

Exposing an English Speculative Word

Hegel congratulated himself on noticing that the German verb *aufheben* embodied a speculative dialectic in the interrelation of its multiple meanings. Translators have been hard put to find an equivalent English word. I think I have found a similar word in English, which, if not exactly a translation, still shows a similar interaction among the contrasting motions of its different meanings.

My word is the English verb *expose*, with its related nouns *exposure* and *exposition*. Consider these different meanings:

(a) To *expose* something is to lay it out in detail, in public view (as in exposing a topic, or, as in a dialectical development that makes *an sich* divisions explicit).

(b) To *expose* something is to show it to be otherwise than it appears (exposing an illusion or an impostor, or, as in a dialectical move that undermines the supposed self-sufficiency of some supposed immediacy). The *exposition* of an item could be a positing of its moments in public view *and* the item and its moments being exposed as not what they immediately seem to be.

(c) To *expose* can also be to put something out into wilder external conditions (as in "The hiker died of exposure.") From this *exposing an object to the elements, expose speaks of posing something ex- or outside its presumed boundaries, in the open, influenced by other moments in the wider dialectical context. To expose something is to place it für sich, putting it out into the movement that both shows (exposes) it and shows up (exposes) its isolation and immediacy.*

(d) If we use the English rather than the Latin meaning of *ex-*, *expose* suggests *posing* something *ex-*, as in *ex-president*, moving on to another level of dialectical development, and in doing so, making something *ex-posed*, no longer posed or posited as final. Something that is *exposed*, is both *posed* in the wider context and *ex-posed*, as partial. When it is laid out in the larger movement and structure, it is not denied, not un-posed, because in its *exposition* it still shows, though it is also shown up and shown out (these, too, in various senses).

If my meanings and hyphens and *ex-*plays seem extra, extreme, excessive or exorbitant, consider the Oxford English Dictionary, that model of sobriety. The OED provides more

grist for the speculative mill when its etymology links putting outside with pausing and placing, laying out and laying down.¹ The OED offers nine general meanings for the word *expose*, containing over thirty more detailed descriptions, some obsolete. Letting these meanings interact exposes the speculative possibilities.

One group of meanings involves removing something from shelter and subjecting it to influences from beyond itself,² and the OED cites the ancient practice of *exposing* unwanted children, taking them from their proper place and putting them at the mercy of the larger elements. In a related but obsolete meaning, a river *exposes* itself when it empties itself into a larger river.

A second group involves putting something forth into public view, disclosing it, putting it into circulation or offering it up for sale.³ A third group involves making known in detail, disclosing intentions or projects, explaining, expounding something's meaning.⁴ A final group involves showing something up or unmasking it as not what it seems to be.⁵

Could we then use *expose* to translate *aufheben*? Something that is *aufgehoben* is *ex-posed*? *Aufhebung* as *ex-posure* or *ex-position*?⁶ Maybe, but a speculative word of our own need not strictly parallel Hegel's German word. It could find its own uses, but it does capture much of what happens with the dialectic.

If it seems a stretch to use *expose* or *exposition* to translate or comment on *Aufhebung*, consider what Hegel says in the essay "On the Notion in General" at the beginning of the third part of the *Science of Logic*:

The only possible refutation of Spinozism must therefore consist . . . in recognizing its standpoint as essential and necessary and then going on to raise that standpoint to the higher one through its own immanent dialectic. The relationship of substance considered simply and solely in its own intrinsic nature . . . leads on to its opposite, the Notion. The *exposition* [German:*Exposition*] of substance . . . which leads on to the Notion is, therefore, the sole and genuine refutation of Spinozism. It is the *unveiling* [German:*Enthüllung*] of substance.⁷

Here the *Aufhebung* of the concept of substance is a laying out which is also an unveiling that reveals that the notion of substance is not as independent and foundational as it seems. *Expose* and *exposition* in English gather these meanings and add connotations of being put into a inclusive context, brought under influences it cannot control, and shown up as conceptually past and partial (where *partial*, too, uses

both its senses).⁸

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1 "Expose [a. French *exposer* (14th c.), formed as an adaptation of Latin *exponere* to put out, expose (see EXPONE, EXPOUND); the verb. *poser* (Latin. *pausare* to rest, lay down) having been associated by erroneous etymology with Latin *ponere* (past participle *positus*), and employed as its regular representative in compounds. See COMPOSE, POSE.]" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. expose)

2 "To put out; to deprive of shelter, to put out; to put (a person) ashore; to expel from a country, etc.; reflexive, of a river: to empty itself into; to turn out of doors; to cast out to chance; especially to abandon (an infant); to place in an unsheltered or unprotected position; to leave without shelter or defence; to remove the covering of; to put (plants) out in the open air; to risk, imperil; to lay open (to danger, ridicule, censure, etc.); to place in the way of something that would be better avoided; to render accessible or liable; to lay open to (into) the action or influence of; to submit (a sensitized surface) to the action of actinic rays." (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. expose)

3 "To present to view, put forth; to exhibit openly; to display to the public gaze; to exhibit (the Host, relics) for adoration; to disclose, display, allow to be seen; to offer publicly, 'put up' for (or to) sale. (The ordinary phrase in Scotland: in England now somewhat formal); to put forth, publish (a discourse); to put (coin) in circulation." (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. expose)

4 "To make known, disclose (secrets, one's intentions or projects, etc.); to explain, set forth or describe in detail; to set forth the meaning of; to explain, expound." (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. expose)

5 "To unmask, show up (an error or misrepresentation, an impostor); to hold up to ridicule or reprobation (faults, follies, or those who are guilty of them)." (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. exposition)

6 Besides its connections to the meanings of *expose*, *exposition* also possesses an obsolete meanings concerning how something lies in a wider context, as in the *exposition* of a field or garden being its "situation with respect to the quarter of the heavens," as well as another meaning where *exposition* is expulsion from something's original place. (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. expose) We might then consider the connections of *exposition* to *composition* and *position* and hence to Hegel's *setzen*.

7 *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 12 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1981), p. 15; *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1963), vol. 2, p. 218; *Science of Logic*, Miller translation (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), p. 581).

8 I take it as a sign of Hegel's ongoing influence that *exposure* might also work as a restatement of *deconstruction*.