

## The Objective Discourse of Hegelian Science

The question of language goes right to the core of Hegel's notion of systematic science, of truth that actually takes place in the embrace between thought and being. If a language of science is one meant to convey objective truth, then Hegel's singular take on science must imply a special grasp of both its language and objectivity. What sort of discourse can claim to express objective truth within an idea of science that sees itself as the systematic articulation of existing knowledge? To answer this question we must guard against importing epistemological and linguistic notions foreign to the Hegelian idea of objective truth, neither must we import notions of objectivity and discourse alien to his idea of science.

Failure to comprehensively understand the nature of Hegelian scientific language has allowed to go unchallenged a wide-spread misunderstanding regarding the nature of Hegelian objectivity. This misunderstanding can be bluntly summarized as follows: the world itself operates dialectically, obeying an inherently dialectical logic. Many who know something of Hegel will probably find nothing objectionable in this statement. In fact, it appears readily verifiable with regard to that part of worldly objectivity Hegel deals with on the Spirit side of his philosophy, for example the rise of consciousness and inter-subjective relations. Indeed, spirit, as human activity, can easily be said to reflect thought or "mind", which, as the *Logics* tell us, is inherently dialectical. And it is this objectivity or "second nature"<sup>i</sup> that most commentators are interested in. When the natural world itself is brought into consideration, however, there is some embarrassment. It is indeed hard to verify, for example, that cosmological phenomena and chemical reactions operate along strictly dialectical lines. Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* therefore tends to be taken less seriously, or ignored<sup>ii</sup>.

However, even when the inherently dialectical nature of Hegelian objectivity is ascribed solely to the Spirit side of his philosophy, crucial (Kierkegaardian, Marxian) questions arise concerning the coherency of the entire philosophical endeavor. If objectivity itself operates dialectically, what is the status of the philosopher subject (i.e. Hegel)? Or, more precisely, what is the status of Hegel's scientific discourse? From where does it derive its own objectivity and truth? It should be obvious to readers of Hegel that his scientific discourse cannot claim to simply *represent* or *reflect* objectivity, and garner its own truthfulness and objectivity from the exactness of this representation<sup>iii</sup>.

Such a view could not help but fall within what Hegel refers to as (Kantian) subjective idealism, i.e. the representation, whether faithful or not, would never be more than mere appearance (*Schein*), the reflection of Hegel's own self-certainty; the supposed "truth", stemming from personal observations, would, in fact, reflect nothing other than subjective certitude<sup>iv</sup>. In other words, this view contradicts Hegel's explicit rejection of scientific truth based purely on confirmed observation (perception) of empirical, experimental data, which we find reiterated in all his major works and in a good deal of his minor ones<sup>v</sup>. This does not mean that Hegel entirely discounts empirical science. For example, as I will show, there is a place, or a level, for the representations of the natural sciences within the body of systematic (philosophical, Hegelian) science. However, as we will see, this level of representation only achieves objective truth through a certain notion of discourse essential to this science.

Hegel's repudiation of sense perception as an adequate ground for systematic, objective truth must be understood in linguistic terms; sense certainty goes hand in hand with the notion of referential language, i.e. with the idea that language refers to, reflects or denotes an objectivity which is real but somehow removed from the language itself. According to this view, truth and objectivity are entirely

based on the exactness of the reflection, on the faithfulness of how "sentence-tokens"<sup>vi</sup> signify "reality". Although many commentators understand Hegel's critique of sense perception and its corresponding referential language<sup>vii</sup>, they seem unable to break away from the idea of Hegel-empiricist, the lucid and profound observer of the world around him. I believe this is because they have been unable to grasp the true nature of Hegel's scientific language as non-referential, where there is no distance between signifier and signified, and where the objectivity of language is not the impoverished objectivity of "sentence-tokens".

In dealing with the question of how Hegel sees the truth of his discourse as objective, I therefore want to show that his claim to scientific truth implies a certain grasp of objectivity different from the one summarized above, and a certain notion of language that is not referential and which is constitutive of Hegelian objectivity. More explicitly, I will argue that the Hegelian idea of "Science" supposes a discourse that is not only objectively true but is also, itself, true objectivity.

The use of the term "objectivity" in the preceding paragraphs may cause some consternation. This is because we are accustomed to using the term in two distinct acceptations: 1) in the sense of non-subjective, non-arbitrary truth; 2) in the sense of a concrete reality existing outside the subject. By saying that, for Hegel, science is a discourse that is "not only objectively true but is also, itself, true objectivity", I am purposely conflating the two acceptations. For Hegel, scientific objectivity is non-subjective, non-arbitrary truth existing as a concrete reality. I am also saying this reality is discourse, scientific discourse itself.

It is also important to emphasize a point which may, at first, appear redundant, but which is crucial. Scientific discourse, for Hegel, is exclusively that discourse which deals with the objects of science. This clearly implies that there are objects which are not addressed by science, i.e. there is a non-scientific objectivity, and there are discourses which are also non-scientific. However, if we are

to take Hegel's scientific claims seriously, as I am doing, then we must respect this often ignored distinction. All objectivity is not scientific. All discourse is not scientific. The discourse of science does not deal with all objectivity.

Initially, the issue is how scientific discourse can be objectively true, i.e. how it can relate to its objects, for example to such worldly manifestations as the state, history, art, religion and nature without merely reflecting them<sup>viii</sup>. According to my argument, these manifestations must somehow be embodied in true scientific discourse as its true, objective content.

This idea of *content* which is also the *object* of science is important to grasp. Hegelian science does not study its objects in a detached analytical way, in order to draw conclusions about them and test these conclusions against empirical data. Hegelian science claims to hold within itself, as content, the objects of its discourse. Or, science is no more than the ultimate articulation of its objects/contents. Hegel expresses the richness of this content by using the term *Gehalt*, rather than *Inhalt*. To use a vulgar example, the former term might apply in stating, "milk is content-rich in vitamins and calcium", while the latter might describe the contents of a suitcase. As *Gehalt*, content should be seen as essential to what it makes up.

There is no mystery about what the *Gehalt*-objects of science are; they can be found in the "Table of Contents" of the *Encyclopedia*. This content, like scientific truth itself, is *essentially* text, i.e. not the inherently meaningless natural occurrences of disengaged objectivity, but meaningful discourse. In other words, I am arguing that scientific discourse derives its truth and objectivity from its contents, which are themselves grasped as true and objective discourse. In order to understand the objectivity and truth of scientific discourse (and its contents), I am therefore proposing a certain linguistic notion that I believe is found in Hegel: language that does not simply reflect what is otherwise "real", language that does not *refer* to its object, but rather language that actually *is* its object

(and content) and is therefore objective and true. The word is truly the thing, but not in the sense of *das Ding*, a common, indeterminate, natural object in a sea of contingency, but rather in the sense of *die Sache*, a more meaningful, content-rich existence. How is this content-rich language possible?

Whether we question a modern-day theoretical physicist or an 18th century empiricist, his or her definition of objective truth in science will involve the adequation of thought and being, of concepts and experience. For example, a subjective theory (thought) takes on objective truth when it can be adequated to reality (being). The adequation of thought and being also lies at the heart of the Hegelian scientific endeavour.

According to the notion of Hegelian scientific objectivity I am proposing, the adequation of thought and being is *realized* in language, in a language which can therefore be grasped as truth and "objectivity", in both senses of the word, namely, language that is not based on subjective representation and language which is itself a real object or thing (*Sache*)<sup>ix</sup> that is both thought and being. This language occurs in several different contexts, and each of these expressions forms specific, objective content for science. The total content of science thus appears as the true and objective discourses of natural science, subjective and objective spirit, art and religion. This is another way of saying that the Hegelian project, consisting of finding true objectivity in the meeting between (natural) being and the dialectical or negating activity of thought takes place, on the highest scientific or systematic level, in the articulation itself of the *Encyclopedia*. The first part of the work, "The Science of Logic" (thought) and the second, the "Philosophy of Nature" (being) find their truth in the third part, the "Philosophy of Spirit", whose last word is precisely "Philosophy", i.e. philosophical discourse itself.

*True Content: the "name" and the "word"*

A brief passage from the *Encyclopedia's* "Philosophy of Spirit" helps us understand more precisely the linguistic notion we are dealing with, namely a language that is to be taken as true objectivity, as the realization of thought and being. Here, scientific language is presented as the objective result of a meeting between representing intelligence (thought) and the mere linguistic sign, or "name", as Hegel puts it (being).

The being <*Seiende*>, as name <*Name*>, needs an other <*eines Anderen*>, meaning from the representing <*vorstellenden*> intelligence, in order to be the thing <*Sache*>, true objectivity.<sup>x</sup>

This reference describes scientific discourse at its most formal level, in the context of subjective spirit, where content is supplied by representing intelligence, by understanding<sup>xi</sup>. The "name" or sign that is to be inhabited by representational content should be understood as an arbitrary, empty, naturally formed being<sup>xii</sup>, open to any "meaning", just as a certain given name can apply indiscriminately to any individual person. The name, as a singular, naturally formed thing (*Ding*) must indeed be understood as simply found-there by representing intelligence. Here, we are operating at the level of sense-certainty as it is expressed in the *Encyclopedia*, where denomination can never reach beyond the singular appellation of individual objects, where every object has its name and only its name, which, like the object referred to, is simply found there ready-made, without having been "worked up by intelligence"<sup>xiii</sup>. What Hegel means by "name" is the senseless externality of the mere, meaningless, arbitrary "sign"<sup>xiv</sup>, as a being simply found-there and as yet divorced from any signification; the term "word" denotes what Hegel sometimes calls the "representational name", i.e. the formerly senseless "sign" that is now filled, by intelligence, with the content of representation. In

other words, a "name" is not yet a "word".

This distinction between "name" and "word" can be born out to some degree by the Hegel's statement, in *Encyclopedia* §463, that "names as such" are "senseless words". This indeed seems to imply that (significant) words are something other than empty, contingent, naturally formed names<sup>xv</sup>. Words, or "representational names" are richer in content (*Gehalt*) than the empty "names as such" we began with. Intelligence has supplied the latter with representational content and the result is in the order of "true objectivity", what Hegel is calling *die Sache* as opposed to *das Ding*.

The point I am making is that "the thing (*Sache*), true objectivity" is still language. It is simply a language which has greater truth and objectivity than the mere empty signs we began with, because now the form of language has taken on content.

It is also crucial to understand that in the passage from the "name" to the "word", we move through two orders of objectivity, from nature to "second nature", from natural, contingent, impoverished objectivity, to the "true objectivity" of the scientific word. Although this level of objectivity and truth is still relative, in that its content is still representational and therefore still somewhat subjective, it is nonetheless higher than the arbitrary objectivity of the natural world, which can itself be seen as nothing more than an infinite number of meaningless "signs" which are only *potentially* significant. Far from being truly objective, this world of immediate sense-certainty reflects, in fact, the most radical form of subjectivity. Sense-certainty is a form of *self*-certainty<sup>xvi</sup>.

Even at the level of discourse we are currently dealing with in the paragraphs of the *Encyclopedia* under discussion, viz. representational discourse *within* the scientific system, representing intelligence fills the mere "name" to form a significant *word* that should be taken as itself incarnating a certain degree of both objectivity and truth. This scientifically meaningful word is what Hegel is calling "the thing <*die Sache*>, true objectivity"<sup>xvii</sup>. Within the *Encyclopedia* system, the

representations expressed in the words of science should then be taken as more than purely natural or purely subjective and arbitrary; they are determined scientific representations that arise, for example, within the natural sciences, and which must be subsequently incorporated into the overall system of science. In other words, the representations expressed in the words of science must themselves become part of the total content of philosophical science. In the "Philosophy of Nature" this language obtains in the numerous examples Hegel cites from the natural sciences of his day, e.g. in his lengthy exegeses of Mesmer's findings, or his espousal of Goethe's colour theory. For the natural, empirical sciences to become part of the system, their own discourse must be seen as already content-ful and objectively true, although still representational<sup>xviii</sup>. The above-defined "word" enables us to understand how this is possible. Representing intelligence penetrates nature, as it invests itself in the completely natural names (empty signs) found already there, to produce meaningful words. In fact, that is all representing intelligence can appropriately carry out. Now, however, within Hegelian science, the subsequent pronouncements of representing intelligence can be taken as objectively true, where objectivity and truth are no longer based on the reflection between (natural) "objectivity" on one hand and language on the other<sup>xix</sup>.

Although in the context of theoretical intelligence, where the discussion on the "name" arises, we are not yet dealing with systematic philosophical discourse as such, Hegel is telling us that representational discourse, as it arises *within the system*, already possesses a certain degree of true objectivity and objective truth. As the realized result of thought (representing intelligence) and being (the "name"), it is truer and more objective than either, or rather, it combines the hard, natural reality of the name with the abstract essentiality of thought to form something that is truly objective and essential.

Thus, the scientifically significant word appears as the "middle term"<sup>xx</sup> between thought and

being. It is a particular being which is at the same time thought, or vice versa.

*Scientific Grammar: From Predication to Syllogism*

The expression "middle term" introduces my contention that an analysis of the act of predication or judgement alone is not sufficient to grasp Hegel's concept of scientifically objective discourse; to do so, one must look beyond the proposition, to the syllogism, and consider it as a grammatical extension of the act of predication. Failure to do so leads one to concentrate on the relationship between language and thought rather than on the more fundamental relation between being and thought. Failing to grasp language as the objective middle term embodying the two extremes, leaves it external to both thought and being. As such, it can do no more than reflect either thought or being, but never actually *be* them. It is only by doing so that language can be considered scientifically objective.

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel deals with the question of how the subject-predicate form can be grasped as dialectical, in terms of what he refers to as the "speculative sentence"<sup>xxi</sup>. In this context, the grammatical subject is to be understood as consciousness losing itself in its predicate, which in turn "recoils" back onto the subject in search of a ground. The grammatical subject can thus be seen as an empty name receiving content from its predicate, or as conscious thought determining itself through predication. In both cases, the issue is "the dialectical structure of the proposition" and how the speculative sentence "reflects the fact that, for Hegel, consciousness itself is essentially a dialectical activity"<sup>xxii</sup>. This seems to show that considering the act of predication in terms of its "dialectical activity" can do no more than provide us with a reflection, where language can provide only an (arbitrary) analogy of thought.

Further, if we consider philosophical language as no more than an accurate reflection of

thought, truth comes to depend entirely on the external, and arbitrary judgments of a judicious Hegelian philosopher or an equally subjective "we". This can sometimes lead to readings where truth in Hegel is viewed as the result of public judgment or a linguistic community of shared reference, à la Wittgenstein<sup>xxiii</sup>. According to my argument, the objective truth of scientific discourse in Hegel depends on neither the insightfulness of individual readers/listeners nor upon general public consensus<sup>xxiv</sup>. Scientific discourse does indeed become actual (or *wirklich*). However, it is important to understand that its worldly actuality is the result of its objectivity, and not the opposite.

Objective truth remains extremely problematical when a reflective distance is maintained between the language of science and thought, when the relation between the two is merely analogous. In Hegel, this problem arises when scientific discourse is examined *only* in terms of the predicative sentence, even when this is understood speculatively or dialectically.

Commentators concentrating on the *Phenomenology* as the main area of research in their investigations into Hegel's "philosophy of language" are necessarily confined to examining the dialectical workings of the predicative statement. Scientific truth is thus construed as the accurate reflection or adequation between this language (dialectical) and thought (dialectical). This reinforces the misunderstanding I invoked earlier: in order for commentators to discover truth in the relationship between language and the *world*, the latter must also be seen as *inherently* dialectical.

In fact, the scientific inadequacies of the propositional act of predication are revealed through Hegel's later writings on judgement, particularly as they appear in the *Greater Logic*<sup>xxv</sup>. More specifically, if scientific discourse does indeed imply a notion of objective truth dependent upon meaningful content (*Gehalt*), then the predicative (judgment) form seems inadequate precisely in terms of its inability to hold any content beyond that which is subjectively representational. It seems an argument might be made that Hegel's evaluation of the predicative form, or the form of judgment,

undergoes a depreciation over time. From his dialectical or speculative investigations into the copula<sup>xxvi</sup>, which lead to his analysis of the speculative sentence in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel comes to see the syllogism as a more appropriate grammatical form in which to grasp scientific expression<sup>xxvii</sup>.

This is born out by the fact that much of the *Phenomenology's* "speculative sentence" analysis is taken up again in the *Greater Logic*, however in a context where judgment (predication) appears as the transitional moment between the concept, as an original, immediate, i.e. still un-mediated whole, and the fully developed syllogism, which articulates moments of the universal, the particular and the singular. In fact, Hegel understands judgment "etymologically" as an *Ur-teilen*, the original dividing necessary for the concept to be able to re-unite itself, but now syllogistically mediated. Thus, "judgment is the dividing of the concept by itself"<sup>xxviii</sup>.

Defining predication in terms of division leaves little room for content, and in the *Greater Logic* Hegel deals specifically with this problem. Real content can neither be held in the subject nor the predicate, which are related in a purely arbitrary, and, in fact, subjective fashion<sup>xxix</sup>. "The subject can find itself taken, with regard to the predicate, as the singular with regard to the universal, or again as the particular with regard to the universal, or as the singular with regard to the particular"<sup>xxx</sup>. Consequently, subject and predicate are once again taken as no more than "names", empty markers or, continues Hegel in the same passage, "something undetermined that must still obtain its determination". Hegel's speculative solution in the *Greater Logic* is to maintain that this determination takes place in neither the subject nor the predicate but in the copula which must become the "filled and determined unity of the subject and the predicate, as their concept."<sup>xxxi</sup> When the copula is understood in this way, as an existing unity underlying both subject and predicate, the judgement "passes into"<sup>xxxii</sup> the syllogism.

I am insisting on this passage between judgment (predication) and syllogism in order to reinforce my argument about the nature of scientific discourse in Hegel, as language that must be grasped as objective, true and content-ful (i.e. "filled and determined"), as discourse that must be understood as the existing "middle term" between thought and being, or between subject and predicate. It is this same "middle term" I invoked above as the significant word in scientific discourse, which Hegel refers to as "the thing [*die Sache*]" or "true objectivity"<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Hegel's analysis of the syllogism should be understood as the "elenchus" of his grammatical analysis of the predicative form. The syllogism expresses the true destiny of the copula, as a mediating, content-ful middle term that determines the two extremes (subject and predicate) in such a way that the whole proposition becomes an objective concept. This is what he means when, referring to the syllogism of necessity, he writes, "In that this syllogism determines the extremes of the concept precisely as totalities, the syllogism has attained [...] its truth, and has thus passed from subjectivity into objectivity"<sup>xxxiv</sup>.

Considering the syllogism as the conceptual development of predication allows us to grasp the systematic (scientific) implications of Hegelian language, as presented in that system called the *Encyclopedia*, and to see how Hegel's notion of objectively true discourse implies a language capable of embodying meaningful content (*Gehalt*). A discussion of Hegel's notion of scientific language therefore requires an analysis that goes beyond the formal linguistic dimension. This emphasis on content rather than form runs generally counter to how linguistic analysis is understood today. I want to look at a specific instance of how Hegelian scientific discourse can be said to hold objective content.

### *The Real Words of Objective Spirit*

The specific content of Hegelian science I want to look at is private property, i.e. the first element of what appears as Objective Spirit or the State in the *Encyclopedia*. In dealing with this

issue (*Sache*), I am obviously not attempting to exhaust it as a question but merely trying to show how it can be seen to form the objective content of scientific language, content that renders scientific language itself objective, without this objectivity depending upon truth defined as the external adequation between signified and signifier. Property, like any other content of science, must then be conceived as a language that is the objective middle term between being and thought. “Property” is particularly revealing in this light since its objectivity, whether we refer to a house, a field or a horse, strikes us as completely natural and “objective”. In fact, it is precisely because of this natural, immediate aspect that the thing (*Ding*) of property cannot, as such become part of scientific discourse. The natural thing has not been mediated (or negated) by thought. We have to see how the discourse of property is more objective than property itself, understood as a simple, natural thing (*Ding*).

Concerning property, Hegel’s insight is that it is not truly objective until it passes from one individual will to another. The meaning of this “passing” is neither in the subjective affirmation of possession, in declaring in a purely predicative way that “this is mine”, nor in the simple “names” or linguistic signs that immediately represent or reflect this bit of earth, the house etc. These signs are as natural and impoverished as the things (*Dingen*) they reflect. The scientific meaning of property, its true objectivity, the fact that it can become a thing in the sense of *Sache*, is only manifest when it is transferred (sold and bought) from one will to another. This meaning manifests itself<sup>xxxv</sup> in the language of the contract.

Hegel writes:

The interiority of the will that surrenders the property and of the will that receives it is in the realm of representation, and the word is, in this realm, act and thing  
[*Sache*]...<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The contract must be grasped as a language having an objective existence, both “substantial”<sup>xxxvii</sup> and true. This truth is the following: the essence of property is to pass from one will to another; this essence is manifested in the real words of the contract. Thus we grasp concretely the meaning of the Hegelian idea that essence (*das Wesen*) can be thought of as being that has been (*gewesen*)<sup>xxxviii</sup>. Only in so far as the purely natural being disappears (is negated or mediated) in the passage from one will to another can essence emerge. However, rather than dissipating in a “formless tumult of church bells or the warm rising of vapors”<sup>xxxix</sup>, the essence of property is objectified in contractual language, understood as the middle term of a syllogism whose two extremes are natural being and thought (here, in the form of will).

We can understand how the written, consensual contract is a more truly objective representation of property and possession than my simple predication of something as “mine”<sup>xl</sup>. When property changes hands, it does so on paper and in writing. Its possession only thereby becomes something objective, “substantial” and of “value”<sup>xli</sup>. It is this objectivity that enables property to be recognized by the persons involved as well as by others, and thereby to effectively participate in the social space of *Sittlichkeit*<sup>xlii</sup>. I believe the same point of view can be said to apply to other fundamentally linguistic expressions of content within objective spirit: laws, constitutions<sup>xliii</sup> and even world history<sup>xliv</sup>.

It is important to understand what I am arguing here. I am not saying that objective spirit is nothing but text. I am saying that objective spirit must already be objectively true language for it to be part of scientific discourse. Or, from another point of view, for scientific discourse to be objectively true and truly objective, its content must also be objectively true and truly objective. The content of science (which is itself discourse) is language understood as itself content-ful, i.e. as the existing

middle term between being and thought. So, if Hegel's science is to incorporate such objective expressions as private property, justice, the state and world history, these expressions must be grasped as text which is, at least to a certain degree, objectively true/truly objective; philosophical science does not observe natural events, it reads texts<sup>xlv</sup>. These are considered truer and more objective than what we might be tempted to call the immediate "real" world, which, for Hegel, is merely natural and undetermined, and therefore less real than the world as penetrated (determined) by thought and manifest in meaningful language.

Objective spirit forms one of the main contents of science. I believe the other objects/contents of the *Encyclopedia* should also be seen as objective discourse: the Philosophy of Nature<sup>xlvi</sup>, the contents of Subjective Spirit, Art<sup>xlvii</sup>, Religion<sup>xlviii</sup> and of course, Science itself. In fact, Science is nothing more than the systematic, speculative articulation of its contents, of its objects, namely the discourses I have mentioned. Science *thinks* the objective truth (or the true objectivity) of its own contents and knows itself to be true and objective. This knowledge is the existing discourse of science, i.e. *logos*.

### *The Actuality of Science*

The idea of true objectivity as essentially linguistic may seem rather bloodless and two-dimensional in that it appears to reduce worldly richness to the words on a page. However, such an objection is based on a notion of language other than the one I have been presenting as Hegel's.

Hegel never denies the world's richness and we know he enjoyed an enviable social life beyond the sphere of academe. But we must distinguish between scientific objectivity and the world in general. Science deals solely with scientific objects. We are not talking about Krug's pen<sup>xlix</sup> or any other arbitrary, singular, natural object. Scientific objects are the contents of science. Their names can

be found in the *Encyclopedia*'s table of contents. They are true and objective discourse.

As objective, they also exist in the world. The objectivity of the contract means that it can be read and recognized by individual wills within the State as *Sittlichkeit*. Similarly, the laws of the City and the constitution itself are *lived* by the citizens, whether litigiously or not. On another level, "international public law"<sup>1</sup> determines, to some extent, the reciprocal activity of States between themselves (i.e. the constitutions, laws, institutions etc.) and world history is read as the discourse of the discourses of history. In the same way, the linguistic expressions of art and religion *participate* in the life of the City. Once more, however, it is important to recall that it is not because these discourses participate in the world that they are objective, but rather the contrary: it is because these discourses are objective and true that they must manifest themselves as actual (*wirklich*).

What about the actuality of philosophical discourse as such, i.e. of the *Encyclopedia* and the other Hegelian writings? Beyond any worldly participation of its contents, what actuality might scientific *logos* itself have within the City? A plausible response may be found by simply recalling that Hegel spent almost his entire adult life teaching, and that almost all of his texts were conceived as teaching manuals used within the State's education system. So perhaps we can say that the actuality of scientific discourse itself, as objectively true *logos*, can be found in its pedagogical application.

### *Ironic Discourse and the Vereitelung of True Objectivity*

At the beginning of this essay, I argued against a certain conception of Hegelian objectivity, that of the "world" progressing through its history, determined by dialectical laws or logic, to an apotheosis of absolute truth. This is a misconception, first, because Hegelian philosophy is not concerned with all objectivity, with "all things" as Protagoras may have meant the expression, but with *scientific* objectivity, i.e. with objectivity worthy of being the object (content) of scientific discourse and therefore capable of sustaining meaningful truth. We are not talking about indiscriminate objectivity of contingent things.

Scientific objectivity is, for Hegel, necessarily linked to a certain idea of scientific discourse, to content-ful language, understood syllogistically as the middle term between being and thought. Non-scientific objectivity has its own language, or rather *is* its own language. As I wrote above, Hegel's personal involvement in Berlin's teeming world of letters, popular theatre and journalism shows how far he was from refusing or denigrating such worldly things. However, one must be careful to distinguish this realm from that of science and to "direct one's activity and work solely on that area which is worthy of them."<sup>li</sup> Above all, when the language of non-scientific objectivity is directed *against* science, against the organic, content-rich discourse of speculative philosophy, its opposition constitutes a threat with necessarily objective repercussions.

This is what Hegel means by irony: "the self-conscious evacuation [*Vereitelung*] of what is objective."<sup>lii</sup> The "evacuation", depreciation or "rendering vain" (all of which translate the German word *Vereitelung*) of objectivity has to be understood linguistically, a fact made clear by the rest of the cited passage, taken from Hegel's *Review of Solger's Posthumous Writings and Correspondence*, where Hegel deals with Friedrich Schlegel. Here, irony is first defined grammatically, in terms of what Hegel refers to as the language of judging. This type of critical language is defined elsewhere as an act of predication which "tears apart [*auseinanderreisst*] the different abstract determinations immediately united in the concrete singularity of the object, and separates them from the object."<sup>liii</sup>

The evacuation ironic discourse operates on the discourse of true objectivity, on language as the objective middle term between thought and being, sunders the holistic reality of the scientific word. The language of ironic judging is prejudicial to Science because it separates significant content from the words themselves. These become arbitrary reflections, subjective representations or signifiers with no objective significance. The grammatical subject is once again reduced to the status of an empty sign, a sort of name that can predicate anything.

Referring again to the passage from the *Review* of Solger's work, we can see why Hegel writes, "judging is a decidedly negative tendency against objectivity" and why "such judgments do not take contents into account, but rather vacuous representations that reject the thing [*Sache*] of religions and philosophies."<sup>liv</sup> The "thing of religions and philosophies" is precisely what constitutes

the true content of Science, the doctrines that form the existing middle terms of Science in its syllogistic deployment. In ripping apart these expressions and reducing them to signs on one hand and pure essence on the other, ironical discourse injures Science and the objectivity it implies, or *is*, as objectively true discourse.

Within the conceptual movement that animates Hegel's system, the divisive force of judgment is the necessary first moment of separation (*Ur-teilen* = original-separating), without which there can be no mediation and reconciliation. However, fixed at the level of ironical discourse, judgment constitutes a divisive force that works as a fixation or a blockage within the organic whole, fragmenting true objectivity into an infinite number of individual things (*Dingen*), simple signs presenting themselves for subjective determination. The language of irony engenders a world radically opposed to the one embodied by the real words of Hegelian Science.

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## NOTES TO ESSAY I

- <sup>i</sup>. See Adrian Peperzak's insightful article "Second Nature: Place and Significance of Objective Spirit in Hegel's Encyclopedia". *Owl of Minerva*, 27, 1 (Fall 1995): pp. 51-66.
- <sup>ii</sup>. This is particularly true with overviews of Hegel's philosophy. Two examples: Charles Taylor's book on Hegel contains only ten pages on the philosophy of nature; none of the 14 contributions making up *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) deals directly with the philosophy of nature.
- <sup>iii</sup>. This is precisely Engels's misconception, as can be found in his essay, *Ludwig Feuerbach*. "[Dialectical philosophy] reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away; of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher. And dialectical philosophy itself is nothing more than the mere reflection of this process in the thinking brain." (New York: International Publishers, 1941) p.12. For a succinct contemporary expression of this misconception, see Alison Stone's "Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Overcoming the Division between Matter and Thought", *Dialogue*, 39, 4 (Fall 2000), pp. 725-43. The author claims to discover a "theory" of nature "according to which nature progresses in a rationally necessary series of stages from an initial division between its two constituent elements, thought and matter, to their eventual unification." The author proceeds to show this progression through "an extended comparison between the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Spirit" (725-6). I am arguing that if objectivity, whether natural or human, moves according to such a progression, it is *because it has been invested with thought* and thought is dialectical, i.e. it moves from original unity, through separation (*Urteilen*) to reconciliation. In

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Hegel, pure, undigested, pre-negated nature does not move on its own accord. Indeed, it is unmoving, lifeless and dead.

iv. Thus, McCumber: "[Hegel] expressed his thought in the sounds and inscriptions of the German language, to which he assigned his own, philosophically constructed meanings." Very few Hegelian readers would disagree with this statement, yet it reduces the objectivity of Hegel's scientific discourse to personal pronouncements of "his own... constructed meanings". *The Company of Words, Hegel, Language, and Systematic Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press) 1993.

v. For example, in *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel credits the *influence* of Locke and Hume with having "dragged down" the subjective idealism of Kant, Jacobi, Fichte into the realm of "finitude and subjectivity". *Werke in 20 Bänden 2*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970) pp.376-377.

vi. See below.

vii. Daniel Cook, in reviewing David Lamb's book *Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein*, agrees that both Hegel and Wittgenstein argue against the empirical account of the relationship between language and reality, and the resultant "atomic facts". However, both commentators share the belief that we can still "make sense of our sense experience" through "certain contextual relations". "Review of *Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein*", David Lamb (New York: St. Martins Press) 1979, *Owl of Minerva* 14,2 (December 1982) pp.2-3. In her article "Can Hegel Refer to Particulars", *Owl of Minerva* 17, 2 (Spring 1986) pp. 181-194, Katherina Dulckeit also sees sense certainty in the *Phenomenology* as a thesis about linguistic

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reference. By proving that Hegelian discourse can refer to particulars, the author apparently seeks to show that, for Hegel, scientific knowledge is empirically grounded.

viii. Investigations such as Katherina Dulckeit's article "Can Hegel Refer to Particulars" fail to grasp the distinction I am making between referential, reflective language and the language of science, just as these investigations fail to distinguish between indiscriminate objectivity (K. Dulckeit is referring to the miscellaneous objects of sense certainty in the *Phenomenology*) and the objects of scientific.

ix. Frank Schalow, in his article "The Question of Being and the Recovery of Language Within Hegelian Thought", *Owl of Minerva* 24, 2 (Spring 1993): pp.163-180, writes: "In an amorphous way, Hegel [like Kant] formulated the problem of the relation between being and thought, but not so decisively as to view language as having an even greater importance in forming an essential link between the two" (p. 164). I am arguing that the language of science is precisely that: the essential embodiment of being and thought. For Schalow, language can only reflect or "make visible" the mediation between thought and being. The relation between objective truth and language thus remains referential and ultimately, according to Hegel, subjective. "Through its own activity, language makes visible the mediation of opposites, and thereby exemplifies the form of determinateness essential to thought" (p. 165). In other words, scientific language remains merely analogous to truth itself (the union of thought and being). This is the same role William Desmond ascribed to art, in the cited reference above. In fact, as early as 1802, in *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel defines the discourse of Reason as that in which subject and predicate express the identity of thought and being. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 2, p.304.

x. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* §464. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 10, p.282.

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<sup>xi.</sup> John McCumber's insightful and detailed analysis of this section of the *Encyclopedia* (§§ 451 - 464) explores Hegel's use of the "name" as linguistic "sign", and reveals its entirely natural and singular objectivity. McCumber, pp. 220-238.

<sup>xii.</sup> "[N]ames as such [are] *external, senseless entities*, which only have significance as *signs*". *Encyclopedia*, "Philosophy of Spirit" §459. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 10, p.274. In this paragraph, Hegel argues against the Herderian notion of words, as natural objects, having some inherent sense, i.e. that they naturally imitate certain sounds. For Hegel, purely natural entities have no inherent sense. Even though they may be formed by the interplay of natural causes and effects, they remain, in themselves, arbitrary. They are meaningless "names" or empty signs waiting to be signified by intelligence. This also explains Hegel's argument against phrenology, in the *Phenomenology*. Skulls, as purely natural entities, do not express some inherent meaning, which need only be deciphered.

<sup>xiii.</sup> McCumber, p. 233.

<sup>xiv.</sup> McCumber uses the term "sign" as something signifying. I am using it as a synonym for "name", a mere, empty token waiting to be invested with meaning or *Gehalt*. As such, it is still insignificant.

<sup>xv.</sup> The 1817 version of this paragraph included the sentence, "Names, there are many of them, and, as such, they are contingent names with regard to one another." The contingency of the actual sign, divorced from any signification, simply means that "lion" for example, could well have evolved to be written and pronounced otherwise, as "leo" for example, just as I personally might have been *named* "Gregory" instead of "Jeffrey", which could also have been spelled "Geoffrey".

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<sup>xvi.</sup> "Sense-certainty, then, though indeed expelled from the object, is not yet thereby overcome, but only driven back into the 'I'". *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trad. Miller (Oxford: University Press, 1977) §100; *Werke in 20 Bänden* 3, p.86.

<sup>xvii.</sup> This, then, is why the thing (*Sache*) appears, in the "Doctrine of Essence", under the heading "The Thing's Emergence into Existence" and why James Wilkinson's proposed translation of *die Sache* as "engendering", though somewhat awkward, does make sense. "On Translating *Sache* in Hegel's Texts: a Response", *Owl of Minerva*, 27, 2 (Spring 1996): pp. 211-230.

<sup>xviii.</sup> For Hegel, there is no (universal) philosophical science without the particular sciences as content. Thus, in his letter/report to von Raumer, on education, he complains that "the materials of the particular sciences have not yet attained their reorganization and adoption into the new idea" (*Werke in 20 Bänden* 4, p.419). Hegel sees the particular, positive sciences as a (written) canon of work to be first learned and assimilated, and then reconsidered conceptually. "This content of understanding, this systematic mass of abstract concepts [i.e. predicative statements] rich in significance [*gehaltvoller Begriffe*] are immediately the stuff of Philosophy [...]". Report to Niethammer on education, *Werke* 4, p. 414. This content, reworked dialectically, is how Hegel defines science: "The content grasped conceptually [*Das Begriffene*] is alone what is philosophical [as it is present] in the form of the Concept." (ibid. p. 415) The scientific whole is "only grasped through the elaboration of the parts [...]". Letter/report to von Raumer, *Werke in 20 Bänden* 4, p. 420.

<sup>xix</sup> More importantly, the concept of the content-rich, scientific word enables us to understand how, for Hegel, formally common language, with its (almost) everyday vocabulary and predication-based grammar can ultimately attain to an expression of *logos* in its deepest, richest meanings: as the word

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of science, as reason and reality, and as the Word of God. It can do so because it is capable of embodying thought and being, and thereby embracing true, objective content and becoming, itself, true objectivity.

xx. *Encyclopedia* §491. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 10, p. 307.

xxi. *Phenomenology*, trad. Miller, § 61-66. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 3, pp. 59-62.

xxii. Jere Paul Surber, "Hegel's Speculative Sentence", *Hegel Studien*, 10(1975) p.222.

xxiii. McCumber p. 260. Also, Daniel Cook's review of David Lamb's *Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein*, p.2. Both Cook and Lamb share, to some extent, the Wittgenstein idea of contextuality.

xxiv. For Hegel, philosophical discourse is university discourse, and not destined for public consumption. See his critique of Solger in this regard. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 11, pp. 266-271. Cf. my French translation of Hegel's review of Solger's work, *Hegel – L'ironie romantique* (Paris: Vrin, 1997).

xxv. "Doctrine of the Concept", Section I, Chapters 2, 3.

xxvi Discussion of the copula arises in a Kantian context (i.e. in *Faith and Knowing*) and can be seen as a reaction to Kant's belittling of the copula in his dismissal of the ontological argument, in the first *Critique*. The copula is again discussed in the section on judgement in the *Systementwürfe* (1804/5), *Gesammelte Werke* 7, ed. R.P. Horstmann and J.H. Trede (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968) pp. 80-93. Hegel's discussions of the copula can only be understood with further reference to Fichte's "I am I", to Hölderlin's thoughts on judgement (*Sämtliche Werke* iv,

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Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1962) pp. 226-7 and to Schelling's philosophy of identity. Perhaps Hegel's earliest thoughts on the speculative nature of judgment and the copula are found in the Frankfurt fragment "*Glauben is die Art...*" *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. Nohl, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1907) pp.382-385.

<sup>xxvii</sup> See *Wissenschaft der Logik, Das Sein*, ed. Gawoll (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986) p. 54.

"The proposition (*Satz*) is in no way immediately suited to express speculative truths."

<sup>xxviii</sup>. *Science of Logic, Doctrine of the Concept. Werke in 20 Bänden* 6, p.304. This understanding of judgement as an "original dividing" is explicitly stated and referred to as an "Ur-Teilung" in Hölderlin's short text "Urteil und Sein". *Sämtliche Werke*, op.cit., pp. 226-7.

<sup>xxix</sup>. Surber points out how Hegel asks us to accept "subject" in both its grammatical sense and as individual consciousness. Surber pp. 214-215. Again, I refer to the Hölderlin text cited above, apparently written in the Frankfurt period, when he and Hegel were re-united. Here, Hölderlin describes judgement as the original separation that makes "subject and object possible", thus conflating the grammatical and "consciousness" senses of the subject. In fact, in Hegel's later, polemical writings, judgment or predication becomes increasingly associated with the pronouncements of individual (ironic) subjectivity in its position against scientific objectivity, thus referring judgement to Fichte's "I am I", as indeed Hölderlin does. Cf. Hegel's *Review of Solger's Posthumous Writings and Correspondence*, where Hegel deals with Friedrich Schlegel. Here, the language of judgment is seen as operating, as irony, against objectivity. "Judging is a decidedly negative tendency against objectivity [...S]uch judgments do not take contents into account, but rather vacuous representations that reject the thing [*Sache*] of religions and philosophies." *Werke in*

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20 Bänden 11., p.233. The ironic assault on true objectivity is effectuated through an evacuation of content from meaningful, scientific language. Briefly put, the "word", as the very foundation of that discourse, is sapped of its thought-content and relegated to the status of the always arbitrary "name". Ironic discourse sunders being and thought. For an elaboration, see my introduction to *Hegel - L'ironie romantique* (Paris: VRIN, 1997), an annotated translation of Hegel's *Review* of Solger's writings.

xxx. *Science of Logic, Werke in 20 Bänden* 6, p. 302.

xxxi. *Ibid.* p.309.

xxxii. *Ibid.*, p.310.

xxxiii. Hegel, *Encyclopedia* §464. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 10, p.282.

xxxiv. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 6, p.354.

xxxv This is why the thing (*Sache*) appears, in the *Logic's Doctrine of Essence*, under the title, "The thing's emergence into existence". *Die Sache* should be understood as the objective manifestation of essence. I am arguing for its linguistic nature in Hegel, i.e. its status as logos, both in the Greek sense of a reasoned discourse, and in the Christian sense of God's revelation.

xxxvi. *Encyclopedia* §493. *Werke in 20 Bänden* vol. p.308.

xxxvii *Ibid.* §494

xxxviii *Logic, Doctrine of Essence. Werke in 20 Bänden* 6, p.13.

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<sup>xxxix</sup> *Phenomenology. Werke in 20 Bänden* 3, p.169.

<sup>xi</sup> *Encyclopedia* §489. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 10, p.307.

<sup>xii</sup> *Encyclopedia* §494. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 10, p.308.

<sup>xlii</sup> I will deal with this crucial "performative" or actual aspect of scientific language below. For now, it is important to understand that ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) can only constitute an object (ie. a content) for science in terms of what I have been describing as content-ful language. Discussions on Habermasian language-based ethics and their opposition to Hegelian intersubjectivity should be reëxamined in this light. Obviously, my account of Hegel's scientific language implies this opposition is largely unfounded, since it seems based on "Habermas's attention to the linguistic dimension of [...] autonomy, and Hegel's neglect of that dimension" as Pippin summarizes the problem in *Idealism as Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.180. I want to stress, however, that the linguistic dimension I am referring to is that of the language as it pertains to the objects (contents) of science. This most emphatically does not mean conversation or the exchange of personal opinions. In terms of intersubjectivity, as I hope to show in this section on "Objective Spirit", it might well mean mutual recognition through mutually recognized text.

<sup>xliii</sup> Shlomo Avineri points out how the expression "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational" (which is another way of expressing the conjunction of thought and being) first appears in Hegel's Heidelberg lectures (1817-1818) in the context of the (written) constitution. Avineri quotes Hegel: "What is rational must happen (*muss geschehen*) since the constitution is after all its development." *Owl of Minerva*, 16, 2 (Spring 1985), p.203.

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<sup>xliv.</sup> As Hegel maintains in § 549 of the *Encyclopedia*, history is essentially historiography, the objective, yet still formal expressions of which are: 1) original and 2) reflective. History itself becomes *rational* (ie. dialectical) only in that it is then understood and expressed speculatively in the philosophy of history. This view is obviously at odds with the interpretation of Hegelian objectivity I am arguing against, which holds history (ie. historical events) to be, in itself, dialectical. Marx understood this difference better than many have done since.

<sup>xlv.</sup> This reflects a deeply personal penchant of Hegel's, who was, by all accounts, a voracious and methodical reader from his very youth. Hegel's predilection for nature in its digested, determined form is also reflected in his account of his youthful trip to the Alps, where his primary interest seems to have been in finding locations whose descriptions he had previously read.

<sup>xlvi.</sup> See for example John Burbidge, "Hegel on Galvanism" in *Hegel on the Modern World*, ed. Ardis B. Collins (Albany: SUNY, 1995) pp. 111-124. The article shows how Hegel relies on the writings of his time in order to develop the theory of galvanism we find in §330 of the *Encyclopedia*. Burbidge also shows how Hegel, in choosing his scientific content prefers those where the form of speculative thought is best seen. The article by Alison Stone I cited above, which argues for a Hegelian "theory" of nature, must necessarily misunderstand the importance of objective content in Hegel's science. Indeed, Stone attributes much of the difficulty of the *Philosophy of Nature* to the fact Hegel's arguments are "submerged amidst [his] lengthy discussions of now-unfamiliar works." Op. cit. p.725.

<sup>xlvii</sup> The word has a particularly elevated status in Hegel's aesthetics. "The object corresponding to [poetry] is the infinite sphere of spirit"; thus the word is "that most constructive material [*bildsamste*

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*Material*], which immediately hears spirit and is most capable of grasping its interests and movements into its inner liveliness." *Lectures on Aesthetics, Werke in 20 Bänden* 15, p.239.

<sup>xlviii</sup> "[T]he true content of religion is first present to the mind in words and letters... in words and writings." Preface to Hinrichs *Philosophy of Religion, Werke in 20 Bänden* 11, p.44.

Hegel's position is radically opposed to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, for whom "all sacred writing is a mausoleum for religion". First edition of *Discourses on Religion, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* I.2, ed. Peiter, Birkner et al (New York, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) p.242.

<sup>xlix</sup> Hegel's 1802 polemical essay against the philosopher Krug, who had asked speculative philosophers to deduce his pen, is meant to show that philosophy does not deal with individual, "natural" objects.

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of Right* § 330.

<sup>li</sup> *Werke in 20 Bänden* 11, p.265. Cf. *Hegel – L'ironie romantique*, op.cit. §52.

<sup>lii</sup> *Werke in 20 Bänden* 11., p.233. Cf. *Hegel – L'ironie romantique* op.cit. §23. It should be stated here that Hegel's definition of romantic irony is in no way dependent on the various definitions that Schlegel comes up with in the *Athenäum*, for example, "Irony is the clear consciousness of the eternal agility of infinitely fecund chaos." *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* 35 vols., ed. by E.Behler, vol.2 (Munich/Paderhorn/Vienna: F.Schöningh, 1958-1985) p.263. According to Hegel, the choice of the word "irony", by its theorists, is purely arbitrary.

<sup>liii</sup> *Encyclopedia*, "Philosophy of Spirit" §467 add. *Werke in 20 Bänden* 10, p.286.

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<sup>liv</sup> *Werke in 20 Bänden* 11, p.233.

## **NOTES TO ESSAY II**