power of the negative needed to look death in the face and tarry with it, converting it into being. Hegel’s project in the long chapter on spirit now becomes the development of this new, spiritual self-consciousness to the point that it can attempt the mutual recognition that miscarried as self-consciousness.

Hegel had established a locus of spiritual recognition within the family, and especially in the relation of sister and brother. However, this recognition, despite the affirmation with which Hegel introduces it, does not turn out to be adequate to the experience of the ethical world. What it lacks is the specificity of self-consciousness. The shape which does develop as the truth of the ethical world, the legal person, preserves a mode of recognition, for it is precisely as a legal person that the individual is *recognized* and counts. However, this recognition, too, is far from satisfactory, for it is based on an individuality that is as hollow as the actor’s mask from which it takes its name—*per sono*. It is a recognition as empty as it is universal: “Consciousness of right [*Recht*], in the very fact of being recognized as having validity, experiences rather the loss of its reality and its complete inessentiality; and to describe an individual as a ‘person’ is an expression of contempt” (*PS 292/PG 262*). “Validity” [*Gelten*], which recurs as the ineffectual analogue of “recognition” several times in this section, depicts the complete insubstantiality to which self-conscious spirit, having rejected ethical substance, is condemned.

The ethical world of ancient Greece becomes the fascist world of the Roman empire, a world where the formal but insubstantial power of the individual is personified in the emperor or lord of the world, “the titanic self-consciousness that thinks of itself as being an actual living god” (*PS 293/PG 263*). Hegel’s criticism of the vacuous subjectivity of the imperial state refutes the view of idealist politics that Levinas frequently imputes to him—the state as anonymous collectivity. In fact, it is precisely the failure of recognition in such a state that anathematizes it for Hegel: “For [the lord’s] power is not the *union* and *harmony* of spirit in which persons would recognize their own self-consciousness. Rather, they exist, as persons, on their own account [*für sich*], and exclude any continuity with others from the rigid unyieldingness of their atomicity” (*PS 293/PG 263*).

It is hard to conceive of the shape of the legal person as part of a progress towards the eventual reconciliation of spirit’s experience in a unity it can know and grasp as its truth. Yet Hegel warned us that the way would be one of despair, a *via negativa*. What we do gain from this experience, positively, is the determinate rejection of anything like abstract right and equality as the basis of a viable human society, a society in which people can recognize themselves as self-conscious and self-determined individuals within a social whole. But what also emerges from the experience of legal status is the absolute alienation of self-consciousness from its actuality as a legal “person.” This alienation recalls and in fact actualizes the alienation experienced by the unhappy consciousness:

Here the actual truth of that view [unhappy consciousness] has become apparent. This truth consists in the fact that this *universally acknowledged authority* of self-consciousness is the reality from which it is alienated. This acknowledgment of its authority is the universal actuality of the self;

but this actuality is directly the perversion [*Verkehrung*] of the self as well; it is the loss of its essence. The actuality of the self that was not present in the ethical world has been won by its return into the “person”; what in the former was harmoniously one now emerges in a developed form, but alienated from itself. (*PS* 293-294/*PG* 263-264)

In fact, every shape of spirit that Hegel designates as a “self” seems to recapitulate the internal disruption or alienation of the unhappy consciousness except the final self, absolute spirit. But it is precisely in the experience of such disruption that spirit reveals its distinctive power, its ability to face death and to transform it into being.

### 3. Culture, Sprache and Saying

The analysis of “Self-alienated Spirit” or “Culture” continues the quest for a recognition that will furnish, on the level of spirit, the reciprocity missing from the attempt at recognition in self-consciousness.<sup>14</sup> In no other section of the *Phenomenology* is there maintained such a deep rift in the experience of consciousness, except perhaps in the depiction of the unhappy consciousness. But this rift, caused by the self-alienation of

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<sup>14</sup>Joseph Gauvin’s *Wortindex zu Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes* indicates that the two subsections that comprise “Self-alienated Spirit” contain some 14 forms of *anerkennen*. This gives it equal footing with the 14 instances in the section, “Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage” (there are another 5 occurrences in the “Freedom of Self-consciousness”). However, both of these pale in comparison to the 42 instances of some form of *anerkennen* that Hegel employs in the final subsection of “Morality,” “Conscience.” Although again nothing definitive can be deduced from the sheer numbers, they certainly indicate a continuity and a development of this theme in the *Phenomenology*. It is also interesting to note the development of the theme of “reconciliation” (*Versöhnung*), or at least use of this terminology. First mentioned twice in “Unhappy Consciousness” (discounting 2 uses in the Preface), it is used 6 times in “Spirit” (3 times in “Conscience”), 18 times in “Revealed Religion” (where, as a religious term, it might be expected to have emphasis), and 4 times in the short final chapter, “Absolute Knowing.” It certainly seems as if the notion of reconciliation overlaps with and even develops out of the theme of recognition.

spirit, also provides the radically subjective doubleness necessary to further the quest for recognition. This does not mean that the recognition achieved within the sphere of culture satisfies the demands of a fully reciprocal, spiritual recognition. Almost every instance of recognition Hegel mentions here is undermined by the cynicism or shame endemic to a world predicated on alienation, and in the short introduction to the whole section on the self-alienated spirit of culture, Hegel paints a picture that is a stark contrast to the tranquil equilibrium he initially ascribed to the ethical world:

This spirit constructs of itself [*bildet sich...aus*] not merely a world, but a world that is double, divided, and self-opposed. ...Nothing has a spirit that is grounded within itself and indwells it, but each is outside of itself in something alien. The equilibrium of the whole is not the unity that remains with itself and the reassurance that comes from having returned into itself, but rests on the alienation of opposites. (*PS 295/PG*)<sup>15</sup>

In short, the world that culture shapes for itself is a world rent with contradiction, but therefore also rife with excitement and energy.

In this contradictory world of culture, spirit attempts a recognition that develops beyond the vain recognition and immediate validity of the legal person. As the above quotation makes clear, culture takes its name (*Bildung*) from the fact that it makes of itself a world (*bildet sich eine Welt aus*) instead of operating within a world that is simply given. In this constructed world, “the universality that counts [*gelte*]...is one that has made itself what it is” and not the universality or “the equality of the sphere of legal right, not that immediate recognition and validity of self-consciousness simply because it *is*”

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<sup>15</sup>Translation emended. The construction *sich ausbilden* does not mean to construct or develop *for* oneself, but to develop oneself.

(PS 297-298/PG 267). In other words, the individual gains recognition or acknowledgment only as an enculturated person: “What, in relation to the single *individual*, appears as his culture, is the essential moment of the *substance* itself...; or, culture is the simple soul of the substance by means of which, what is *implicit* acquires an *acknowledged*, [real] existence [wodurch das *Ansich Anerkanntes und Dasein ist*]” (PS 298-299/PG 268). However, in keeping with the duplicity and alienation of the realm of culture, this recognition works one way for the noble consciousness and another for the ignoble consciousness, personified in the “haughty vassal.” This ignoble consciousness is acknowledged as being in conformity with the essentiality of state power despite the fact that it surrenders to this state power only its “outer existence [Dasein],” not its “intrinsic being [Ansichsein].” In the ignoble consciousness, therefore, “the others find their own essence exemplified, but not their own being-for-self—find their thought, or pure consciousness, fulfilled, but not their individuality” (PS 307/PG 274-275). Essence and actuality are here each split in two; recognition can accrue to only one at a time, and directly at the expense of non-recognition for the other aspect, which then demands to be accounted for in its turn.

Although the schizophrenic spirit of culture can thus achieve only a partial and self-defeating recognition, it allows Hegel to bring into focus what is certainly the most important development in this section with respect to the ultimate accomplishment of recognition: language, *Sprache*.<sup>16</sup> The alienation in this phase of culture “takes place,”

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<sup>16</sup>John Burbidge points out the importance of language for the accomplishment of recognition in his essay, “Language and Recognition” (in *Method and Speculation in Hegel’s Phenomenology*, ed. Merold Westphal, 85-94 [New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1982]). He locates

Hegel maintains, “solely in *language*, which here appears in its characteristic significance.... It is the power of speech, as that which performs what has to be performed. For it is the *existence* of the pure self as self” (PS 308/PG 276).<sup>17</sup> From both action (as we saw in ethical substance) and “physiognomic expression” the I withdraws; in their thinghood, they add to the I what it in its purity is not: a thing. This means that physiognomic expression is for Hegel akin to the mere phenomenality or plasticity of the face that Levinas rejects in explicating the face as *visage* and expression, already language. But this does not mean that language for Hegel accomplishes the same ethical summons that the attendance and expression of the face do for Levinas. Language as *Sprache* expresses the self in its purity because it effects an existence (*Dasein*) that is “at once the externalization and the vanishing [*die Entäußerung und das Verschwinden*] of *this particular I*, and as a result, the abiding of the I in its universality” (PS 308-309/PG 276; translation slightly modified). The I abides in its universality not because it effects a

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another support for this connection in the Jena lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit given in 1803/4 (*System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, 218f, esp. 244-245). Burbidge shows that the lack of language is one reason for the failure of ethical behavior in the chapter on “Reason” and then observes that language, although introduced in “Culture,” does not fulfill the requirements of recognition until the section on conscience. However, he does not trace these latter stages in detail, and thus presents the beautiful soul as the unproblematic accomplishment of recognition.

<sup>17</sup>Throughout this section Miller attaches “real” to “existence” to translate *Dasein*, but, if anything, the sense would call more for “actual and effective,” i.e., *wirkliche*. This shift of actuality into reality is continued in the next sentence, when he translates, “In every other expression [the I] is immersed in a reality [*Wirklichkeit*] from which it can withdraw itself....” Compare the explanation at PS 309/PG 276 that “Spirit obtains this actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] here because the extremes, of which it is the unity, are also determined as being actualities [*Wirklichkeiten*] on their own account.”



“real presence” or thinghood, but because in the instant of its utterance (*Äußerung*) it is perceived or taken in (*vernommen*) by others.

This phenomenon inspires one of those amazingly paradoxical passages of the *Phenomenology* that frustrate those who cannot get beyond the strict logic of the understanding:

That it is *heard* or *perceived* means that its *existence* [*Dasein*] *dies away*; this its otherness has been taken back into itself, and its existence is just this: as a self-conscious *now*—as it is there—not to be there, and through this vanishing, to be there. (*PS 309/PG 276*)<sup>18</sup>

Taken outside of the context of the utterance and perception of speech, this passage would hardly make sense, and Miller’s insistence on translating even the verbal phrase *da zu sein* with the substantive phrase “a real existence” does not help English-speaking readers. The point is that spoken language effects the pure actuality of “being-there” that does not harden into substance, and does so precisely in the intersubjective situation of communication, even if what is communicated is the specious counsel of the ignoble consciousness or the flattery of heroism. It is not the particular content that expresses the pure self, but the form of language itself; the externalizing vanishing of speech is the medium that makes effective the negativity of the self. The essential negativity of the self “is there” only in the give-and-take of communication, the expression and impression of language.

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<sup>18</sup>Translation modified. The last part of this runs in German: “*und eben dies ist sein Dasein, als selbstbewußtes Jetzt, wie es da ist, nicht da zu sein, und durch dies Verschwinden da zu sein.*”

Hegel uses the surprisingly apt metaphor of *infection* (*Ansteckung*) to describe the vanishing but effective medium that is language. This metaphor does not express a negative judgment about the content language conveys as culture (a content Hegel later calls “the perverting, and perverted and distracted, self of the world of culture” [*PS* 395/*PG* 351]), but describes the dynamic by which that self actually exists in this exchange. Language, like infection, is actual in the transition (*Übergang*) between individuals, and simultaneously affords these individuals knowledge of their own actuality through this mediation. Here language is *effectively* universal. It is not the inarticulate and incommunicable *meaning* [*Meinung*] of sense certainty, but neither is its universality the free-floating essentiality of thought or the abstract universality of legal right. Language as it begins to show itself in culture expresses a universality accessible to all together—*Allgemeine*—and does so as the actual medium of human intercourse.

This same pure effectiveness of language qualifies it as knowledge for Hegel. The vanishing self that abides as universal through language accomplishes the perfect commerce of the self that characterizes *knowing*: “It is its own knowing [*Wissen*] of itself, and its knowing itself as a self that has passed over into another self that has been perceived and is universal” (*PS* 309/*PG* 276). The terminology Hegel employs here is not only that of recognition but of absolute knowing, and signals the true importance and destiny of what Hegel attributes to language. Of course, following a familiar pattern, Hegel has sketched a somewhat idealized conception of language and its effectiveness, yet he admits that in the particular shape of culture under consideration, “the *self* is at first actual only in consciousness, in the one extreme, while the *in-itself* is actual only in the state power, the other extreme.... This language is, therefore, not yet spirit that

completely knows and expresses itself [*wie er sich vollkommen weiß und ausspricht*]” (PS 310/PG 277). Such limitations will persist throughout the self-alienation of spirit as culture. Spirit will approach the perfection of language and knowledge when it moves beyond this purely alienated existence, and experiences this power of language in the activity of moral reconciliation, religious representation, and, finally, the absolute conceptual grasp of self-knowing.

Hegel’s analysis of language here corroborates Levinas’s assertion that Western philosophy reduces language to ontology by subsuming its ethical signification as responsibility or *saying to...* into the apophantic signification of the *saying of...* The emphasis Hegel gives to the mediation effected by language places it squarely in this ontological context. The vanishing being-there of the saying (*Aussprechen*) is preserved as the “being there of the pure self as self” in the “said” that is heard (*vernommen*). The pure self, in its saying, renders itself perfectly accessible to the sure grasp of the concept. This is precisely what it means to say that language is an infection: “The I that utters itself [*sich ausspricht*] is *heard* or *perceived*; it is an infection in which it has immediately passed into unity [*in die Einheit...übergegangen*] with those for whom it is an existence, and is a universal self-consciousness” (PS 309/PG 276). The said, according to Hegel’s conception of language, is perfectly correlative with the saying, and this in fact is its power.

What Levinas maintains is that the saying that issues inevitably in this transmission of meaning has an ethical significance that precedes the ontological sense taken up on this common and therefore universal plane. The saying gives itself as “a sign of the giving of signs,” although what is here “given” is not a sign in any conventional

sense of the term. It signifies rather the directionality of the French *sens* that Levinas emphasizes repeatedly, especially in the essay “Meaning and Sense.” The “*sens unique*” required for the meaningfulness of communication is not the ideality of an essence inscribed in a culturally established sign, but the ethical *orientation* that already goes towards the other:

The desire for the other, which we live in the most ordinary social experience, is the fundamental movement, a pure transport, an absolute orientation, sense. In all its analyses of language contemporary philosophy insists, and indeed rightly, on its hermeneutical structure and on the cultural effort of the incarnate being that expresses itself. Has a third dimension not been forgotten: the direction toward the other who is not only the collaborator and the neighbor of our cultural work of expression or the client of our artistic production, but the interlocutor, he or she to whom expression expresses, for whom celebration celebrates, both term of an orientation and primary signification? (*CPP* 94-95/*HdAH* 46).

Although Levinas is most likely alluding here to Merleau-Ponty, Ferdinand de Saussure and hermeneutic theorists who traces their origins to Husserl’s theory of signs, this evocation of a new dimension not encompassed by the hermeneutical circle suggests also an ethical dimension not mapped by consciousness in the landscape of experience.

Levinas’s “theory” of language does not at all deny the commerce between the saying and the said that Hegel maps out in the *Phenomenology*. It simply points to another dimension, a dimension without which the plane of consciousness could bear no significance at all, would be reduced to the incessant rumbling of the “there is” of pure being. That every step consciousness takes in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* moves already in a world where significance is not only possible but necessary indicates that the ethical dimension of which Levinas speaks is everywhere operative, even if it is not thematized as such but *taken up* in the experience of consciousness as a mode of knowing, ultimately

as a shape of that knowing spirit that is ubiquitous, if everywhere finite, that is, absolute.<sup>19</sup> The situation of language, where the very finitude of expression accomplishes the universality of its commerce is a paradigmatic example of such an *Aufhebung*. But the infinite that Levinas claims is welcomed in the ethical relation is not the infinity of being; rather, it is the infinite beyond being, on being's hither side. This equivocity signifies the radical newness of its dimensionality, its *sense*.

The saying that signifies ethically beyond the said in which it issues is not primarily a "saying of..." but a "saying to..." "Saying states and thematizes the said," writes Levinas, "but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that is to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said. This signification to the other occurs in proximity, which stands out from every other relation and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other" (*OB 46/AE 58*; translation slightly modified). Distinguishing the saying to... from the saying of... recognizes the important vocative, even imperative dimension of language, which does not effect emergence and disappearance but calls one to attend one's utterance, to attend the expression of the other. Here it is not the hearing or perception (*Vernehmen*) of the expression that signifies, but attendance to it, welcome and response. The ethical dimension of the saying to... is not an infection, but a summons and a provocation.

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<sup>19</sup>The linking of ubiquity and finitude to describe Hegel's absolute comes from Dennis Schmidt's insightful study of Heidegger's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to extricate himself from the intricacies of Hegelian thought, *The Ubiquity of the Finite* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

To be sure, this very saying issues in a said, where Levinas, exploiting the ambiguity of the terms, says that its ethical dimension is *betrayed*.<sup>20</sup> Absorbed into the said, the saying to... becomes the saying of... and indeed seems to function as an infection. This is how it functions for Hegel; the saying is always the saying *of* the said, with the subjective and objective genitive here realizing the reciprocity of self-knowing. The said itself can even be conceived, Levinas admits, as “prior to communication and the intersubjective representation of being” and thus seem to be the condition or context of any saying at all (*OB* 135/*AE* 172). Yet this priority conditions only the saying of... that the saying to... as proximity, as substitution, the one for the other, already compels. It is because I am ethically compelled to respond that I turn to the contexture of the said and deploy its resources not only in my spoken response, but in my understanding of what the other has said. Here the ethical relation compels the why of intelligibility and not vice-versa.

An example Levinas employs in “Meaning and Sense” to explain the lateral penetration of meaning between different cultures captures this *sense*—both urgency and orientation—of the saying that is primarily a saying to.... Merleau-Ponty had used the expression “lateral penetration” to describe how a Frenchman can learn Chinese without requiring an intermediary language such as Esperanto, and thus pass from one culture to another, functioning with at least some degree of proficiency in the context of that

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<sup>20</sup>In the Translator’s Introduction to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Alphonso Lingis cites an adage to apologize for the infidelities of translation required by linguistic differences: “*Traduire c’est trahir*” (*OB* xxxviii). Levinas alludes to this same adage early on: “*Dans le langage comme dit, tout se traduit devant nous—fût-ce au prix d’une trahison*” (*OB* 6/*AE* 7), and then refers to the betrayal of the saying in the said throughout the text.

culture's "said." According to Levinas, what is missing from this explanation—which by refusing an ideal intermediary upholds both the universality and the finitude of the said—is the exigency “of an *orientation* which leads the Frenchman to take up learning Chinese instead of declaring it to be barbarian (that is, bereft of the real virtues of language), to prefer speech to war” (*CPP 88/HdAH 36-37*). Thus the saying that is first of all a saying to... is not properly described in terms of the conventional properties of language at all, but in terms of ethics: obligation, responsibility, peace. No matter what I speak of, I must always say it to the other, to whom I am already turned (even if I am turned away).

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas describes the “*noeud d’une intrigue*,” the knot of an intrigue that cannot be reduced to correlation and synchronization, but that nevertheless interlaces the saying in the said (*OB 46/AE 59*).<sup>21</sup> This intrigue by which the saying issues in a said that still does not exhaust its signification is critical for Levinas, for without it the terms “saying” and “said” would appear contingently related. If he were to maintain an absolute divorce between the saying and the said, not only the latter but both would be without vital significance. The apparent coherence of the said would be reduced to a ruse, the work of an evil genius. But saying, although thematized by consciousness in the said, nevertheless bends back in its knot, and signifies in the said as a trace of “a *proposition*, a proposition made to a neighbor, a ‘signifyingness dealt’ (*signifiance baillée*)” (*OB 47/AE 59-60*). The

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<sup>21</sup>This knot in which intricacy (*intrigue*) is implicated Lingis translates as “the crux of a plot,” which seems to suggest a conspiracy that says one thing but dissembles, encrypts another. However, if one hears the “crossing” in “crux” and slides “plot” into “plat” and then “plait,” one begins to hear the twistings and turnings of Levinas’s expression, which expresses the one for the other of substitution.

significance of the saying apart from the said thus constitutes both an interruption and a provocation of the work of consciousness. This non-determinative relation of “intrigue” between the saying and the said signifies, yet escapes the schema of a perfect, reciprocal commerce between them that could be recollected by consciousness as the absolute experience or truth of the saying.

But Levinas also overemphasizes the distance between his account of language and the onto-phenomenological account (although he probably has Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty more in mind than he does Hegel). Nothing so marks how close Hegel and Levinas’s accounts come to each other—but also how distinct they are—as the role language plays in the relation with the other. What language fundamentally accomplishes according to Hegel is a being-for-self that is simultaneously a being-for-others. He emphasizes this point when he describes language as the existence of the pure self: “In speech, self-consciousness’s individuality in its being-for-self comes into existence as such, so that it is for others” (*PS* 308/*PG* 276).<sup>22</sup> In the initial confrontation of one self-consciousness with another, each had to prove its being-for-self as negativity by risking its life, as well as by seeking the death or domination of the other. Here self-consciousness has become spirit, the culture of a people that has developed a language, and in speaking “it surrenders itself as completely as in death, yet in this renunciation

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<sup>22</sup>I have given a more literal translation than Miller’s, which interprets “being-for-self” as “independent” and “separate,” obscuring the way in which being-for-self and being-for-others are here united. The German runs: “*in ihr [Sprache] tritt die für sich seiende Einzelheit des Selbstbewußtseins als solche in die Existenz, so daß sie für andre ist*” (*PG* 276). Daniel J. Cook, following Hyppolite’s French, translates the first part of this clause, “In it the *self-oriented individuality* of self-consciousness as such enters into existence” (*Language in the Philosophy of Hegel* [The Hague: Mouton, 1973]), 85).



[*Entäußerung*] no less preserves itself” (PS 308/PG 276). This actual and vital coincidence of being-for-self and being-for-others is crucial to the knowing that language is ultimately able to accomplish.

On Levinas’s side, the saying apart from the said is characterized as substitution, responsibility, “the one for the other,” which, however, is not yet a *being-for-the-other*. How is this “one-for-the-other” that does not yet assume the shape of being to be understood? Is the distinction simply a product of Levinas’s stubborn fear of ontological language and thus a barren assurance without content? Or does it mark the anarchic exception to the play of being and essence that gives ethics precedence over ontology? What I would suggest is that the ethical “*for-the-other*” conditions and even demands the ontological “*being-for-the other*,” and that there are two different senses of *for* used here that are precisely ethical and ontological. To *be* for the other, I need to feel the claim of the other, the desire for the other, responsibility for the other even to the point of persecution. Furthermore, because of the insoluble and unseverable knot of intrigue between the saying and the said, this anarchic ethical responsibility for the other demands that one also *be* for the other, that is: speak to the other, hear the other, shift one’s priorities and “be there” for the other, even oppose the other, whose ultimate well-being (no matter how one conceives this) already concerns me.

What is also significant about Hegel’s combination of being-for-self and being-for-others in language is that it shapes the decisive dialectic of conscience, where the long drive towards recognition comes to fruition. I will attempt to show that the culmination of revealed religion and the transition to absolute knowing recapitulate the recognition and reconciliation achieved at the end of the dialectic of conscience—in fact,

realize it in religious experience and comprehend it as dialectical knowing. This means that the reconciliation announced at the end of “Morality” and “Conscience” is decisive for the *Phenomenology* as a whole in an even stronger sense than that in which the resolution or *Aufhebung* of every shape of consciousness remains determinative for the absolute recollection of spirit. It is to this resolution of the quest for recognition that we will turn next, after a brief summary of the disruption that plagues all shapes of spirit as culture.

Hegel does not dispute the insufficiency of the recognition attempted within the realm of culture, despite its development of language as the living speech, the actual culture of a people. Because of the alienation that constantly rends or disrupts self-consciousness here, it experiences recognition or acknowledgment but also non-recognition. What Hegel does claim is that “self-consciousness retains the recognition [*Anerkanntsein*] and *intrinsic validity* of itself as an independent being,” but sees itself from the side of its “pure ownmost *actuality* [*reiner eigensten Wirklichkeit*] or its *I*, as outside of itself and belonging to another” (*PS* 313/*PG* 280). The self or the *I* that was acknowledged for itself under legal status, albeit at the price of abstraction, is here surrendered to the world of culture, and the self “sees that its pure personality is not a personality,” which prompts a feeling of “profound depravity [*tiefsten Verworfenheit*]” and “extreme rebellion” or resentment (*PS* 314/*PG* 280).<sup>23</sup> It is precisely

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<sup>23</sup>*Verworfenheit* (depravity, degeneracy) is mistranslated by Miller as “dejection.” My suggestion of “resentment” for *Empörung* is meant primarily to suggest a more personal tone than the political one carried by “rebellion.” “Indignation” would also do, and its coupling with *Verworfenheit* suggests that what we have here is not righteous but unrighteous indignation.

this “unrighteously indignant” self that perfectly employs the language of culture, aping flattery but combining it with incisive judgment to produce high culture’s hothouse flower, the cynical wit. Hegel knows that the cynic, like Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov, at once masters and sees through the hegemony of culture, and so is closer to moving beyond it than the “plain mind” clinging to the myth of “the good and the noble.” The conflict of faith with the Enlightenment that ensues also accomplishes recognition only halfway. Each side sees the faults of the opposite way of thinking, but fails to recognize itself (*sich erkennt*) in that other (cf. *PS* 333, 336, 344-347/*PG* 297, 299, 306-309, *passim*).

Finally, the shape of absolute freedom draws these contradictions into the vortex of its pure negativity. This spirit is “the *being-for-self* into which being-for-another returns,” the self that unites I and object, or the “pure concept, the gazing of the self into the self, the absolute seeing of *itself* doubled” (*PS* 356/*PG* 317). This purity has a price; it forfeits the “positive” accomplishments of language and service in the world of culture: “All these determinations have vanished in the loss suffered by the self in absolute freedom; its negation is the death without meaning, the sheer terror of the negative that contains nothing positive, nothing that fills it with content” (*PS* 362/*PG* 322). Then, by one of the most astounding reversals of the *Phenomenology*—although most commentators seems to take it in stride—this pure, destructive negativity turns around into the positivity of the moral will. The point is that this pure negativity is in actuality the self, and this prompts a shift from self-consciousness considering itself as a mere point in the universal will to self-consciousness considered as the unity of pure knowing

and willing, or the moral will as discussed by Kant and the tradition of German idealism.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. Conscience, Recognition, and Reconciliation

Our task is to understand how the ruptures that rend experience are comprehended by spirit in what Hegel calls “absolute knowing.” Levinas’s fundamental claim against Hegel is that the structures of knowing and thought dissemble the experience from which they live, and more specifically, that the ethical relation, the one for the other, opens an infinite responsibility that devolves into a totality of conscious commitments when absorbed into the system of the said. We have seen that Hegel considers the project of recognition crucial to the development of self-conscious and self-knowing spirit, for recognition affords a certainty that what self-consciousness (which becomes self-conscious spirit) conceives it is *in and for itself*, it is *in actuality and truth*. In other words, free and mutual recognition assures self-consciousness that its experience is grounded in a complete, if everywhere finite, process of knowing that is spirit’s own self-development. If Hegel can provide us with an account of how recognition succeeds concretely, he will have acquitted himself of the charge that knowing dissembles

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<sup>24</sup>Miller obscures this transition when he translates *Wirklichkeit* as “real existence” and thus says that the “real existence” of absolute freedom’s negativity “is immediately one with self-consciousness” (*PS 362/PG 322*). It is rather the actuality and effectiveness of absolute freedom’s negativity that is one with self-consciousness. The “real existence” produced by absolute freedom was the Reign of Terror described by Hegel, an existence in which spirit and thus self-consciousness is still alienated.

experience, for the whole of experience will be nothing else but this interrelated process of knowing.

That the project of recognition comes to a head in “Morality” and especially in the subsection on “Conscience” is generally acknowledged, although the trajectory towards this denouement through the failed recognitions of self-consciousness, ethical substance, and culture is less obvious.<sup>25</sup> One way to see this development is Hegel’s own announcement that conscience is the “third self” of spirit (*PS* 384/*PG* 341), the self that attains a concrete content and existence without abandoning its universality. He identifies the first of the previous selves as the abstract person of “Legal Status,” whose “existence [*Dasein*]” consists in being recognized [*Anerkanntsein*], but only on this abstract, insubstantial level, where the relation between individual and universal is immediate and thus indeterminate. The second self of spirit, the self of absolute freedom, overcomes the oppositions of culture at the same time that it differentiates between individual and universal. Here, “The universal...is *object* and content of the self and its universal actuality,” that is, not merged immediately with the self, but set up against it as its object [*Gegenstand*]. Yet this universal “all the same remains a purely spiritual essence [*Wesen*], the state of being acknowledged or a universal willing and knowing.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Robert Williams’s *Recognition* is the best account of this trajectory. See also the works by Paul Redding and Terry Pinkard cited above, n. H. S. Harris is always sensitive to this theme, and I expect the pursuit of recognition will be traced carefully in his forthcoming two volume commentary on the *Phenomenology, Hegel’s Ladder*. However, he seems more skeptical than Williams, Redding, and Pinkard on how well “recognition” translates into and justifies a *system* of knowing. See Harris, *Hegel: Phenomenology and System*, 107.

<sup>26</sup>Translation emended. Throughout this section, I will replace Miller’s “reality” with “actuality” or some form of “actual-” when it translates *Wirklichkeit* or some form of *wirklich-*. I will also frequently alter Miller’s translation slightly in the following pages to maintain Hegel’s

Recognition here still has no concrete existence apart from the self, and thus the self has “no filling and no positive content, no world” (*PS* 384/*PG* 341).

Another way that Hegel explains this is to say that the legal person is a self with no content at all; the universal and the individual are immediately one in it, depriving it of the dynamic needed to establish an effective content. The self of absolute freedom has a content—the universal will—but no concrete, particular content, and so its experience of recognition is also one-sided or one-dimensional. This deficiency is gradually supplied in “Morality,” first by the conception of the nature that is both the concrete world in which the individual dwells, and the sensual human nature of the individual on which morality goes to work. However, even the moral duty of the individual remains formal and without content in the first two stages of morality, and the two sides of nature and pure duty either fall apart or alternate in the play called “duplicity” or “dissemblance” [*Verstellung*]. What Hegel emphasizes as crucial to the third self of conscience is precisely its concreteness, its existence [*Dasein*]. This concrete existence consists in its acting from conviction and its expression of this conviction to others who are also conscientious actors in the human community.<sup>27</sup> What eventually results is a concretely mediated universality that is thoroughly subjective—a community whose self-relation consists in this self-certain activity, the articulation of its conviction or certainty,

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contrasts or consistency of specific vocabulary in this key section, signaling such alterations by introducing the German text in square brackets.

<sup>27</sup>Flay’s analysis in *Hegel’s Quest for Certainty*, 215-226, emphasizes that the spiritual standpoint of conscience is not just the individual, but the individual as a participant in the community of conscientious actors.

and finally, the confession of finitude and mutual forgiveness or reconciliation. With this step we will move beyond conscience itself to religion, where “religion” represents the way this concrete reconciliation is worked out in the experience of spirit.

a. Recognition as Doing and Speaking One’s Conviction

Conscience itself moves through several stages of recognition, each more effective and “concretely spiritual” than the last. The first stage is to consider the concrete moral actions of the individual. Such conscientious action sublates the contradiction between pure duty and impure action not by thinking about this contradiction, but by acting. What is considered here is the will as actual and effective, as in fact acting. Conscience is not first a will and subsequently an attempt to effect this will (this is the situation of “moral consciousness”) but itself accomplishes the effective unity of knowing and acting by acting from its conviction [*Überzeugung*] of duty in its particular circumstances. As far as conscience is concerned, to speak of the active will is a tautology: “Action *qua* actualization [*Das Handeln als die Verwirklichung*] is thus the pure form of the will” (PS 385/PG 342).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>On the unity of action and effectiveness, see again Flay, *Hegel’s Quest for Certainty*, 217, including n19. Hyppolite’s discussion, to which Flay refers, explicates the difference between pure duty and duty that is acted upon out of conviction in terms of Karl Jaspers’ notion of *Existenz*, where to act is to embed one’s freedom in the finitude of *Existenz* and thus historicity (*Genesis and Structure*, 496-505). If this comparison is illuminating, and I believe it is, one is tempted to invoke also a comparison with Heidegger’s discussion of the call of conscience, the factual situation, the clarity of the moment, and existential resolution (*Entschlossenheit*). However, such a consideration is beyond the scope of the present study, leading, as it does, deliberately beyond the categories of moral thinking and action.

Hegel explicates the action of conscience as *being-for-self* that has become *being-for-another*, and argues that the self holds this being-for-others of action in unity with the being-for-self of its own consciousness, so that duty becomes “the essential moment of relating itself, *qua universality*, to another (PS 388/PG 344). Except for that crucial “*qua universality*,” one might read this as the Hegelian version of Levinas’s notion of the one-for-the-other of ethical responsibility. Indeed, here we again glimpse the precise difference between these two thinkers. For Levinas, responsibility is not a conviction that arises from the pure certainty of the self in the face of particular circumstances, a duty that becomes a concrete universality by being enacted so that it exists or is there for another. Rather, responsibility arises in the face of the other, individualizing the self as the one responsible; its infinity does not move into universality, but is suffered in the deepening nearness of proximity. The face of the other is not a proof of the fact of responsibility or duty, but an interruption that disturbs every conviction about one’s duty or commitments.

For Hegel, the being-for-another of conscientious action is the first moment of the recognition of conscience. This recognition in fact secures the “*enduring actuality*” of the deed: “Conscience is the communitarian [*gemeinschaftliche*] element of the [two] self-consciousnesses, and this is the substance wherein the deed has its *enduring actuality*, the moment of being recognized and acknowledged by others” (PS 388/PG 344). What is remarkable here is that it is recognition that is effective as the “element” in which conscientious action, as such, is actual. It is no longer a question of acting so as to insert moral events into the workings of the realm of nature, as the Kantian moral consciousness that Hegel critiqued had it. The realm of nature could provide, at best, an



objective actuality, the truth that “Spirit is a bone.” Only a spiritual element can grant and sustain the spiritual actuality consciousness seeks here; therefore, *it is in being recognized that the action of conscience is actually an act of conscience*. Again:

It is just the fact that it is recognized that makes the deed an actuality. The deed is recognized and thereby made actual because the existent actuality is immediately linked with conviction or knowledge; or in other words, knowing one’s purpose is immediately the element of existence, is universal recognition. (PS 388/PG 345)

In other words, recognition does not *follow* conscientious action, but effects the very conscientiousness of the action.

This means that there is a deep connection between “conviction” and “recognition.” One’s conviction that one’s actions stem from one’s duty is grounded in the recognition that such conscientious action is not only possible, but also the only path of certainty. Thus conviction [*Überzeugung*], though essentially personal, is ideally grounded in the witness or proof [*Zeugnis*] that is recognized as having public or universal validity. However, as Hegel’s pointed use of “immediately” shows, the recognition at work here is still insufficiently mediated by the community, which is present as yet only as one’s own *conviction*.<sup>29</sup> When Hegel reviews how active conscience resolves the insufficiency of reason’s “honest consciousness” that sought to concern itself with the “thing itself” or the “real issue [*die Sache selbst*],” he notes that while the “thing itself” has passed through the individual moments of substantiality, existence, and the essentiality of thought at various stages of the section on spirit, “in

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<sup>29</sup>Miller had rendered *unmittelbar* as “directly,” obscuring, I think, this insufficiency.

conscience it is the *subject* that knows these moments within itself” (PS 389/PG 345). The *immediacy* of this subject’s knowing or conscientious certainty (*Gewissen*) is recognition present as conviction. The insufficiency of recognition as conviction also seems to me to be manifest in the avowed inability to know or consider all the circumstances in a given situation, even though Hegel professes to find as much actuality for conscience in the recognition of cowardice as in the recognition of courage.

The next stage of recognition involves the re-introduction of language as the actual existence of the self. In the *doing* of a conscientious act, the difference between consciousness and duty is subsumed by conviction or knowing, as *deed*, something already done; however, Hegel says that this difference enters into the enduring realm of being, where it does not necessarily bring knowing and thus acknowledgment with it. The result is a *disparity* between what conscience knows and acts upon and what the deed is for others (PS 294/PG 350). This disparity is overcome through language, where conscience expresses its conviction or knowing of the rightness of its action. The simple effect of the action—the objective state of being that it brings about—cannot directly be acknowledged by others as having universal validity; for, as we learned early in the *Phenomenology*, the true determinations of objective being cannot be maintained without grasping the actuality of self-consciousness in the object. Here Hegel reiterates: “The element of lasting being is universal self-consciousness” and such universal self-consciousness *exists* or is there for others, as we had seen earlier, in speech:

Language is self-consciousness existing *for others*, self-consciousness which *as such* is immediately *present*, and as *this* self-consciousness is universal. It is the self that separates itself from itself, which as pure ‘I’=‘I’ becomes objective to itself, which in this objectivity equally preserves itself as *this* self, just as it merges immediately

[*unmittelbar...zusammenfließt*] with other selves and is *their* self-consciousness. It perceives itself [*vernimmt sich*] just as it is perceived by others, and the perceiving is precisely *existence that has become a self*. (PS 395/PG 351)

The deed is actual as conscience only in the self's immediate recognition of universal validity in the form of its own certain conviction; here conviction must be expressed in order to be acknowledged, to achieve existence or actuality not only for itself but universally, for others as well.

It is almost impossible to overemphasize the importance of this claim. Virtually every effective defense of Hegel against the image of him as the architect of a system of mystical metaphysics and dictatorial onto-theology relies on the concrete universality and intersubjective dynamic first evoked here, even if they do so more on the basis of the objective spirit examined in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* or the other lectures that articulate the absoluteness of spirit as set forth in the later *Encyclopedia*—the *Lectures on Aesthetics* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. The ultimate ground of this concretely intersubjective universality is the community of conscientious actors—which includes conscientious scholars, civic and state leaders, artists, religious believers, and ultimately all conscientiously thinking humankind—articulating their convictions and recognizing their dependence upon one another's judgment (as well as forgiveness, as we shall see). It is here that Hegel first emphatically announces an intersubjective unity that does not absorb and neutralize plurality, but depends upon it:

Language, however, only emerges as the middle term, mediating between independent and acknowledged self-consciousnesses; and the existent self is immediately universal acknowledgment, an acknowledgment on the part of many, and in this manifoldness a simple acknowledgment [*...allgemeines, vielfaches und in dieser Vielheit einfaches Anerkanntsein*]. (PS 396/PG 351)

Crucial to the argument that Hegel's system does not reabsorb or sublimate this effective and necessary community of concrete selves—a community that is both plurality and unity—will be the fate of this concrete intersubjectivity in the transitions to religion and especially to absolute knowing. If language as spoken and heard is the medium of concrete universality—the way that spirit achieves certainty in its adventure of self-knowing—this intersubjective dynamic of language must somehow still be effective in the ultimate shape of absolute knowing and thus in the *Logic* itself.<sup>30</sup>

The insistence that actual universality is effected by language expressed and understood means that conscience cannot be authoritarian or dictatorial in its convictions. Conscience is not a privileged state of being or knowing whose word is law. Instead, language is the medium through which alone the dynamic of knowing essential to conscience can find expression and existence. It is only as expressed in language that the conviction of the individual can effect the recognition it already implicitly claims for itself. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" can serve as a clear example of how this works: King is completely convinced of the justice of the civil disobedience he and his colleagues have practiced in picketing the Birmingham

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<sup>30</sup>I am discounting here those who rely exclusively on the *Logic* to defend Hegel against the charge that his system or totality compromises the plurality he wants to preserve. To do so, it seems to me that they must explicate the absolute idea as a dialectic ultimately and radically independent of the concrete intersubjectivity of the *Phenomenology*, a project that threatens to undermine the unity of the system as a whole. How can a purely logical concept—even the concept of dialectic—configure itself independently as the comprehension of the universality effected by a concrete intersubjective community without dissembling or discounting this very concreteness? This is the ultimate problem of the relation between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*, at least from the perspective of a critique of Hegel that requires him to show how the ethical relation is not compromised by the absoluteness of the system.

merchants, but he also knows that he must articulate this conviction for these actions to have any effect as conscientious acts. He deliberately expresses himself in the religious and ethical language recognized as valid by white American culture and especially the white ministers to whom he addressed his letter. Here, although on this occasion King expresses himself in writing rather than speech, we see precisely how language effects a universal validity and knowledge. As Hegel argues: “What is valid for [universal] self-consciousness is not the *action* as an *existence*, but the *conviction* that it is a duty; and this conviction is made actual in language” (*PS* 396/*PG* 351).

The avowal of conscientious conviction in one’s actions raises the individuality and particularity that is the locus of this conviction into the universality of the human community as such. This universality differs from the universality of ethical substance, where a merely substantial universality and anonymous destiny ruled individuals, and it differs as well from the universality of pure duty that moral consciousness opposed to the sensuous nature of the individual. Here, “this distinction between the universal consciousness and the individual self is just what has been superseded, and the supersession of it is conscience.” The particular self’s declaration of conscience “in itself cancels or raises the form of its particularity to a new level. It thereby acknowledges the *necessary universality of the self*” (*PS* 396-397/*PG* 352).<sup>31</sup> In raising itself to universality through language, however, the self does not—or at least *ought not*—lose the concrete

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<sup>31</sup>I have revised the second-to-last sentence here, following the German: “*Das Aussprechen dieser Versicherung hebt an sich selbst die Form seiner Besonderheit auf,*” thinking it best to give emphasis to the Hegelian meaning of *aufheben* that is stressed here.

particularity it achieved in acting. This is the point of the further development of conscience into the form of the “beautiful soul,” which so abandons concreteness that it retains no form at all: “It vanishes like a shapeless vapor that dissolves into thin air” (*PS* 400/*PG* 355).

One further point to be emphasized about conscience before we consider the dilemma of hypocrisy and the dialectic of confession and forgiveness is the status of conscience as a “universal knowing and willing.” Conscience (*Gewissen*) involves being certain (*Gewiss*) and as such implies a knowing (*Wissen*) not only of duty but of oneself as obligated by that duty in these concrete circumstances. The declaration of conviction or speaking one’s conscience asserts the universality of this knowing by making it linguistically and thus conceptually accessible to the whole human community. But the knowing that conscience involves is not a moral species of knowing completely divorced from what is commonly called “objective knowing”; the claims of objective knowing—sense-certainty, perception and understanding, observing and active reason—lie behind us and are therefore, in Hegel’s conception of experience, still with us. Because conscience comprehends all the previous stages of consciousness’s development, it functions as the ground on which all of these previous shapes—rational observation and action, for example—can take their stand. In this way one’s knowing the world is grounded in one’s participation in the community of conscientious actors in the world: knowing the world objectively ultimately makes sense as an element of the avowed conscientious activity of humankind. Thus the morality of conscience is not an esoteric or subjective knowing that is separate from and unrelated to objective knowing, but the

standpoint that gives objective knowing a spiritual purpose or destiny: it is an integral part of spirit's self-knowing self-realization.<sup>32</sup>

#### b. Recognition as Reconciliation and the Infinity of Responsibility

Initially it seems as if the experience of conscientious actors articulating the convictions that underlie their actions and thus actualizing the concrete universality of spirit should bring the progress of the *Phenomenology* or at least the section on morality to a close, but it does not. Instead, Hegel introduces a new diremption or rift, between self-consciousness withdrawn into itself as the pure but impotent yearning of the beautiful soul and self-consciousness that acts and speaks conscientiously but finds itself confronted with its hypocrisy or the consciousness that its conviction may just as well be evil as good. This development seems in some ways a regression to the stage of duplicity or dissemblance (*Verstellung*), out of which conscience itself arose. Indeed, here Hegel says that hypocrisy arises in part because conscience goes too far to the other extreme: it substitutes for the abstract universality of pure duty the externality of words as all that counts as being-for-another. Similarly, the beautiful soul takes refuge in words that do not function as the real existence of the self as a self, but attempt to protect it from the contradictions and effort of existing at all. The beautiful soul comforts itself with words for its refusal to act, while the hypocritical soul acts only with words.

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<sup>32</sup>For a discussion of the certainty of conscience as the unity of sense-certainty and self-certainty, see Flay, *Hegel's Quest for Certainty*, 216f.

It is apparent *for us* that these two attitudes are really quite similar, and this is what they must discover for themselves. Hypocrisy, the first to grasp this identity, perceives in the articulated judgment of the beautiful soul the same discrepancy between its words and its actuality that it knows in itself. Returning to the effective power of language, and “giving utterance to [this identity], he confesses this to the other, and equally expects that the other, having in fact put himself on the same level, will also respond in words in which he will give utterance to this identity with him, and expects that this mutual recognition will now exist in fact” (PS 405/PG 359). However, this expectation is not met. The delicate beautiful soul is also a “hard heart” and “confronts the confession of the penitent with his own stiff-necked unrepentant character, mutely keeping himself to himself and refusing to throw himself away for someone else” (PS 405-406/PG 359). There is a strong contrast between the perspective of the hard-hearted beautiful soul, which sees confession as “throwing oneself away [*sich wegzuwerfen*]” and the confessing soul, which in its confession “has renounced [*entsagte*]” the exclusivity of its being-for-self (PS 406/PG 360) and thus made possible the universality to be accomplished by mutual recognition.

What the beautiful soul actually renounces here is the possibility of certainty and knowledge, which can only take place in community and therefore in communication with others. Hegel emphasizes the contrast between this confrontation of self-consciousnesses and the one that had taken place in the master-slave relation and the servile alienations of culture, for here the self-consciousness of the beautiful soul meets itself not as the spiritless thing of labor or wealth, but as “thought, simply knowledge itself, this absolutely fluid continuity of pure *knowing* which refuses to put itself into



communication with the other” (*PS 406/PG 359-360*). If we recall the judgment of the preface that person of common sense who refuses to communicate with others “tramples underfoot the roots of humanity” (*PS 43/PG 47*),<sup>33</sup> we see here why Hegel says that the beautiful soul, in maintaining its hard heart, “reveals itself as a consciousness which is forsaken by and which itself denies spirit” (*PS 406/PG 360*).

This contradiction between the confessing soul and the hard-hearted beautiful soul marks the most important rift in the whole experience of consciousness as Hegel presents it in the *Phenomenology*. It not only takes up the internal disruption of the unhappy consciousness on the level of spirit, but looks forward to the experience of the death of God in Revealed Religion; and its resolution as reconciliation prefigures the final comprehension of self-emptying in the conceptual grasp of absolute knowing. It is here, in the reconciliation of self-consciousness with itself which marks the transition from morality to religion, that Hegel makes one of the most memorable and provocative assertions of what he means by absolute spirit: “The wounds of the spirit heal, and leave no scars behind” (*PS 407/PG 360*). How is this miraculous healing effected?

The reconciliation of these two aspects of conscientious spirit is the culmination of the drive towards recognition introduced in the chapter on self-consciousness. The

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<sup>33</sup>John Durham Peters focuses on this phrase from the Preface in his analysis of how Hegel’s notions of language and communication strike a human balance between solipsism and social determinism; see his “‘The Roots of Humanity’: Hegel on Communication and Language,” in *Figuring the Subject: Subject, Absolute, and Others in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. David E. Klemm and Gunther Zöllner, 227-244 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). However, his account of how language works sometimes goes wrong, such as when he speaks of the middle term in the dynamic of *Sprache* as “a floating, disconnected entity—the content or ‘message’” (234).

hard heart relents because it recognizes the very universality it seeks in the confession of the penitent; thus it also renounces its one-sidedness in the forgiveness extended to the other: “The word of reconciliation is the *existent* spirit [*der das seiende Geist*], which beholds the pure knowledge of itself as *universal* essence in its opposite, in the pure knowledge of itself as *individuality* that is absolutely in itself [*als der in sich seienden Einzelheit*]*—a reciprocal recognition that is absolute spirit*” (PS 408/PG 361). Here for the first time Hegel acknowledges a recognition that is truly mutual (*gegenseitiges*), a recognition in which the two sides are united without doing away with opposition, *and united precisely in their character as knowing (Wissen)*.

This last point is important for our question of the relation between knowing and ethical responsibility. What is recognized here is not the similarity of objects in their qualities or structure, nor even the similarity of the subjective character of self-consciousness as being-for-itself, but the dynamic of *knowing* as it has been developed throughout the *Phenomenology*. What spirit knows itself to be in its universal essentiality (the purity of conviction) it finds reflected in its own individuality, and what it knows itself to be as an individual (imperfection in need of forgiveness) it finds reflected universally in others. Thus, Hegel’s ultimate statement about morality asserts that the demands of morality are fulfilled only when one knows both one’s concrete duty and one’s inevitable insufficiency and acknowledges both before others. For Hegel, morality is grounded in knowing, but a knowing that requires the intersubjective dynamic of recognition.

Thus we can say that the ethical problem posed by Levinas, the problem of the one for the other that Levinas says can only be suffered as an infinite responsibility, is

resolved or reconciled by Hegel in terms of knowing. But such a knowing or conceptual reconciliation of being-for-self with being-for-another is precisely what Levinas rejects. Yet, if his rejection is not to be comprehended as the ineffectual self-pity of the beautiful soul,<sup>34</sup> Levinas's critique must find a clear point where it can show that the *Aufhebung* of Hegelian knowing operates as dissimulation. Just such a point can be found in the role that language plays in the reconciliation that accomplishes spirit's self-recognition in otherness, a point at which Hegel takes up what seems to be a pure *saying* as the perfect correlate of the *said*.

According to Hegel's account, the recognition that universal knowing and individual knowing coincide is accomplished by language, by "the word of reconciliation." This word of reconciliation, however, is neither the expression of conviction, nor the confession of hypocrisy, the confession that personal interest can always also be attributed to the action that arises from conviction. The word of reconciliation is rather the explicit offering of forgiveness, and it is characterized by Hegel as the "reconciling Yes" (*das versöhnende JA*). According to Hegel, this "Yes" functions here in precisely the same way as the expression of the pure self in culture and the conscientious avowal of the convictions that underlie moral action: "The reconciling *Yea*, in which the two I's let go of their antithetical *existence*, is the *existence* of the *I* which has expanded into a duality..." (*PS* 409/*PG* 362). Again, "The word of

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<sup>34</sup>This is a charge Levinas explicitly denies: "And there is in subjectivity's relationship with the other, which we are here trying to describe, a quasi-hagiographic style that wishes to be neither a sermon nor the confession of a 'beautiful soul'" (*OB* 47/*AE* 61).

reconciliation is the existent spirit”—a formulation in which we can note that here it is *spirit* that exists and not only an aspect of *self* as had been the case earlier.<sup>35</sup> It is *absolute* spirit that comes into existence in reconciliation, absolute spirit as pure self-knowledge that comprises both universality and individuality.

Hegel spells out explicitly the content of this word of reconciliation. I shall quote his account of the content here at some length, for it is crucial to the understanding of why he takes reconciliation to be a *knowing*, especially an *absolute* knowing.

The content of this utterance is the substance of its enduring existence; it is the assurance of spirit's certainty in itself [*die Versicherung von der Gewißheit des Geistes in sich selbst*]. Each of these two self-certain spirits has no other purpose than its own pure self, and no other reality [*Realität*] and existence than just this pure self. But yet they are different; and the difference is absolute because it is set in this element of the pure concept. It is also absolute not only for us, but for the concepts themselves which stand in this opposition [*Gegensätze*]. ...For one of them, the absolute universal, is equally the pure knowledge of itself, as the other is the absolute discreteness of individuality, and both are only this pure self-knowledge. Both determinatenesses are thus pure knowing concepts [*wissenden reinen Begriffe*], whose determinateness is itself immediately a knowing, or whose relationship and opposition is the I. (*PS* 408-409/*PG* 361-362)

In other words, the content of the reconciling “Yes” is precisely the I's unity with and opposition to itself as mediated by the acting, speaking, forgiving community. Spirit here knows itself not as a thing, but as *knowing* itself, as the dynamic of simultaneously *relating* itself to and *opposing* its object, which is nothing else but this same relating and opposing, the knowing I. It is substance known as subject or pure knowing, although

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<sup>35</sup>This extension of language's effectiveness from the existence of the self to that of spirit is, I presume, what lies behind Robert Williams's claim that “Recognition is the existential-phenomenological genesis of *Geist*” (*Recognition*, 191; cf. also 208).

Hegel quickly notes that this occurs first on a level of consciousness, which only becomes a self-consciousness—or substance grasped and comprehended as subject—when the representational opposition of consciousness that dominates religion becomes the fluid self-movement of absolute knowing.

But does this *content* comprehend the whole signifyingness of the “Yes”? Here is where Levinas awakens us to the possibility of the pure significance of the saying. Responsibility for the other, turning towards the other in the very subjectivity of election, never gets so far as the certainty of recognizing itself in the other. Here the saying, signifying prior to or on the hither side of the said, speaks first in the vocative or imperative dimension of language, the dimension of proximity. Hegelian knowing and recognition already describe a return, already traverse what Levinas characterizes as the infinite distance of proximity. By contrast, what Levinas describes as substitution or responsibility transpires not merely in but *as* the infinity of this nearness. Here responsibility opens upon a depth that no knowing can grasp, for ethical subjectivity does not find itself circulating through the depth of its experience, but compelled to approach dimensions it could never suspect from or for itself. Responsibility does not respond to the recognition of itself, but moves always into the infinite proximity across which the other calls. One does not *fulfill* one’s responsibilities; they deepen as they are entered upon.

For Hegel, mutual confession and forgiveness effect the reconciliation that heals the wounds of spirit, bridging the gaps that open in the experience of the self with the movement of knowing, the absoluteness of subjectivity as spirit. Knowing manifests itself here as a dynamic that seizes upon the identity or unity of unity and difference,

grasping this movement of unity in difference as the very dialectical life of the concept. But for Levinas, who emphasizes the wound of responsibility for the other, every reconciliation must remain tentative, an incitement to further responsibility. The saying that Levinas can affirm as signifying in the relation of the same to the other is rather the “Yes of non-indifference.” This again does not mean (as Levinas himself sometimes implies) that Hegel espouses an indifference of the one for the other—such ethical indifference is exactly what the trenchant characterization of the beautiful but hard-hearted soul condemns. The “Yes” of non-indifference affirms the non-indifference of unity and difference rather than their unity.

This affirmation of non-indifference means that knowing is not and can never be absolute. Knowing would not thus simply be rendered relative, a condition that the Hegelian dialectic could almost certainly remedy, but *tentative*, in the literal sense of the word. Every act of knowing would be an *attempt*, a turning towards the other with all the risk—what Levinas repeatedly calls “this fine risk”—that substitution signifies. The signification of the pure saying means precisely that one is *for the other* without this *for* being situated in the absolute space of a system of reciprocity.

##### 5. Religion: Reconciliation, Community and the Absoluteness of Knowing

The reconciling “Yes” that ultimately accomplishes recognition is, as we have seen, at once the existence of spirit. With this, Hegel turns to consideration of the consciousness of this spirit as it is actually embodied in the plurality of knowing subjects, the religious community. But while we return to the concrete plurality of a human community with religion, it is no longer merely the substantial unity with which the long

chapter on spirit began, a substantiality in which individuality is submerged. The reconciliation of the individual and the universal effected conscience is in fact “God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge” (PS 409PG 362).

This transition to religion does not undermine the reconciliation accomplished in morality; instead, Hegel shows how this reconciliation can be understood in terms of religious consciousness, in terms of the representations that religious communities use to know absolute spirit, or God. For our purpose, which is to situate the claims of ethical responsibility vis-à-vis absolute knowing, it is clear that for Hegel the unity effected by moral recognition is taken up as the religious knowing of God as absolute spirit. The ethical responsibility of acting and speaking one’s conscience emphasized in “Morality” is thus cast in the shape of religious experience and understanding—in religious knowing. The development of religious consciousness moves through the primitive conceptions of natural religion to the humanistic world of religion and art epitomized in ancient Greek culture, and finally to the revealed religion of Christianity.<sup>36</sup> When this development is complete, absolute knowing will grasp it as the perfect counterpart of the reconciling self-knowledge of morality. The unity of these two reconciliations is the absolute reconciliation of spirit with itself: absolute knowing.

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<sup>36</sup>Judaism, which played a preliminary if largely negative role in the early writings on religion (*The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*) and which resumes such a role in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, is more or less ignored in the *Phenomenology*. Although he nowhere (to my knowledge) comments on this omission, Levinas could claim some vindication for his own use of religion in the fact that Hegel found no place for Judaism in his criticism of religion as “representational consciousness.”

While I cannot attempt here a full analysis of Hegel's phenomenology of religious consciousness, the development of several themes that it picks up from the previous dialectic of spirit will be useful for understanding how his resolution of moral experience with religious experience in the conceptual grasp of absolute knowing compares with Levinas's description of the infinite impossibility of resolving the ethical relation into a higher unity of being or knowing. The key concepts here are reconciliation, language, and community.

Religion, and especially revealed religion, takes up the theme of reconciliation developed in morality. We might even say that one of the tasks of religion is to achieve a reconciliation on the representational or theoretical level that will match the reconciliation achieved on the level of moral action and praxis. The reconciliation achieved in religion is first of all not the reconciliation of two acting consciences, but the reconciliation of God with God's other, or evil, which becomes identified with the merely natural. The reconciliation of good with evil, of God with nature, takes place first of all in the incarnation of the divine human being, but even more so in the experience of the death of this mortal divinity. In this process of experiencing and therefore knowing nature as "the untrue existence of spirit," we have what Hegel says is "in itself the reconciliation of spirit with itself" even though self-consciousness here cannot grasp this "conceptually" but only by means of the "imaginative idea [*Vorstellung*]," pushing the imagined actualization of this reconciliation into the distant future (*PS* 475, 478/*PG* 418, 420-421). In fact the actuality of reconciliation is the religious community itself, as it was at the end of morality, although, as Hegel says, "the community is not yet perfected in this its self-knowledge" (*PS* 477/*PG* 420). What ultimately occurs in the grasp of



absolute knowing is the reconciliation of these two reconciliations with one another, so that “the unification of the two sides...closes the series of shapes of spirit” (*PS* 482-483f/*PG* 425f).

Therefore we may say that religion is conceived by Hegel as a progressive representation of the reconciliation of the absolute being or God with finite consciousness and self-consciousness. Religion is the representation of an implicit unity, a unity which, although it always remains in a sense a *beyond*, nevertheless animates the spirit of religion. Levinas, by contrast, sees the essence of religion as precisely ethical. Religion does not unite God and human so much as it binds them in the imperative of an ethical relation: “Religion, where relationship subsists between the same and the other despite the impossibility of the Whole—the idea of Infinity—is the ultimate structure” (*TI* 80/53). The God of Levinas’s Jewish tradition is not so much a God of reconciliation and unity as a God of relation and encounter, even confrontation. The God of Judaism is a God who speaks and solicits a human response, but also a God who himself responds to the particular demands of the human, expressed face-to-face in the stories from Abraham and Moses to Job and Jeremiah, to Elie Wiesel and Yossel Rakover, the hero of the story Levinas comments on in “Loving the Torah more than God.” For Levinas, the ideal of religion is not so much reconciled unity and thus a knowing of God, but the whole uncertainty of relation, of question and challenge and response.

Language also plays an increasingly important role in Hegel’s development of religion, as it did in morality, coming explicitly into consideration when the Greeks begin to represent divine activity through the humanistic expression of linguistic art: “The god, therefore, who has language for the element of his shape is the work of art that is itself

ensouled [*das an ihm selbst beseelte Kunstwerk*], that possesses immediately in its outer existence the pure activity that, when it existed as a thing, was in contrast to it” (*PS* 430/*PG* 380). Although he speaks here generally of the religious *hymn*, it is the hymnody of the cult that develops into Greek tragic drama that Hegel has in mind, a language that animates the inanimate representation of the gods as statuary. This becomes clearer when he contrasts the hymnody of the cult to the oracular utterance in which the godhead is represented as alienated from the consciousness to which it speaks, and then to the higher languages of epic and tragic poetry and drama, in which “the separate beautiful national spirits unite into a single pantheon, the element and habitation of which is language” (*PS* 439/*PG* 388).

However, language plays only a representational role in religion, a role that persists in Hegel’s mind even in “Revealed Religion,” where Christ is the *Word* incarnate. At the same time, this representational role of language continues to develop, so that the contradictions inherent in taking its essential spirituality only in the mode of representation push consciousness onwards towards the ultimate realization of conceptual thinking and knowing. In revealed religion, language is “the word which, when uttered, leaves behind, externalized and emptied, him who uttered it, but which is as immediately heard, and only this hearing of its own self is the existence of the word” (*PS* 465/*PG* 410). The word is not simply in itself the divinity, for “spirit is not a ‘meaning,’ is not

what is inner, but what is actual” (PS 465/PG 410).<sup>37</sup> The word is divine in the very dynamic of externalization and reception, the universality shared between self-consciousnesses. In other words, the revelation of revealed religion gradually becomes the divine self-knowledge of the religious community itself: “Spirit is thus posited in the third element of its existence, in *universal self-consciousness*; it is its community” (PS 473/PG 417).

Thus, first in culture, but now also in the moral sphere and in religious consciousness, language itself accomplishes sociality, community. Language accomplishes this not just as the *saying* but as the *said*, for it is not simply the act of saying but the existence or being-there effected by the whole process of communication that signifies. Hegel insists on this; the significance of language is neither beyond being nor somehow before it, but only *in* being. In the terms that Levinas uses in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, we could say that for Hegel language signifies only ontologically, in the said, in saying and hearing united. Language signifies as the *essence* of language, as its very way of being.<sup>38</sup> And language’s way of being is community.

What happens to this community when Hegel makes the transition to absolute knowing? Indeed, what happens to language itself, without which community is only a

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<sup>37</sup>The word translated as “meaning” (placed in quotation marks by Miller) is not *Meinung* but *Bedeutung*. I point this out merely to distinguish it from the emphasis given to *Meinung* in the chapter on sense-certainty.

<sup>38</sup>*Essence* here refers to the meaning Levinas gives it, a meaning he attributes to Heidegger, *Being* distinguished from *beings*, *Sein* from *Seiendes*. Whether Heidegger would agree and what he would understand by saying that “Language (*Sprache*) signifies only as the essence of language” would require separate treatment.

non-existent abstraction? In absolute knowing, Hegel explicitly emphasizes that absolute spirit is the *movement* of knowing, a movement that comprises both the *action* of conscience and the *representation* of religion. His review of previous shapes, especially that of conscience, specifies the crucial element of existence no longer as language, but as both action and knowing, signaling that, for self-knowing spirit, action *is* knowing. Conscience is that spirit that “knows that its *existence* as such is this pure certainty of itself.” Furthermore, “The spirit that, in its existence, is certain of itself has for the element of *existence* nothing else but this knowledge of itself; when it declares that what it does it does out of a conviction of duty, this utterance is the *validating* of its *action*” (PS 481-482/PG 424). Finally, in explaining how a return to the model of conceptual knowing effected by acting and forgiving conscience raises the representational certainty of religion to absolute knowing, Hegel argues that “through this movement of action, spirit has come on the scene as a pure universality of knowing.... It is only through action that spirit *is* in such a way that it *is there* [*da ist*], that is, when it raises its existence into *thought* and thereby into absolute *opposition* [*Entgegensetzung*], from which, through which, and into which itself it returns” (PS 485/PG 427). The “action” of which Hegel speaks here is not still conscientious action, but the whole of the process of self-actualization in which it knows itself:

Thus, what in religion was *content* or a form for presenting an *other*, is here the self’s own *act*; the concept requires the *content* to be the *self’s* own *act*. For this concept is, as we see, the knowledge of the self’s act within itself as all essentiality and all existence, the knowledge of this subject as substance and of the substance as this knowing of its act” (PS 485/PG 427).

The emphasis that spirit exists only in actual communication among individual selves gives way in absolute knowing to a conception of spirit as self-actualizing self-knowing.

Of course, an argument can be made that language permeates absolute knowing, since this is itself explicated in a work called the *Science of Logic* and in the dialectic of the *concepts* articulated there. However, despite Hegel's assurance that "Spirit, therefore, having won the concept, displays its existence and movement in this ether of its life and is *Science*" (*PS* 491/*PG* 432), we must ask what such an ethereal existence has to do with the intersubjective existence of the self and of spirit accomplished by language in the *Phenomenology*. The struggle for recognition in the *Phenomenology* could have led Hegel to a demand that Levinas would accept: the exigency of the saying, of saying again and again despite the seeming coherence of the said. Saying and hearing are glimpsed as indeed the roots of humanity, an affirmation, notwithstanding the universality of spirit, of the particularity of the concrete individual. But with the transition to absolute knowing, this saying becomes subsumed in a said, in recollection. Although the *Logic* functions again as a saying, the saying that *is* dialectic itself, this is no longer the saying to which the concrete individual is obligated. Instead, Hegel conceives of the *Logic* as a *saying* that is perfectly correlative of the *said* embodied first in nature, the absolute idea outside of itself, and then recollected in the fullness of concrete spirit.

Paul Redding has argued that recognition is implicit in the *Logic* precisely in its treatment of language, first as the reciprocal recognition of the syllogistic forms, but

more especially in the absolute idea, which is the “method” of dialectic itself.<sup>39</sup> Hegel introduces the absolute idea in this way:

Logic exhibits the self-movement of the absolute idea only as the originary [*ursprüngliche*] word, which is an outwardizing or utterance, but an utterance that in being has immediately vanished again as something outer; the idea is, therefore, only in this self-determination of *apprehending itself* [*sich zu vernehmen*], it is in *pure thought*, in which difference is not yet otherness, but is and remains perfectly transparent to itself. (*SL* 825/*GW*.12.237)<sup>40</sup>

Here Hegel does clearly invoke the understanding of language employed in the *Phenomenology*, with the significant difference, however, that its existential and intersubjective context seems completely absent. It is at least *unexpressed*, which by Hegel’s own argument suggests that this context is not here actual and effective. If the absolute idea, as the unity of the practical and the theoretical ideas, unites “personality, ...impenetrable atomic subjectivity” with “universality and cognition” (*SL* 824/*GW*.12.236), it still does so without invoking the concreteness of a human community. Indeed, Hegel says here that this unity is a subjectivity that “in its other has *its own* objectivity for object” and that “All else is error, confusion, opinion, endeavor, caprice, and transitoriness; the absolute idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life*, *self-knowing truth*, and is *all truth*.” Here Levinas agrees, and the ethical relation he describes demands precisely that one risk such error and confusion for the other.

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<sup>39</sup>Paul Redding, *Hegel’s Hermeneutics*, 144-165, esp. 164.

<sup>40</sup>I have rendered *ursprüngliche* as “originary” rather than “original,” as the fact of effecting an origin as well as a vanishing in being rather than primordially seems to be the meaning Hegel intends here.

The tensions and contradictions that pervade the landscape of the *Phenomenology* are reconciled by Hegel in the logic of absolute knowing in part because the inescapability of the relations they trace signify *knowing* for Hegel. That to which spirit must respond, that which it must undergo in its quest for certainty, that which it faces in its own experience—all these describe the necessary possibilities by which spirit can understand itself, or, more precisely, the necessary possibilities of its own self-conception. Knowing or truth traditionally involves the correspondence of subject and object, and Hegel believed he had discovered in the exigencies of expression and thought the perfect and absolute interpenetration of subject and substance. But is it not possible that Hegel confuses the imperative of the saying with the absoluteness of the said? For Levinas this imperative of saying signifies ethically, announcing the impossibility of any whole, while for Hegel it outlines the absolute terms of knowing, the whole experience of spirit.

Although Hegel emphasizes the contradiction and incompleteness operative at any given stage of spirit's development, these are always conceived as determinate and thus resolvable into a system. But if one tries, like Levinas, to consider the imperative of the saying beyond the determinations of the said, one can ask what would result if we subtracted "absoluteness" from "absolute knowing." Or at least one can ask what would happen if we transposed that absoluteness from an ontological and epistemological key into an ethical one, asserting the absoluteness or indissolubility of ethical responsibility, which is to say, of the ethical relation, or facing the other again and again, of speaking again and again despite the apparent authority of the said.

Hegel's *Phenomenology* exhibits the kind of constant rupturing that Levinas requires of an ethical system. Even when the rupture is "healed," it remains the catalyst of movement, an essential moment of the dialectic. Notwithstanding Levinas's fear of reducing the other to a moment of the system, it seems that alterity, otherness in general, provides the same constant antagonism or *Anstoß* for Hegel's system that the face-to-face ethical relation provides for Levinas. The one exception to this pattern is the absoluteness of absolute knowing. We have seen that at the end of both the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*, Hegel emphasizes the free release [*Entlassen*] or liberation of the idea into existence, as nature or, more generally, finite spirit. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel says that, despite the necessity of externalizing the pure science of the concept into consciousness, "This release of itself from the form of itself is the supreme freedom and assurance of its self-knowledge" (*PS* 491/*PG* 432). In the *Science of Logic*, the freedom from determination by another involved in this release is clearer:

The idea, namely, in positing itself as absolute *unity* of the pure concept and its reality [*Realität*] and thus contracting itself into the immediacy of *being*, is the *totality* in this form—*nature*. But this determination has not *issued from a process of becoming*, nor is it a *transition*.... On the contrary, the pure idea in which the determination or the reality of the concept is itself raised into concept, is an absolute *liberation* [*Befreiung*] for which there is no longer any immediate determination that is not equally *posited* [*gesetzt*] and itself concept; in this freedom, therefore, no transition [*Übergang*] takes place.... The passage is rather to be understood in this manner, that the idea *freely releases* itself in its absolute self-assurance and inner poise [...*sich selbst frei entläßt, ihrer absolut sicher un in sich ruhend*]. (*SL* 843/*GW*.12.253)

This crucial moment is the only moment in the system where determination does not involve some kind of confrontation with otherness. It nevertheless seems required by the absolute concept itself, which is as much a result and a beginning as is absolute



knowing.<sup>41</sup> I have shown that in one sense the *Phenomenology* culminates with the ethical and religious challenge of reconciliation, breaking the beautiful soul's hard heart with a demand for moral sensibility and a human *response* to the word of the other. It culminates again, in religion, with the painful awareness that "God is dead"—which means that the comfortable representation of a reconciling, transcendent God has died, but been *aufgehoben* into a human responsibility for the world and for the other. God as the "other" here would not simply incarnate Levinas's notion of infinite responsibility (a notion he rejects), but because God's death is realized in human "experience," it would *implicate* the human subject in this responsibility. The lesson of the *Phenomenology* would not thus be the circle of perfect knowing, but the infinity of ethical response, the felt exigency that one is always addressed by the other, always obliged to speak, to unsay or say again the word that signifies *to the other* the thought one would signify to the other.

By what alchemy does this become "knowing"? How would humans "experience" the death of God as knowing, conceptuality? It is perhaps not the first step of Hegel that one must arrest, as many have argued, but the last. Perhaps spirit does not release itself freely into existence, but responds, always too late, to the other who was already there—abused, neglected, or comprehended and thus sublimated into one's own

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<sup>41</sup>See the section at the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, "With What Must Science Begin?" There Hegel argues that, in logic as well as in the phenomenology of consciousness, "the advance is a *retreat* [*Rückgang*] *into the ground*, to what is *originary* [*Ursprünglichen*] and *true*, on which depends, and from which originates, that with which the beginning is made" (*SL* 71/*GW*.21.57). In other words, every beginning is also a result, and philosophical science moves in a circle of knowing.

projects and designs. Again, it seems that Hegel has confused the infinite responsibility of saying with the absolute knowing of the said. Responsibility is an infinity not described by the circle, but by time without beginning or end: goodness anarchic and insatiable.

## CONCLUSION: SAYING OTHERWISE

### 1. Infinite Responsibility and Society

The ethical saying that Levinas attempts to recover for philosophy signifies forever prior to and differently than the reciprocal and in this sense comprehensive or absolute interplay of the said. Nevertheless, the saying issues in a said, the common plane of consciousness where speakers can give and take meanings, agree on truths or problems, and hold one another responsible for articulating reasons and meanings. But throughout Levinas's work, especially in the emphasis *Otherwise than Being* gives to the terms "saying" and "said," but also in the descriptions of language and discourse in *Totality and Infinity*, it is clear that this saying to the other signifies first ethically, as responsibility and attendance, and only later as an event of knowing. In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas writes, "Communication is an adventure of subjectivity, different than that which is dominated by the concern to recover itself, different from that of coinciding in consciousness; it will involve uncertainty" (*OB* 120/*AE* 153f). The inevitable and necessary enterprise of knowing is never absolute.

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas had argued that "language is spoken where relation between the terms of the relationship is wanting, where the common plane is waiting or is yet to be constituted" (*TI* 73/45). This means that knowing is always an adventure, one undertaken from an ethical position before or subject to the other, and directed to the other with all the hope and risk that an adventure implies. "Discourse is

thus,” Levinas writes (here allowing himself the exceptional use of terms he will later avoid), “the experience of something absolutely foreign, a *pure* ‘knowledge’ [*connaissance*] or ‘experience,’ a *traumatism of astonishment*” (TI 73/46).<sup>1</sup> Although Hegel would accept the first description of language, that it is spoken where the common plane on which knowing operates is yet to be constituted, he would balk at the latter for, as we have seen, language for him is fundamentally an *Ansteckung* or infection that infuses universality and existence where self or certainty (or both) had only been *an sich* or implicit. In Levinas’s account, the work of language is not infection but traumatism, a wound that is not healed by being raised to knowing, but exposed again and again in the saying that is for the other.

Thus, where Hegel and Levinas fundamentally differ is in regard to the status of the said that is generated by the saying. Levinas maintains that the saying—which signifies in responsibility and substitution—issues in a said but is not subsumed in this said, remains anarchic with respect to the contexture of the said. It is as if there were an ethical dimension that always recedes from the intersubjective space in which there could be a perfect commerce of the saying and the said, where words and propositions flow back and forth, giving and taking meaning. According to Levinas, the saying remains diachronic to the said where consciousness, possessed of perfect memory, synchronizes all experience. In closing, we must look at the way Levinas negotiates this seemingly

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<sup>1</sup>The use of “knowledge” here is tempered by the cautionary quotation marks. I also note that Levinas uses the term *connaissance*, which has overtones of encounter and alterity, and deliberately avoids using the *savoir* of *savoir absolu*.

impossible passage from the saying to said without compromising the absoluteness of the saying and thus the infinity of the ethical relation. The imperative here is twofold: Without the social fabric of the said, of consciousness, ethical responsibility will remain ineffective, a suffering without issue, at odds with the humanness of our world. But without the “anarchy” of the saying, resistant to comprehension by knowing consciousness in the simultaneity of the said, ethical responsibility would be reduced to the commerce between speakers, each as much for himself or herself as for the other. If the ethical saying were not to remain somehow anarchic, resistant to principle and recollection, ethical responsibility would not command absolutely, but always be “in play,” subject to determinations of the said.

The clearest exposition of the passage from the saying to the said is in *Otherwise than Being*, although even here the account remains evocative, even somewhat prescriptive, an imperative of philosophy arising from the ethical exception to consciousness and knowing already articulated as substitution, responsibility, the pure saying. The subject, viewed from the perspective of being, appears wholly in the service of revelation, of being’s manifestation, and is absorbed into the system of intelligibility. That this view from being ignores or dissimulates the ethical uniqueness of the responsible subject has been and remains Levinas’s primary teaching. And even though this complaint against the anonymous but all-powerful fulguration of being seems directed more at Heidegger’s thought than Hegel’s, Levinas adds that ethical subjectivity is not “an outbidding of presence [*surenchère de présence*], as idealism conceives of subjectivity, where presence rejoins and confirms itself and becomes a coinciding” (*OB* 136/*AE* 173; translation modified). In other words, Hegel’s absolute subjectivity, where

the ubiquity and energy of the for-itself encounters nothing that it does not ultimately recognize as equally and reciprocally in-and-for-itself, remains as much at the service of the system of the said as Heidegger's *Dasein* or Husserl's transcendental subjectivity.

Levinas describes the priority of the saying as glory, inspiration, witness, and prophecy. These tropes suggest the radical openness of the spirit that animates Levinas's thought. The obsession of this saying, like the obsession of the Old Testament prophets—"I kept it secret and my frame was wasted"—never relaxes into the calm of certainty, but bespeaks a constant provocation, bearing witness to the very responsibility it announces. This restlessness does not return to itself but obsesses as "a restlessness for the other" (*OB* 143/*AE* 182), in contrast to the "restless tranquillity [*unruhige Ruhe*]" (*PS* 289/*PG* 260) of Hegel's absolute, which as absolute spirit is "its own restless process of superseding itself" (*PS* 491/*PG* 432), but as the absolute idea maintains an "absolute self-assurance and inner poise." In its restlessness, ethical subjectivity is a saying that is "not the communication of a said, which would immediately cover over and extinguish the saying,<sup>2</sup> but saying holding open its openness, without excuses, evasions or alibis, delivering itself without saying anything said." It is "Saying saying saying itself [*Dire disant le dire même*]" (*OB* 143/*AE* 182), a phrase which recalls but revises the self-movement of Aristotle's unmoved mover: "Thought thinking itself" or "Thinking thinking thinking" [*νόησις νοήσεως νόησις*].<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>This "saying" [*le Dire*] is misprinted as "the said" in the English translation.

<sup>3</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1074b34.

But this radical saying must also, as I have indicated, relate itself to what is said, to the world in which there is a give and take of meaning. The saying must even break through or reduce itself from this common plane, as Levinas notes:

The making of signs in the world in which language is spoken objectively, in which one is already with a third party, has to break through the wall of meaning said, so as to revert to the hither side of civilization. Thus there is need to unsay all that comes to alter the nakedness of signs, to unsay all that is said in the pure saying proper to proximity. One cannot unambiguously make signs in the night. One has to say something about it, say something, before saying only the saying itself, before making signs, before making oneself a sign. (*OB* 198n7/*AE* 182n7).

This relation of the saying to the said, the way it is “unsaid” or heard underneath, despite the said, underlines the role Levinas envisions for philosophy. I mentioned at the close of Chapter 1 his rejection of those who would misunderstand the ethical exception to being and essence and renounce all possibility of or even aspiration to philosophy and knowing. Knowing is not a delusion or a willful game, but is itself commanded by the ethical relation, as indicated above, with the advent of the third person.

Levinas says that the responsibility of the one for the other, insofar as it commands directly and absolutely and in a one-way direction, would not give rise to the “problems” taken up by philosophy, were it not for the entrance of the third person, who is nevertheless always already there. But who is this third person? “The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and a neighbor of the other, and not simply like the neighbor [*son semblable*]. ...The other and the third party, my neighbors, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third

party” (*OB 157/AE 200*). With the introduction of the perspective of distance, of contemporaneity, I am no longer concerned solely with the infinity of *my* responsibility, but with the common measure of justice.

The advent of the third person and the measure it requires is not so much an empirical event and a balanced calculation of objectivities as it is a realization that “In the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsess me”; the face of the other is “both comparable and incomparable, a unique face and in relationship with faces, which are precisely visible in the concern for justice” (*OB 158/AE 201*). The distance of the third and the measure required by justice passes through the face of the other, in proximity. The measure of justice does not subsume proximity, but shows itself in it, by virtue of the unique election of responsibility. As Levinas writes, “Justice is impossible without the one who renders it finding him or herself in proximity” (*OB 159/AE 202*), and “The contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of the two: justice remains justice only in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest” (*OB 159/AE 203*).

When this is not the case, justice remains rational, remains governed by the rules of the said, but at the price of forfeiting its very claim to the title “justice.” And it can forfeit this title especially in those situations where the cry for justice appears most urgent. Elisabeth Weber has pointed out the way victims of persecution and trauma (words that Levinas uses to describe the subjectivity of the ethical subject) lose the very ability to give an acceptably rational account of the violence that wounded them, an account that could be accepted according to the “rules of evidence” in a court, or even



according to the principles of diagnosis used by “medical experts.”<sup>4</sup> Weber cites the American psychologist William G. Niederland, expert witness at the so-called “reparations trials” for Holocaust victims in Germany, whose published account show that especially the inability to give a coherent temporal account of the events of persecution led some doctors to deny that the trauma was necessarily persecution-related, but possibly the result of mental deficiency, disordered personality, or old age.<sup>5</sup> Here is a justice that seems to have become such a slave to the reciprocity of the said that it has forgotten the face of the nearest, the face which itself commands the responsibility without which justice is just a balance of forces. Yet we can also imagine—as well as observe—the tyranny that results if a purported victim’s saying or claim is taken as determinative without being subjected to the rules of coherence and reason that govern the said.

Thus, although the advent of the third person establishes the common plane where words and ideas are measured against one another, where justice is pursued according to this measure and this comparison of what would else be incomparable, we are left with an antinomy. The exigency of the moral relation commands the absoluteness of

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<sup>4</sup>See Elisabeth Weber, “The Notion of Persecution in Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*,” trans. Mark Saatjian, in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, 69-76 (New York: Routledge, 1995). The topic of this conference paper is given fuller treatment in Weber’s *Verfolgung und trauma: Zu Emmanuel Levinas’ “Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence”* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1990). The testimony Weber cites is documented in William G. Niederland, *Folgen der Verfolgung: Das Überlebenden-Syndrom Seelenmord* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980).

<sup>5</sup>Weber, “The Notion of Persecution,” 69.

responsibility and substitution, the one for the other, of suffering to the point of persecution and expiation. But the requirements of knowledge and the measure introduced into human relations by the third person demand that justice respect the equality of the common plane, that it operate on the basis of evidence that can count for everyone. How is this antinomy to be resolved?<sup>6</sup>

Such is the dilemma of Levinas's thought examined by Torsten Habel in *Der Dritte Stört: Emmanuel Levinas—Herausforderung für Politische Theologie und Befreiungsphilosophie*. Habel's conclusion, that the face of the other is "a rent in the social fabric [*einen Riß in die Gemeinschaftlichkeit*]" seems correct, and his cautionary challenge to the liberation theologians who have been "too quick" to understand Levinas merits attention, yet his explication of the details of Levinas's thought often falters. Worst is his culminating example of a tyrant as the other, a prisoner as the third, and a soldier (subject of the tyrant) as the responsible subject, the I.<sup>7</sup> The supposed order of the tyrant to kill the prisoner is simply in no way the ethical "saying" of the other. In fact, Levinas is quite clear that the saying is my own witness to the ethical responsibility I have in the face of the other.<sup>8</sup> The saying is a *saying to*, a turning towards the other and

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<sup>6</sup>Torsten Habel, *Der Dritte Stört: Emmanuel Levinas—Herausforderung für Politische Theologie und Befreiungsphilosophie* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1994).

<sup>7</sup>Habel, 125-130.

<sup>8</sup>OB 150/AE 191. In another essay written at the same time as *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas again characterizes the saying that speaks as inspiration and testimony as "a commandment pronounced from the mouth of the one it commands." See "Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony," trans. Iain MacDonald, in Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 104.

an obedience and persecution in this sense. It signifies not as an obligation to obey the other blindly, but to face the other in this relation, to say “Yes” to the face of the other even as one might “say ‘No’ to the other’s face.” The fact that an SS officer is also my other, as Levinas admits in an interview,<sup>9</sup> in no way means that I am responsible to the SS officer as such, but that I am obliged to him *as the other*. In the name of the third—of all the others of the other—I am also obliged to demand justice from the SS officer or the concentration camp kapo precisely on the basis of the criminal role he has assumed in our common world.

Still, Habel is right that we are led into an aporia if we try somehow to reconcile the subject’s absolute responsibility for the other with the authority invested in the common measure inaugurated by the third. The success of such an enterprise would signify as the subsumption of ethical responsibility into a system of knowing that is essentially Hegelian, a system of mutual recognition and reciprocal determination, a system in which no saying could signify except as comprehended, acknowledged and disseminated in the said. Instead of accepting such a reconciliation, or resigning himself to the aporia that simply balks because it knows this reconciliation is impossible without renouncing the anarchy of ethical responsibility, Levinas calls for a philosophical dialogue that maintains itself in this antinomy, that operates as an adventure of consciousness, but remains radically open to prophetic critique and the interruption of a

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<sup>9</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, “*L’Autre, Utopie, et Justice*,” in *Entre nous*, 243-244.

responsibility that commands us to face the other whom all systems elide.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Levinas suggests that philosophy itself can maintain an ethical integrity not as a *System der Wissenschaft*, but as an open dialogue, an ethical dialectic that does not *determine* the categories of knowing, but interrupts them again and again and asks them to remember the other.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Unsayings the Said: Philosophy as Wakefulness and Prophecy

Several of Levinas's later writings characterize philosophical and even political discourse this way, as a plot of consciousness disturbed by a wakefulness or vigilance for the other. In *Peace and Proximity* (1984), he characterizes peace not as "the unity of the diverse integrated by synthesis," but as "a relation with the other in its logically

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<sup>10</sup>Habbel acknowledges such a "solution" to the aporia, a solution that remains essentially tentative or critical, when he calls the epiphany of the face "a rent" or "a rending" of the social fabric. According to Habbel, Levinas's thought should become a "corrective" for every political theory or system, rending the sociality it has fabricated, and questioning, "What place do you give the particular person?" (137), as God asks Cain, "What have you done with your brother?"

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Wiemer's *Die Passion des Sagens: Zur Deutung der Sprache bei Emmanuel Levinas und ihrer Realisierung im philosophischen Diskurs* (Freiburg: Alber, 1988) is the best study of this theme, although the promise of its title is more clearly accomplished in the analyses of literary and prophetic discourse than philosophical discourse. Of particular interest is Wiemer's notion that Levinas's own philosophical writing is characterized by "remembrance" or "mindfulness" (*das Eingedenken*), which Wiemer connects with Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where messianic fragments open the history of historiographers to another way of thinking that history. See especially Thesis XVIII; in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 263-264. Wiemer also characterizes Levinas's philosophical writing as "conversational," not in the sense of a Platonic dialogue, but as addressed to the reader, to the other. For a discussion of this in English, see Adriaan Peperzak, "Presentation," in *Re-reading Levinas*, 51-66.

indiscernible alterity...an incessant watch over this alterity and this unicity.”<sup>12</sup> Levinas here cites Vassili Grossman’s description of a woman waiting in line at the Lubyanka in Moscow to hear the meager news about political detainees to illustrate how the face is not just the literal image of the eyes, nose and mouth, but “the extreme precariousness of the other”: “[She] had never thought that the human back could be so expressive, and could convey states of mind in such a penetrating way. Persons approaching the counter had a particular way of craning their neck and their back, their raised shoulders with shoulder blades tense like springs, which seemed to cry, sob, and scream.”<sup>13</sup> Here we are asked to think of “Peace as awakesness to the precariousness of the other.”

This wakefulness is the explicit theme of the essay, “Philosophy and Awakening” (1976/77),<sup>14</sup> which attempts to see the distinction between the saying and the said as exposed or “unsaid” in the philosophical reduction. Here Levinas shows his allegiance to Husserl, who taught how one could begin to catch sight, at the bottom of experience, as it were, of a life upon which that experience was constructed. Although he admits that Husserl inevitably sees only the “gnoseological signification” of this reduction, Levinas

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<sup>12</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, “Peace and Proximity,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 161-169; here, 166. French text: “Paix et proximité,” in *Les Cahiers de La nuit surveillée*, 3: *Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jacques Rolland (La Grasse: Éditions Verdier, 1984), 343.

<sup>13</sup>Vassili Grossman, *Life and Fate*, cited by Levinas in “Peace and Proximity,” 167/344.

<sup>14</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, “Philosophy and Awakening,” trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Who Comes After the Subject?* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), 206-216; French text: Emmanuel Levinas, “La Philosophie et l’Éveil,” in *Entre nous*, 86-99.

sees another dimension, “the traumatism of awakening.”<sup>15</sup> The philosophical reduction simultaneously accounts for the plane of consciousness and shakes it, by glimpsing in the rifts that reduction exposes traces of an absolute past, a traumatism. The condition this awakening issues in is “sobriety,” philosophy itself.<sup>16</sup>

The relation of the saying and the said is thus characterized as enigmatic, but marked by an enigma that bears precisely the signification of responsibility into the contexture of the said. Proximity is again *betrayed* in the said. That is, proximity is not only forsaken but also revealed, and this revelation, this testimony and prophecy, calls each of us, though we be participants in the community of knowers inaugurated by the third person, again and again to a responsibility that has no term. The community is a community of those responsible, each to the other, not a genus united by a common trait or set of traits. Philosophical discourse, if ethics and not ontology or logic is to become “first philosophy,” not only bears responsibility for reminding us of this condition, it itself embodies the unsaying of the said: “Philosophy is philosophers in an intersubjective

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<sup>15</sup>“Philosophy and Awakening,” 213/95. In this essay, Levinas views Hegel and Husserl as having the two most significant understandings of the subject. But while he sees that Husserl exposed the dimension of proximity and ethics, without taking it up, he denies this to Hegel. The thrust of the present work has been to discover this same “happy fault” in Hegel.

<sup>16</sup>Levinas here cites the high moments of this philosophical sobriety, which is an awakenedness from the complacent slumber of the egological, including Plato’s good beyond being, Aristotle’s active intellect entering “at the door,” (*De Generatione Animalium*, 736b27), and the quest for recognition by the other in Hegel. He credits Heidegger with the term *sobriety* used to describe this philosophical wakefulness; “Philosophy and Awakening,” 215/98.

‘intrigue’ that nobody resolves, while nobody is allowed a lapse of attention or a lack of rigor.”<sup>17</sup>

Is this not also a truly philosophical dialectic? The comprehension of the saying in the said is again and again unsaid, said again, said otherwise. Philosophy that is the love of wisdom reverts into the wisdom of love, of obsession for the other. The justice that springs from our common concerns and the knowing we can exchange and acknowledge when I and the other and all the others develop into a society must again and again be called back to accountability for the other. Levinas’s essay “*De la Unicité*” (1986) ends with the suggestion that prophetic voices must arise again and again to remind the system of justice of its origin in the relation of responsibility that calls the one to the other. Justice, if it would be just, must “listen to the voices that recall to the judgments of judges and statesmen the human face that is dissimulated under the identities of citizens.”<sup>18</sup> These voices are sayings that arise to awaken the authority of the said to responsibilities it could never have assumed or comprehended, responsibilities it could never discharge or fulfill. Infinite responsibilities. Prophetic voices.

They are heard sometimes in the cries that mount from the interstices of politics and which, independently of official proceedings, defend the “rights of man”; sometimes in the songs of poets; sometimes simply in the press and in the public places of liberal states where freedom of expression has the rank of the first freedom, and where justice is always a revision of justice and the awaiting of a better justice.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>“Philosophy and Awakening,” 215/98-99.

<sup>18</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, “*De la Unicité*” in *Entre nous*, 195-203; here, 202. My translation, here and following.

<sup>19</sup>“*De la Unicité*,” 202.

Such prophetic voices herald another dialectic, one that calls absolute spirit beyond the circle of its knowing by calling it back to the other whom it would have taken up into this knowing as its own experience. These prophetic voices, each an ethical saying rending the fabric of the said, do not repudiate knowing but challenge its absoluteness. They recall knowing to the infinite passion of its responsibility for the other, beyond the circle in which knowing is in and for itself.



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