

# A HEGELIAN PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

## An Onto-grammatical Interpretation

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**CRITICAL REVIEW**

**A HEGELIAN PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE  
An Onto-grammatical Interpretation**

FRANCIS K. PEDDLE

Jeffrey Reid's goal for *Hegel's Grammatical Ontology*<sup>1</sup> is "to discover and show how each form of consciousness involves and reveals itself as a form of language" (xiii, see also 33). This uncluttered and very readable volume follows closely in its eight chapters the structure of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Miller translation, 1977). *Hegel's Grammatical Ontology* has the overall ambience of a commentary. It, nonetheless, reaches out across the full landscape of Hegel's philosophy and thought. Though it gives us a particular interpretation, the book does serve as an excellent introduction to Hegel's thought in general as well as to his *Phenomenology*.

The author's first three chapters discuss the topics Hegel arrays under "Consciousness." Reid's Chapter 4, entitled "Self-Consciousness: Predicated Bodies," reflects on Hegel's excursus into Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness. Chapter 5, "Reason: Modern Individuality," gives us the author's insightful comments on some neglected passages in the *Phenomenology*. Strictly speaking the "phenomenological" mind, or *Phenomenological* science, as Reid likes to style it, should end with the chapter on Reason, as those familiar with Hegel's mature work know well enough. Hegel's discussions of "Spirit," "Religion," and "Absolute Knowing," in the 1807 *Phenomenology* are aligned with Reid's last three chapters. From the standpoint of the *Encyclopedia*, "Spirit" deals with the finite determinations of the will and its ethical orderings, while "Religion" and "Absolute Knowing" cover the absolute modes of mind associated with art, the religious consciousness, and philosophy in the *Philosophy of Mind*. In the *Phenomenology* art does not get an independent section, like in the *Encyclopedia* and its accompanying lectures on fine art. Nonetheless, there are abundant references to art, the

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1. Jeffrey REID, *Hegel's Grammatical Ontology. Vanishing Words and Hermeneutical Openness in the 'Phenomenology of Spirit.'* New York NY, Bloomsbury, 2021 (hardback); 2023 (paperback), 248 p.

literature of Hegel's period, and Sophocles' *Antigone*, Hegel's favorite tragedy, scattered throughout this commentary as well as an extended discussion of religion and art in Reid's Chapter 7 (191 – 202).

Generally, the subject matter of *Hegel's Grammatical Ontology* takes its interpretive orientation from the "speculative proposition," which pivots off the ontological nature of the copula, and the ensuing "floating centers" of meaning that align at various stages with the development of consciousness. The author utilizes the term "onto-grammatical," or as he likes to say "actual, performative language" (123), to connect Hegel's logico-conceptual treatment of judgment with the varying shapes of the speculative proposition, which is code for Hegel's unique approach to integrating language with the requirements of his ontology and metaphysics. Hegel's old friend from his Tübingen days, Friedrich Hölderlin (*Urteil und Sein*, 1795), is profitably enlisted by the author in this effort, as well as Johann Fichte (the I = I of the *Wissenschaftslehre*), co-founder and first rector of the University of Berlin, where Hegel taught in the 1820s. Reid meticulously sticks with his thesis, which is not easy to do in Hegelian studies, and proceeds to give us a rich interpretation of the *Phenomenology* that should inspire students of Hegel for some years to come.

What are the chief difficulties with speculative language that are either ossified or ignored in representational (*vorstellen*) language, i.e. the limited, rigidified, discursive language of the understanding (*Verstand*)? Hegel does at various points have specific things to say about language, as much in the *Phenomenology* (M652 – 653 and many other places, following the Miller paragraphing, which Reid also utilizes), as in the section on representational thinking in the *Philosophy of Mind*. Representational language stays with the fixed determinations of the understanding and has great difficulty engaging with dialectics and the dynamics of actuality. The analytic understanding invariably ends in dogmatism, skepticism, or sophistry. Dialectics, in its juvenile forms, as Plato took pains to show, can easily lead to misology, eristics, "indifferent" sophistry or skepticism, and ultimately to a disdain for thinking and philosophy. We should not, however, despair since it is Hegel's singular achievement to have retained the altogether necessary virtues and stabilizations of representational language while allowing for the fluidities and floating centers of dialectical discourse. All of this finds its happy reconciliation in the multiple iterations of the speculative proposition, if one keeps in mind that the "propositional" is itself essentially a function of the discursive linguistics of the understanding.

A few words should be said about subjectivity and predication. All you need to know about grammar in this book can be formally expressed as "A is B." It would be a mistake, however, to reduce the Hegelian grammar book to an atomic proposition. The spectrum of meanings with which Hegel infuses the

word “subject” is all-extensive. The high speculative subjects of the “Subjective Logic,” such as judgment, syllogism, chemism, or the absolute idea contrast markedly with the lowly individual bodies of nature (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, para. 316), which are nonetheless subjects with their own forms of predication, manifestation, and differentiation. So when it comes to the naming of a subject, just about anything goes. For Hegel, and for the author’s onto-grammatical interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, the more important concept is that of predication. Subjects as self-identities give us little information. They are abstractions without predication and differentiation. The ontology of the copula, the connector, holds the two sides together, but the key is how this is “performed” in the speculative language of vanishing words and hermeneutical openness. Furthermore, if you are able to meld all this together with a speculative theory (and critique) of individuality (“singularity,” *infra*) then you have the main strands of Reid’s approach to the *Phenomenology*.

### Sign Markers and Vanishing Words

The author traces assiduously throughout the *Phenomenology* the various “sign” associations, or sign markers, that Hegel integrates with things in the section on “Sense-certainty” to the “body-signs” of the master/slave dialectic, all the way to the significations of revealed religion and absolute knowing. We cannot do without signs, but they are not much in themselves. The sides or moments of all logical and conceptual progressions have their particular sign languages, or discourses, from the understanding (*Verstand*) to the self-dissolving language (Reid’s “vanishing words”) of dialectics, i.e. “floating centers” of meaning, on to the mutually complementary and explicitly unifying language of speculative philosophy, which places some discipline on the fluidities of meaning. We are cautioned to be sensitive to the merits and demerits of these varying language forms as we go through the *corsi* and *ricorsi* (a not wholly apt allusion to Vico) of the shapes of consciousness. If one is to pin a “philosophy of language” on Hegel it must be something like this “hermeneutical” exercise of Reid’s. “Language as the existence of Spirit” (*Geist*) (M652) is the ontological playing field for us self-consciousness humans, though for the Absolute or God “revelation” presumably dispenses with any need for soliloquy.

Why do words vanish? One could equally ask how and why do they come into being? This is not meant to be rhetorical in a work explicitly focused on the “being” of words and grammar or “onto-grammatology.” The origin of language is as much debated today as it was in the eighteenth century. Humans do more with language than any other animals we know, so it is only natural for us to think therein lies our uniqueness on this planet. Hegel makes a distinction between linguistic sign (*Zeichen*), or names (*Namen*), which are raw

signifiers, and words (*Worten*). The best way to take the distinction is to say that “signs” and “names” are meaningless “words.” Reference could be made here to Hegel’s well known distinction between symbols and signs in the “Psychology” of the *Philosophy of Mind*. The essential difference between signs and words is that the latter are always vanishing (6). Meaning(s), of course, outstrips the word(s) that houses it or them. Words are signs invested with thought (xvi). Meaningful words take the arbitrariness out of the world (71). Some words, of course, get loaded up with more thought than others. Equally, words in the mouths of some have more import than your average windbag. It is hard to think of anything more plenary than Hegel’s *Geist*, or Anaxagoras’s *Nous*, or Plotinus’s One. Terms like this will not be vanishing anytime soon from these philosophical universes, although as Reid notes sundry commentators and interpreters, “protagonists,” should flourish as long as there are state universities (181).

If sufficient heed is not paid to shoring up the underpinnings of a Hegelian philosophy of language from either the deficient rigidities of the abstractive intellect or the properly mediated declarations of positive (speculative) reason, then the vanished takes over and everything becomes will-o-wisp fictions. The author is adept at protecting us from the defective languages of the understanding, but struggles more to get it right when it comes to a speculative linguistics. Another way to say it, is that a speculative philosophy of language cannot simply be a catalogue of linguistic failures but an articulation of the truth that is impervious to dissolution, either conceptually or linguistically or meaningfully. More on this when we come to the chapters on religion and absolute knowing, the most linguistically tortuous and dense sections of the *Phenomenology*.

Hegel himself is fond of getting out of his “vanishing” dilemma by exposing the vanishing of the vanishing in the “knowing itself as a self,” which is real existence. The author’s favorite paragraph in the *Phenomenology* (M508, Miller translation) is where vanishing one-sidedness itself vanishes into the speculative proposition. The latter is equally reducible to a vanishing one-sidedness. The whole world of vanishing, where there can be no more vanishing of the vanishing “vanishing” (Aristotle’s thinking on thinking “thinking,” νόησις νοήσεως νόησις of *Metaphysics*, Lambda, 1074b34, the essence of divine thought), must find a consummation in Absolute Knowing. The vanishing of vanishing is a successful speculative achievement, though within the system it is only momentary, until one reaches Absolute Knowing in the *Phenomenology* or the Absolute Idea in the *Logic*. The author knows this well enough when he says he is getting ahead of himself in his interpretation of M508 (134). It is in the “beautiful” speculative Science of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* that one finds the apotheosis of Hegelianism (159). At this point we have long left the world of phenomenological language and entered the philo-

sophical world of the speculative, where talk about absolutes cannot be avoided and where we become ever-shrinking predicates instead of subjects (183). Of course, hubris often inspires us to turn this around and make the absolute *our* predicate, which is pretty much the stuff of twentieth century existentialism, with its subplots of psychopathology and an ever-widening web of social constructs. Not to put too fine a point on it, the phenomenological *as such* is inherently counter-philosophical and non-speculative, i.e. it can never get beyond the strictures of a science of consciousness and leaves us flat when it comes to culture, politics, ethics, art, and religion.

### **Hermeneutical Openness and the Beginning of Philosophy**

Phenomenology is primarily observational. Its status vis-à-vis the Hegelian system has been much commented upon, not the least by Hegel in his last writing, an attempted revision of the Preface to the *Phenomenology* immediately before his death. The writings of one's relative youth always remain dear, but Hegel to the end was ambivalent as to whether the *Phenomenology* is but one of several portals to the "system," or the definitive, singular portal. "Pure Being" must be the beginning of logico-metaphysics, i.e. the absolute, abstract beginning of the science of pure thought. The science of pure thought as "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind" (*Science of Logic*, Miller translation, 50) is obviously a portrayal of the logic of the absolute. As such it is only revelatory in the sense of an expository, progressive logic and not revelatory in any religious sense. In the important "With What Must the Science Begin" in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel takes pains to point out that philosophy cannot begin with the "I," which was the fashion of his day, for it is too concrete, too much of an infinite manifold, too little disrupted for most of us, too little known as pure to ordinary consciousness, and, well, too entangled in too many confusions and tempting illusions to be of much use for a speculative philosophy of undoing presuppositions, much less an introductory course on Hegel, which it primarily became in the Anglo-American world. The blurring of the human and the cosmological, the phenomenological and the philosophical, in Hegel found few sympathizers in the science and positivism of the nineteenth century. The cosmos became only *for* us humans and irrelevant *to* itself. Hegel's youthful *Phenomenology* gallantly struggles to get out of the Kantian/Fichtean divides just as much as it presents all the inklings of his mature system. Along with the *Science of Logic* it is one of the most revolutionary texts of the early nineteenth century and indeed in all of European history.

It is useful to think of the distinction and connection between *signs* and *words* in terms of the relation between the understanding and negative (dialectical) reason. Words break down the arbitrary fixities of signs and they in turn

dialectically implode through their own vanishing. This process is integral to the idea of “hermeneutical openness” that is a key aspect of a dialogical community, which especially comes into play in the ethical order, in religion, and in philosophy. The utter transiency of the words “here” and “now” in the section on “Sense-certainty” are a common but excellent example of how the “here” immediately vanishes leaving behind only the empty sign (the arbitrary letters) that require some further re-stabilization in a “this here” which again is vulnerable to a breakdown into a “one-sided infinite.” The latter is often given the appellation of the “bad” infinite, which is somewhat unfortunate because Hegel is referring to the abstract or repetitive infinite of the dogmatic, limited understanding, which simply thinks of the infinite solely in terms of transcending a limit and not as recurring integration of the finite and the infinite. “Vanishing words” could certainly be thought of in terms of a linear, open-ended infinite, but Reid wants us to think of them as fragile centers of meaning in a dialogical community that can carry the weight of speculative thought. The author does not privilege language over thinking, but seeks to show how Hegel creates a philosophical language worthy of the demands of dialectico-speculative thinking.

The other key construct in this interpretation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is the idea of “hermeneutical openness” (xiv). “Hermeneutics,” as a philosophical orientation in the twentieth century is generally associated with Hans-Georg Gadamer, especially his foundational *Truth and Method* (Tübingen, 1960). It is difficult to resist noting Jürgen Habermas’s declaration at a *Festschrift* that Gadamer’s hermeneutics represents “the urbanization of the Heideggerian countryside.” Writers on classical German Idealism do use the term, but often not in any particular sense associated with Gadamer. For example, J.N. Findlay’s *Kant and the Transcendental Object* (Oxford, 1981) is subtitled *A Hermeneutic Study*, but Gadamer is nowhere to be found therein. The same is true for *Hegel’s Grammatical Ontology*. I think the most succinct sense of the phrase “hermeneutical openness” in Reid’s work is the “open interplay between identity and difference” (131, 156). But equally the author wishes us to think of this idea in terms of communities, and especially the fully “speculative community” of his last chapter “Absolute Knowing: Hermeneutical Openness and Science.” Again, it must be remembered that from the standpoint of the *Encyclopedia*, these shared communities of meaning and dialogue are trans-phenomenological, i.e. they only institutionally occur in the realms of ethical life (specifically *Sittlichkeit*) and in the modes of artistic, religious, and philosophical consciousness. For example, the atomistic individualism of “Civil Society” by definition precludes the possibility of speculative interaction since it is the State or society as the understanding envisages it, i.e. congeries of private persons pursuing private ends. The linguistic clusters one finds in Civil Society are fundamentally counter-communicative because they represent a



self-enclosed, unmediated “word” universe driven by propositional identities, be they identities of the self-interests of property owners or of society viewed as solely contractual. Difference is indifference, dialogue is stymied, and the horizons of hermeneutical openness are extremely limited. Hermeneutical openness and interpretation are themselves predicated upon the vanishing of words. In Civil Society, however, words can never be taken in themselves. Hence the rule of hypocrisy and subterfuge in contemporary discourses.

### **Application of the Onto-grammatical Interpretation**

Aristotle is only mentioned once in *Hegel’s Grammatical Ontology*. The *Phenomenological* journey ends in “fittingly Aristotelian language” (215). This reviewer sympathizes with Reid’s intention, as well as his general fatigue with footnotes stated in the Preface, to give an uncluttered and free-flowing interpretation of the *Phenomenology*. Arguably a little more Aristotle would not be out of place in this book. In *Politics* (1253a8-18) Aristotle declares that the power of speech (λόγος) is “to set forth the expedient and the inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust.” Since the author is adamant that “the notion of individuality, in Hegel, is inherently political” (81), it would have been helpful to have a fuller treatment of how *signs* and *words* (vanishing and unvanishing) become the meaningful speech of the politicized individual. Hegel did not think of Aristotle as a nominalist, one presumes because the end of the onto-grammatical journey in Aristotelian language expresses fundamentally Aristotelian notions about the nature of being and how we linguistically grasp its content. There are many tributaries one can go down with regard to the relation between Aristotle and Hegel. Nonetheless, a few more hints at this important nexus would have bolstered the author’s thesis.

Reid often intersperses his text with short commentaries on contemporary political divides and the ramifications of “dogmatic indifference” (56). For instance, he talks about the climatological implications of treating Nature as *sign*, representing the dead indifference of the cosmos, or as alive in the *word*, in the section on “Observing Reason.” Romantic ecology, grounded in the “meaningful word,” certainly gives us a benign and caring approach to our environment, as opposed to the mechanistic, *sign*-based manipulations of the Baconian Enlightenment. Simply juxtaposing, pursuant to a Hegelian taxonomy, a vitalistic Nature with a cold, *Verstand* view of Nature does not give us much support in deciding what ought to be preferred. Industrialists will always want to de-nature Nature. Environmentalists will always want us portrayed as the fragile charges of Nature’s benevolence, even if at times it treats life with reckless disdain. Reid’s novel interpretation of Hegel in terms of a speculative, grammatical ontology is at many points illuminating and instructive, but it is still burdened with the fact that Hegel’s philosophy is



fundamentally descriptive, not prescriptive, a reflection on what has already happened (*nachdenken*), and not a persuasive directive to take one side or the other. I, for one, would much prefer a strident environmental stance, even if riddled with a maudlin Romanticism, rather than a *Verstand*-based economics focused on fossil-fueled growth at any cost.

This is an appropriate place to comment on Reid's important discussion of the "individual" or the "singular" (*Individuum/Individualität* and *Einzelnen/Einzelheit*) as the unity of universality (*Allgemeinheit*) and particularity (*Besonderheit*) (80-85, and more importantly the discussion at 205-206). The individual and the singular are loaded terms, shall we say *words*, with unbounded hermeneutical openness, which stream through the *Phenomenology* and indeed all of Hegel's mature works. For historical context, the *doppelgänger* of Hegel's time are the self-legislating rational agents of Kant's moral philosophy and the "beautiful souls" of Romanticism. The individual of moral conscience acts only out of respect for the moral law, with its mandates of universalizability, human dignity, and participation in a kingdom of ends. This is a de-souled, featureless individual who loses all individuality in a desiccated universality. The Romantics moved the needle in the other direction. Return must be made to the uniqueness, i.e. the unfathomable personality of one's own self. Hegel abhorred the mysticism which the Romantics gorged themselves on regularly. Our souls can be pure and innocent, in harmony with nature, even in the face of maintaining an "ironic" distance from oneself. Hegel grapples with this bipolarity in "Conscience, the 'Beautiful Soul,' Evil and its Forgiveness" (M632 – M671) of the *Phenomenology*. The 'beautiful soul' has to withdraw from the ugliness of modernity. Any act in that world is a sully of one's being. The beautiful soul lacks an actual existence: "wastes itself in yearning and pines away in consumption" (M668). The problem is that in the end the self-universalizing, self-legislating individual of Kant's *Verstand*-saturated Enlightenment and the ironic withdrawal of the Romantic "wanderer" both dissolve the actual (*wirklich*) individual into a barren, should we say insufferable, universality. How does speculative philosophy rescue us from these twin banalities?

Well, first of all we have to burden ourselves with a few technical details. Hegel deals with the tripartite structure of individuality or singularity in conceptually rigorous passages in the *Encyclopedia Logic* (trs. Geraets, *et al.*, 1991) and in the larger *Science of Logic* (trs. Miller, 1969 and di Giovanni, 2010), both of which the author refers to as the *Logics*. Reid does not like Miller's translation of *Einzelheit* as "individuality." He prefers "singularity" and correctly contrasts the speculative connotations of *Einzelheit* with the specified differentiations of the *Individuum/Individualität* usage (201). In this regard Reid is in line with di Giovanni and others. I agree with Reid that Miller is wrong to translate both terms indifferently as "individual." But the "singular" does not

sit very well with me either. It is Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (Viking, 2005), a dystopian bit of utopianism if there ever was one, that makes me long for the pre-algorithmic, pre-machine days of Hegel's Europe. The distinction between *Einzelheit* and *Individualität* is important and ought to be carried over into English, so I guess we are stuck with "singularity" in the band of Hegelians. While on the topic of "lost in translation" I wholeheartedly agree that *Wesen* should be rendered as "essence" (or "meaning" as Reid likes to style it, 204) and decidedly not as "being." Miller got this right in his earlier translation of the larger *Logic*, so his translation of *Wesen* (*gewesen*, what is past being or behind being) is baffling. My particular gripe with Miller is his translation of *Begriff* (Concept) as "Notion," a most ill-starred, subjective, and un-Hegelian term in English. He commits this capital offense in both the *Science of Logic* and the *Phenomenology*. "Notion" had long settled into Hegelian English, though not unanimously, before the advent of Miller, who is an otherwise admirable translator of Hegel. Maybe this was his chief reason for continuing to use it. It is surprising that my own mentor, J.N. Findlay, let him get away with this in his Foreword and Analysis of the Text to Miller's translation of the *Phenomenology*. More recently the di Giovanni and Geraets/Suchting/Harris translations of the larger and smaller *Logics* respectively have thankfully strived to correct this tradition.

The individual is more inescapably particular (*besonder*), and indeed even more inescapably "political" (81), than the speculatively rigorous unity of universality and particularity found in "singularity." This is well dealt with by the author towards the end of the book (205 – 206) but the discussion would have been more profitably placed for the reader in a summary fashion in the Preface. There are any number of obfuscations with respect to individuality in the *Phenomenology* that the more mature *Logics* clear up. The components of the universal-particular-singular (individual) (UPS) syllogism are better elucidated, *ab initio*, through the separative powers of the Understanding. One can then easily move through a dynamic onto-grammatical interpretation of the copula in judgment and on to the superior speculative elaborations of syllogistic reasoning (105, 116). As an aside, Reid is rightly condemnatory in many, many places of the dichotomous misdeeds of the Understanding, but it must be remembered that it is impossible conceptually to get started on anything without its analytic abilities of segregating and quarantining a distinct category of thought. In this sense all thought must have dogmatism as its starting point or *archē*, or a "word" that strenuously avoids vanishing in order to firm up the conceptual grid upon which one is operating. Reid says as much when he notes how representational language "resists vanishing" (208), as any form of communication must do. The *Logics* do this work splendidly for the speculative concept of singularity or individuality. The *Phenomenology* does not.

The fairly lengthy section on “Physiognomy and Phrenology” in *Hegel’s Grammatical Ontology* is original and welcome. I have always thought that Hegel’s contributions to the psychiatric debates of his day in the “Anthropology” of the *Philosophy of Mind* were extraordinarily insightful and prescient. There, Hegel artfully utilizes the resources of his dialectico-speculative method to navigate a delicate and caring balance of the mutually complementary contributions of talk *versus* pharma-psychology. The outcome puts him, for his time, on the cusp of the reform of psychiatric hospitals. For a discussion of how horribly awry things can go in the world of phrenological dissections, if one does not adhere to even a few of Hegel’s strictures, see, Michelle Nijhuis, “The Downward Slope,” reviewing Alex Riley’s *A Cure for Darkness: The Story of Depression and How We Treat It*, in the *New York Review of Books*, Vol. LXIX, No. 5, 32 – 37 (March 24, 2022). A modern phrenologist, like Emil Kraepelin, who looked at all mental ailments as having an origin in anatomical aberrations, and who would have followers like Egas Moniz and Walter Freeman, who in turn pioneered the diabolical aberrations of prefrontal leucotomies and frontal lobotomies portrayed in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, is a direct descendant of abstractions like the “mind is nature” critiqued in M309 of the *Phenomenology* and in the later “Anthropology” of the *Philosophy of Mind*.

### **The Speculative Language of Religious Experience**

It is in Chapter 7, “Religion and the Absolute Other,” where the rubber hits the road. The principal *nisus* of speculative thought is the reconciliation of the human and absolute points of view. The *modus vivendi* of the reconciliation lies in the idea of “absolute otherness.” Hegel’s challenge to himself, or rather he would say the challenge of philosophy in his day, or of “we moderns,” is the relation of the absolute to finite reality. This is purported to be the perennial *nisus* of philosophy. The author himself hints at how abiding this theme may be in metaphysics (180). Of course, not all religious experience, or metaphysics for that matter, seeks such a reconciliation. Apophatic or negative theology wishes to dissolve the possibility of articulated relations as much as the “metaphysics” of the first hypothesis in Plato’s *Parmenides*, which not only uses the “one” to clear away all finite reality, but indeed all being and all thinking about being, whatsoever. Hegel’s approach to religion certainly recognizes the apophatic disposition, but it is dismissed cursorily as an all too easy collapse into immediacy. The action, for Hegel, is in positive religion and the relations to consciousness and the world that this engenders. For Hegel’s detailed views on the relation between philosophy and religion, see his Introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (trs. Speirs and Sanderson, Vol. I).

It is in reason’s relation to revelation that Reid wishes to situate the *locus classicus* of Hegel’s solution to the human/non-human approaches to the

absolute. He succinctly puts it the following *pas de deux*: “Reason is human self-knowledge through knowledge of the absolute; revelation is the self-knowledge of the Absolute through human self-knowledge” (174). Medievalists should not think of this as a quaint German *redux*, (Etienne Gilson’s *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*) nor should Reformationists, in the Roland Bainton camp, think of it as justification through faith. Reid is providing an important angle on a large claim by Hegel, even if they both leave us latter-day “we moderns” still in the “bad” infinite of wanting more. Philosophy ought not to be flippantly dismissive of religion, for it too barter and trucks with the absolute, nor should religion treat philosophy as a rational but all-too-secular handmaiden. On the correspondences between natural religion, religion in the form of art, and revealed religion to the various figures of consciousness covered by Hegel in the earlier sections of the *Phenomenology*, the author has given us a helpful chart (182). Religion and philosophy are “complicit,” because the self-consciousness of one must pass through the other. Everything hinges on the “revelatory,” and this is as true of religion as it is of philosophy. Revelation also means bringing some things to an end. The end of classical art brings forth revealed religion and its particular form of worship. Reid jars us with the comment that “it is Antigone who acts as the speculative mother of God” (194).

### Speculative Thought and Onto-grammatical Reality

What can one ever make of the tortured, frenetic, over-wrought language of the last chapter, “Absolute Knowing,” in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*? Did Hegel think Napoleon would lob a cannon ball his way before he could get it all out? Our author makes an effort at interpreting the chapter through a reconciliation of hermeneutical openness and speculative science, though the emphasis is more on the side of science while hermeneutical openness finds its home in history and in “the *Encyclopedic* instantiation of the state university community” (216). Reid’s idealized university, which he spends some time on in his last chapter, is a far cry from today’s *Verstand*-ridden institutions of higher learning, where programming is driven by ever shifting responses to disasters, be they the horrors of social media, conflict zones, plagues, starvation, or the latest economic meltdown. No absolutes there, I am afraid. Our author, I cannot help noting, is perfectly situated to give us some commentary on the current debates over the re-naming of universities. Might it be that once meaningful words have now sunk back into the meaninglessness of signs, or possibly the reverse?

On the issue of speculative reconciliations, a few pesky difficulties linger. It is useful to compare the last chapter of the *Phenomenology* with the “Philosophy” section in the *Philosophy of Mind* of the *Encyclopedia*, with “The

Absolute Idea” at the end of the larger *Logic*, and the section called the “Final Result” at the end of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. In “Absolute Knowing” Hegel seeks to close off the journey of Spirit (*Geist*) by absolutizing self-consciousness, i.e. by shifting gears from human consciousness that is always *for us* as phenomenological observers to a cosmic, not simply phenomenological, standpoint. In this standpoint we find the completed fruition of Spirit in its externalization through time and history as well as nature. Likewise, in this exercise we get out of our phenomenological subjectivity through all manner of objective existences in the moral and religious forms of spiritual externalization. Systematic speculative science is the conceptual knowledge of all possible conceptual knowledge. This is the absolute knowing of the speculative philosopher. It is unattainable in the vast representational mosaics of the religious and moral consciousness.

It is hard to keep philosophy conceptually sunk in itself. It must go out into the human and cosmic worlds. There it spends most of its time explaining to everybody else why they are not philosophers. The non-philosophers are always too subjective, too individual, too dogmatic, too skeptical, too enthralled with their own absolutes. There is a curious committee-like, take no responsibility, in the dispositions of the syllogizing philosophers. The phenomenological observer, on the other hand, must always account for his observations. There is no accounting in the absolute knower because everything has been accounted for, at least to the extent that you can always go back and do a phenomenological accounting in the full knowledge that it is *only* phenomenological. Perhaps this may be why some are more attracted to the *Phenomenology* than the more rigid *Encyclopedia* with its supporting array of posthumously published lectures, where the hermeneutical openness of Hegelianism finds some very luxuriant pastures.

It is in the absolute syllogism of the *Philosophy of Mind* (paragraphs 575 – 577) that the ultimate speculative formulation of absolute knowing is articulated by Hegel. In this syllogism the principal categories of *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, i.e. Logic, Nature, Mind, are interwoven in a circular quadruplicity (larger *Logic*, 836, 842) that few commentators in English take the time to properly unpack. For a good discussion, see, Théodore F. Geraets, “Les Trois Lectures Philosophiques de L’Encyclopédie ou la Réalisation du concept de la philosophie chez Hegel.” *Hegel-Studien* 10 (1975): 231–54. Logic, Nature, and Mind all occupy interchangeable places in the absolute syllogism as universals, particulars, and singulars. Everything is a self-mediating absolute syllogism. Propositional attitudes shift as one alternatively takes either Logic, or Nature, or Mind as the absolute *prius*. For example, the first syllogism, Logic → Nature → Mind, is the position of the *Encyclopedia*. This is the standpoint of the linear, the developmental, and the pedagogical (Reid’s “teaching manual”). Therein we have progressive scientific cognition unfold-

ing in the somewhat artificial, triadic methodology of Hegel's system as it is known to his external audience. This is the skeleton of Hegel's state university and its *Bildung* of free Spirits in free dialogue. The third syllogism, where Mind is the absolute *prius*, reverses the linearity of the first syllogism in such a way that dialectical development is contextualized within the system as complete. These are subtle moves by Hegel and they shed a great deal of light on how the completions encountered in the first syllogism, at the end of Logic, of Nature, and of Mind, have less stability than that of the third syllogism. We have here one of the more astonishing absolute-theorists of European intellectual history casting a web from which it is very difficult to escape. Just ask Heidegger or Wittgenstein. By the way, "absolute-theorist" is J.N. Findlay's nomenclature for Hegel.

In the "Final Result" of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel talks about philosophy as the "totality of forms" which does not "overstep its own time." Nonetheless, "each philosophy sets up a new principle of its own," that "throughout all time there is only one philosophy," and that there is "one self-present Spirit." These reflections come out of a long sojourn by Hegel through the history of philosophy, which seems quaint by today's specialized standards, but which was extraordinary for its time, and which still provides rich rewards for those with the leisure to go through the three volumes, published posthumously. None of this is to denigrate religion, or art, or even the nature mystics. Hegel is, however, sensitive, almost to the point of being evangelistic, to the unique role philosophy plays in our cultural mosaic. There are some valuable lessons here to be learned for contemporary practitioners of the discipline, shrinking violets they are to diehard Hegelians. If philosophy is a "narrative," be it historical, conceptual, or adumbratively a *ficcion* (along the lines of Jorge Luis Borges's *ficciones*), then Reid does not mean this in any soft sense of the word. For him, as for Hegel, a philosophical narrative must be a well defended systematicity.

In his final chapter Reid wishes to interpret the "reverse movement" alluded to above in terms of the "speculative linguistic reality" of "reciprocal unification" (212). Strict, non-revisable, reconciliations must be high on the agenda at this stage of the game. The author declares on the matter of "speculative truth that neither subject predicating substance nor substance predicating subject is true" (213). The burden is whether any language, but especially the language, i.e. the science, of conceptual philosophy, is up to the challenge. Discursive and culturally relative languages are as much obstacles to clarity and enlightenment as enablers. Post-Hegelian philosophers have spent much time threading this needle, Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics* immediately comes to mind. Clearly, Reid thinks that speculative thought has a transparent reflection in onto-grammatical reality. In this respect I think he is true to Hegel and has marshalled ample evidence to support the argument.

But speculatively oriented languages often crumple into a copula-less, speechless incantation of the “One,” or circularizing quadruplicity, or “the identity of identity and difference.” Equally, meanings shift and glide into irreconcilable debates about the implosion of “civil society,” or whether true religion requires an immanent or a transcendent God as its predicating or non-predicating subject. What happens to philosophical discourse in the world that comes after the absolute syllogism? Do we just muddle on as phenomenological observers? Or do we in some very meaningful ways come to rest in a settled, and forever imperturbable, philosophical repose. The ancient Greeks were more able to think such a state than “we moderns.”

Generally, this manuscript from Bloomsbury Academic is free of any egregious errors, although the text is not pristine. It is unfortunate that one of the first German terms used in the book contains a typo (*volkommene*, for *vollkommene*, x). Unfortunate because the German thereafter is *fehlerfrei*. It is also unfortunate that we are left with the usual frail and inconsistent Index that present day publishers generally put on offer. No entries for many Hegelian terms of art such as “sense-certainty,” “reflected” (28, 212, for example), “in-itself” (27, for example), or “for-itself” (27, 42, for example), or even for Reid’s term of art “onto-grammatical” (not too frequently used to forestall inclusion). Then there is the somewhat haphazard employment of technical German terms, e.g. no *Bestimmung* for “determination” (important for the author, 182), or *Wesen* for “essence” (important for the confluence the author makes with “meaning,” which is not a term of art for Hegel, and, alas, missing locators as well for pages 184, 187). Erratic use of capitals: epictetus, protestant, Chorus, Woman. Finally and frustratingly, the insertion of token locators for such words as “truth,” surely a worthy Hegelian entry.

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