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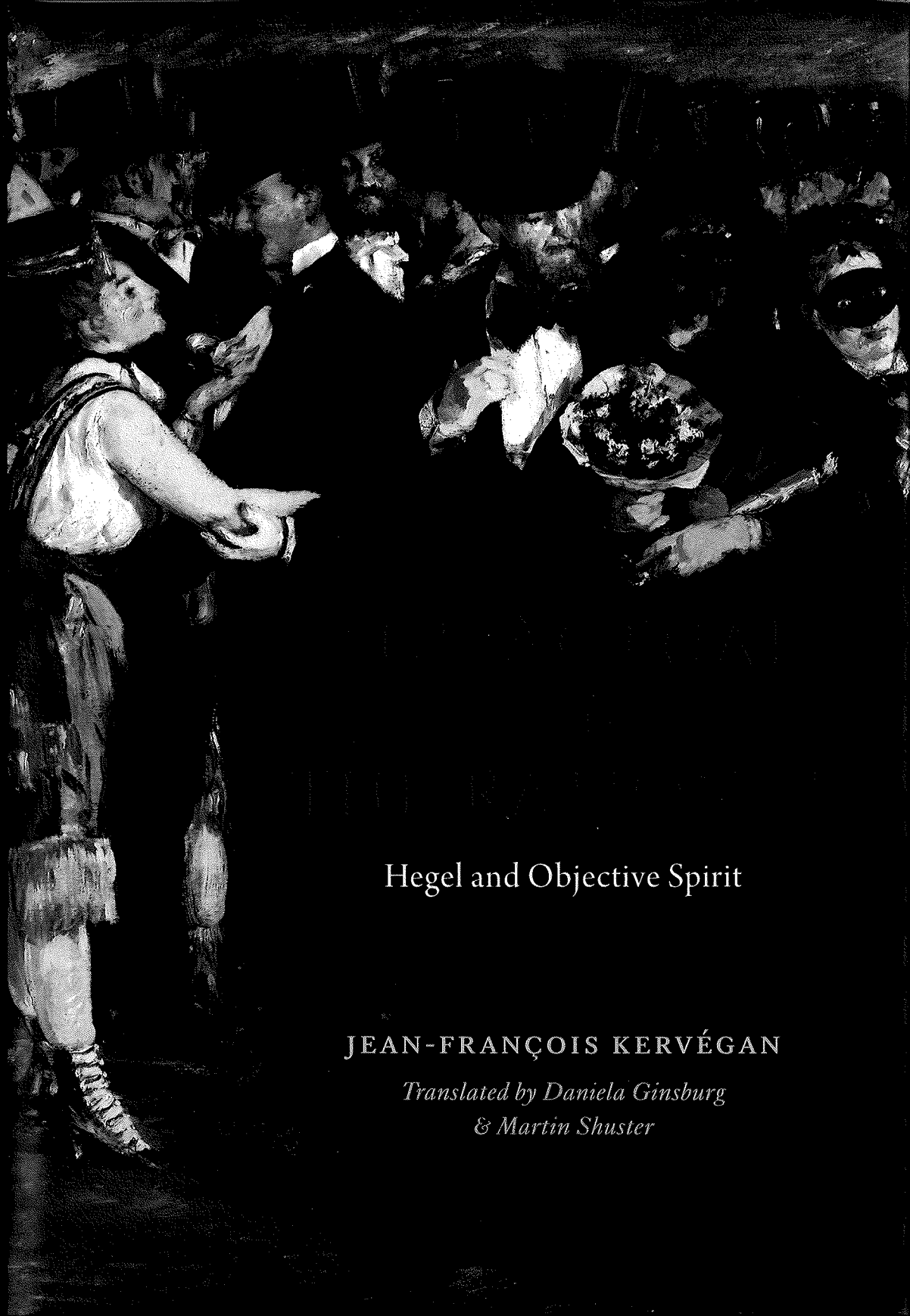
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THE ACTUAL AND THE RATIONAL  
JEAN-FRANÇOIS KERVÉGAN



Hegel and Objective Spirit

JEAN-FRANÇOIS KERVÉGAN

Translated by Daniela Ginsburg  
& Martin Shuster

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

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**PREFACE****Hegel without Metaphysics?**

It is not necessary to justify the special interest one takes in a certain area of an author's thought (in my case, Hegel's legal, social, and political thought, to which a large part of my research over the last twenty-five years has been dedicated). The reasons for one's interest may be partly external to that thought or to philosophy on the whole. On the other hand, the *way* one studies an area of thought, the presuppositions of one's reading, must be exposed and justified, which means one must be clearly aware of them, being able to measure their effects. For me, coming to this realization was a slow process, one that to a certain degree modified the rules by which I had undertaken my study of Hegel. After years spent reading and commenting on the *Science of Logic* as part of a group led by the late André Lécrivain,<sup>1</sup> I naturally approached the study of the doctrine of objective spirit with that long, collective labor in mind. I was, and remain, convinced that the logical-speculative perspective opened relatively unprecedented hermeneutic possibilities and that it was important to read Hegel's legal-political writings not as the expression of opinions or even theoretical positions in political philosophy but as elements of a system, of an

1. See J. Biard et al., *Introduction à la lecture de la science de la logique de Hegel*, vol. 1, *L'être* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1987).

“Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences,” of which the *Science of Logic* is the center and nexus of meaning. Moreover, this conviction comes from a basic reading of the texts. In the *Philosophy of Right*,<sup>2</sup> Hegel constantly emphasizes the interdependence between the doctrine of objective spirit and the *Logic*, to which he makes some twenty explicit references. He writes, for example, in the preface,

It will readily be noticed that the work as a whole, like the construction of its parts, is based on the logical spirit. It is also chiefly from this point of view that I would wish this treatise to be understood and judged. For what it deals with is *science*, and in science, the content is essentially inseparable from the *form*.<sup>3</sup>

It is indisputable that for Hegel the doctrine of objective spirit, like every part of the system, rests not only on the “spirit” of the *Logic* but on its letter; if that were not the case, there would be no sense in speaking of a Hegelian system. For Hegel, as for Kant, a system is fundamentally distinct from a mere “aggregate” of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, for Hegel, the systematic project is not at all incompatible with attention to the concrete aspect of things and with the concern for the “life of men,” as he wrote to Schelling:

In my scientific development, which started from [the] more subordinate needs of man, I was inevitably driven toward science, and the ideal of [my] youth had to take the form of reflection and thus at once of a system. I now ask myself, while I am still occupied at it, what return to intervention in the life of men can be found.<sup>5</sup>

2. I accept the usual translation of *Philosophie des Rechts* as “Philosophy of Right.” But there are good reasons for choosing “Philosophy of Law” instead, inasmuch as on my view in the Hegelian context the “subjective” meaning of *Recht* (right) depends on the “objective” meaning of the word (law).

3. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 6 (*Elements*, 10; see *Outlines*, 4).

4. “By an architectonic I understand the art of systems. Since systematic unity is that which first makes ordinary cognition into science, i.e., makes a system out of a mere aggregate of it, architectonic is the doctrine of that which is scientific in our cognition in general” (*KrV*, *Ak.* 3, B 860 / 1C, p. 691).

5. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 64. Letter dated November 2, 1800.

The problem — raised quite early on, in particular by Marx — is the following: must we believe Hegel, and to what extent, when he maintains that all the philosophy of law and right (e.g.) is an extension of his *Logic*? If the answer is yes, don’t we risk having to consider that “the entire philosophy of right is only a parenthesis to *Logic*”?<sup>6</sup> It must, moreover, be noted that the young Marx’s position on the matter evolved greatly, for in the end he (along with Engels) considered the *Logic* to constitute the “rational kernel” — revolutionary because dialectic — of Hegelianism. Strangely enough, that had already been the position of Rudolf Haym, who so greatly contributed to establishing the bad reputation of the “philosopher of the Prussian state” when he asserted that the system is “revolutionary in its logical part” though “conservative in its practical part.”<sup>7</sup> The opposite position, which was adopted by a good number of later commentators, consists in separating the argument of the *Philosophy of Right* as much as possible from its logical-systematic context in an attempt to render it more acceptable at a time and in a context where absolute spirit no longer enjoys very good press. If we wanted to summarize this alternative crudely, we might say, with the help of a historical nod, that either, like the “old Hegelians,” one opts for an orthodox reading of the system and runs the risk of helping discredit it, or, like the “young Hegelians,” one pits the spirit of the work against its letter and tries to rid it of its metaphysical dross at the risk of depriving it of what gives it its power and coherence.

It must be noted that recently, though some eminent commentators continue to take the “old Hegelian” position of a reading faithful to Hegelianism’s explicit systematic program (even if this means nourishing the suspicions that some burden it with — e.g., the suspicion of totalitarianism popularized by Popper), others increasingly choose a “young Hegelian,” nonmetaphysical reading of Hegel — a reading that, no matter how it breaks with the letter of the system, implies pushing away or relativizing some of its strongest ambi-

6. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 18. “*Logic* is not used to prove the nature of the state, but the state is used to prove the *Logic*” (*ibid.*).

7. Rudolf Haym, *Hegel und seine Zeit: Vorlesungen über Entstehung und Entwicklung, Wesen und Werth der Hegel’schen Philosophie* (Berlin: Rudolph Gaertner, 1857), 368–69. We find the same argument in Engels; see Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972), 67–70; Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (New York: International, 1941).

tions at the obvious risk of thus depriving it of what is most powerful in it. I would like, with the help of several examples, to show what is interesting and risky in such iconoclastic attempts, which, at bottom, amount to distinguishing once again “what is living” and “what is dead” in Hegel,<sup>8</sup> even at the risk of being suspected of doing arbitrary violence to the coherence of this thought.

When one considers the disrepute that has followed Hegel within the dominant strand of Anglo-Saxon philosophy ever since Russell’s break with neo-Hegelian idealism, it is surprising to observe that for some ten years now, Hegel has once again become a significant point of reference within what one no longer dares call analytic philosophy, given that it is now so diverse and renounces some of the distinctive traits of its original identity—in particular, its distrust of continental philosophy and especially of German idealism. It is not only that important, now-classic contributions to the study of Hegel have been born in the Anglo-American world, which had previously lagged behind in this area (I am thinking, e.g., of the innovative works of Robert Pippin<sup>9</sup> and Terry Pinkard).<sup>10</sup> We have even seen analytic philosophers seize Hegelianism (certainly in a very liberal way that would be problematic for a historian of philosophy in the European tradition) and even what is apparently most suspect within it—that is, its idealism—in order to try to raise, on the analytic continent itself, new, post-Wittgensteinian, post-Quinean, or neopragmatist questions. I am thinking here of the works of Robert Brandom<sup>11</sup> and John McDowell,<sup>12</sup> which have caused quite a commotion, and not only because of

8. See Benedetto Croce, *What Is Living and What Is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

9. See in particular Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

10. See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996); *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Hegel’s Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Terry Pinkard and H. Tristram Engelhardt, *Hegel Reconsidered: Beyond Metaphysics and the Authoritarian State* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994).

11. Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Robert B. Brandom, “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel’s Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1999): 164–89.

12. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); *Having the*

the doubly iconoclastic use they make of Hegel (iconoclastic in relation to classic readings of Hegel and in relation to the analytic mainstream).

However, these works deal with problems of philosophy of knowledge and philosophy of language. Since my subject is different, I will highlight instead Axel Honneth’s effort to update the Hegelian doctrine of *Sittlichkeit*. In a book titled *Suffering from Indeterminacy*, he proposes a “reactualization of Hegel’s philosophy of right”<sup>13</sup> in order to show that here, too, a return to Hegel, comparable to the return occurring in the field of theories of knowledge, is fruitful. Honneth does not claim that the *Philosophy of Right* offers answers to the questions raised by contemporary social and political philosophy, but he does maintain that a nonmetaphysical reading of the text makes it possible to confront and even resolve certain difficulties encountered by contemporary philosophy—for example, in the debate between liberals and communitarians. After dismissing the usual political objections (Hegel is an enemy of democracy) and methodological objections (the system’s logical-speculative presuppositions are unacceptable), Honneth shows that the doctrine of objective spirit, adequately reconstructed, can be fruitful for post-Habermasian discussions on three subjects. First of all, the Hegelian theory of right and law, centered as it is on the idea of a “universally free will,” can be understood as a theory of justice in the contemporary (post-Rawlsian) sense of the term—as a theory that exposes the intersubjective conditions of individual autonomy and distinguishes different spheres of self-realization. Second, in direct line with his earlier works on recognition and “social suffering,” Honneth seeks within the doctrine of *Sittlichkeit* the ingredients for a “therapeutic for social pathologies.” Finally—and on this point there is convergence with Pippin—he proposes understanding this doctrine as a normative theory of modernity; a theory whose limits, nevertheless, stem from its “superinstitutional” character. This, by the way, is a point whose demonstration can be debated; doesn’t it fall prey to the anti-institutional disposition common to large sections of contemporary political philosophy? Whatever the case may be, these analyses show the potential inventiveness and fecundity of nonmetaphysical readings of Hegel. But of course, Honneth, like the other authors mentioned,

*World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

13. Axel Honneth, *Suffering from Indeterminacy: An Attempt at a Reactualization of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right; Two Lectures*, trans. Jack Ben-Levi (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 2000).

must answer the prejudicial question, do Hegelian statements (here, those concerning objective spirit) still make sense when one abstracts them from the logical-speculative context of their justification? There is material here for fruitful debates.

As for me, I confess that on this essential question my opinion is, if not wavering, at least nuanced. Having started off from an orthodox (old Hegelian) position nourished by long contact with the *Logic*, I gradually realized that what interested me the most and seemed most relevant in the doctrine of objective spirit did *not always* need to be correlated with the logical-metaphysical infrastructure of the system in order to be judged valid. A good part of the doctrine of abstract law — which I aim to reevaluate in a positive manner — can be coherently understood independently of Hegelian metaphysics (by which I mean first and foremost the *Logic*, which Hegel explicitly tells us “takes the place of the former *metaphysics*”).<sup>14</sup> But this is not always the case. On one decisive point, the question of the rabble (*Pöbel*), I believe I have shown that the solution Hegel seems to support (there *must* be a social and political solution to the social question) presupposes what I call a meta-ethical and metaobjective guarantee: the spirit of the world, the worldly figure of absolute spirit.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, this is what is suggested by the final paragraph of the *Philosophy of Right*, which in a sense places the principle of the internal opening of objective spirit in the direction of absolute spirit (religion, philosophy) and affirms — counterintuitively — that “the present has cast off its barbarism” and that, as a result, the state appears as “the image and actuality of reason.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the doctrine of *Sittlichkeit* and even the doctrine of objective spirit in its entirety do not by themselves offer the means for thinking civil society’s reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) with itself as *necessary*; they show, rather, the unavoidable nature of social fracture, as we would say today, and the ultimately aporetic character of the solutions that civil society and the state can implement to remedy it (such as aid for the poor or the policy of colonial expansion). But what does the idea that the structural contradictions of objective spirit can be resolved only from the point of view of absolute spirit mean if not that Hegel’s metaphysics is the ultimate guarantee of the coherence of his philosophy of finite spirit and in particular of the doctrine of objective spirit?

14. *WdL* 1<sup>1</sup>, *GW* 11, p. 32, or *WdL* 1<sup>2</sup>, *GW* 21, p. 48 (*Science of Logic*, 42).

15. See below, chapter 6.

16. *RPh*, § 360, *GW* 14.1, p. 281 (*Elements*, 380; see *Outlines*, 323).

An anecdote recounted by Heine seems to confirm this: to the question, “Do you really believe that everything that is *wirklich* is *vernünftig*?” Hegel is said to have answered, smiling, “It could also be put: ‘Everything that is rational, must be!’”<sup>17</sup>

Having arrived at this point, we must examine what exactly the term *metaphysics* refers to in the Hegelian context, where its meaning is obviously transformed.<sup>18</sup> I am aware that in the foregoing remarks I mentioned interpretations that are neither synonymous nor necessarily compatible with one another. I do not know exactly what Hegel thought about this question. (When it comes to his explicit formulations, I know, of course, like everyone else; what is less clear to me is the definition of a position in keeping with the overall intention of Hegelianism as I perceive or reconstruct it.) But I can attempt to define the spectrum of acceptable positions. They seem to me to fall between two extremes: (1) Hegel’s metaphysics is his *Logic*; (2) Hegel’s metaphysics is his doctrine of absolute spirit. It is not my goal here to choose between these two positions — there are good arguments for either one — but instead to show the stakes of these interpretive choices.

If it is true that the *Logic* “takes the place of” and at the same time “takes over for” traditional (precritical) metaphysics, then it must be said that it is the true metaphysics. So what is the intention of Hegelian logic? It is to show — in accordance with a strong understanding of what *logos* is<sup>19</sup> — that rational discourse is the very discourse of being, that logic is an onto-logic. According to its explicit ambition, Hegelian logic, setting itself apart from all that is said or thought by means of this word, including from the point of view of transcendental philosophy, claims to be not a discourse on being but

17. Günter Nicolin, *Hegel in Berichten Seiner Zeitgenossen* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2013), document 363, p. 235: “It could also mean: ‘everything that is rational, must be.’”

18. See Hans Friedrich Fulda, “Spekulative Logik als die eigentliche Metaphysik: Zu Hegels verwandlung des neuzeitlichen Metaphysikverständnisses,” in *Hegels Transformation der Metaphysik*, ed. Detlev Pätzold (Cologne: Dinter, 1991); Emmanuel Renault, “La Métaphysique entre logique et sciences particulières,” in *Logique et sciences concrètes dans le système Hégélien*, ed. Jean-Michel Buée, Emmanuel Renault, and David Wittman (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006). The state of the debate is summarized in Frederick Beiser, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–20. Discussions with Bernard Mabile helped me to clarify my own position.

19. On this point, see the illuminating observations — in spite of the radically anti-Hegelian conclusions drawn from them — of Dominique Dubarle, *Logos et formalisation du langage* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977), chaps. 1, 8–10.

rather the discourse of being. Hegel is then “just” a secretary taking dictation from the World Spirit, which through him thinks its own actuality. If this is the case (I mean, if one agrees not to disqualify this program immediately as paranoid or hypocritical), then Hegel’s logic/metaphysics defines not only the conditions of possibility for thinking the thinkable (as does Kant’s transcendental logic) but also the very regime of being engaged in a unique process of verification. To say that logic replaces metaphysics, understood as the science of being as being and not as the description of existents or as regional ontology, is thus to affirm that the program for a theory of (true) discourse of *substance* raising itself into *subject*—to use the terms of the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—must replace the program for a theory of the conditions of possibility of experience.

This hardly helps us assess the other position, the interpretation of metaphysics as the philosophy or science of absolute spirit in its triple register: art, religion, philosophy. My hypothesis is that this interpretation and everything that derives from it is of course required by Hegelianism’s own self-representation but is not necessarily part of the development of “real [philosophical] sciences”—in any case, of the philosophy of nature and of finite spirit. In other words, the doctrine of objective spirit undoubtedly cannot be thought coherently without the *Logic* but perhaps can be without the philosophy of religion. However, on certain key points, this position is no longer tenable: once again, the way Hegel deals with the problem he highlights—the structural crisis of civil society—must give us pause. We know the solution he retains: the institutionalization of social life through corporations and proper enforcement by the rational state supplemented by an adroit policy of using the poor for colonial expansion allows for the gradual resolution of the fundamental contradiction of civil society (which here must be called *bourgeois* civil society) on the ground of world history, which is expressly mentioned in section 247 of the *Philosophy of Right* in order to emphasize the increasing role played by the globalization of trade, including at the cultural level. Now, the reasons for this speculative optimism<sup>20</sup> cannot be found in the doctrine of

20. To speak of speculative optimism obviously does not mean ascribing to Hegel the naive faith in the progress of the human spirit proclaimed by the *Aufklärung*; for him, it is the “work of the negative” that causes history, like any process, to advance. “Optimism” here designates only the proclaimed conviction that there will be an ultimate resolution of social and political contradictions.

objective spirit *alone*, although Hegel does not seem willing to admit as much. Here, we might read the half-worried, half-furious observations he makes over the course of the 1820s regarding the harmful effects of the freedom of enterprise<sup>21</sup> and of the suppression of corporations<sup>22</sup> as well as his tirade, at the end of the 1830 course on the philosophy of history, against the dangers liberalism (here, *political* liberalism of the French type) poses for old Europe. Obviously, old Hegel wasn’t very optimistic about the health of *Sittlichkeit!* Consequently, what I, in the interest of simplicity, have named his speculative optimism can only be a *metaphysical*, counterintuitive optimism, the very optimism that caused him, in his lectures, to give the expression from the 1820 preface, “The rational is actual and the actual is rational,” the sense of historical process—“the rational becomes actual and the actual becomes rational”<sup>23</sup>—and even of a speculative necessity: “it must be so!”

Which position to choose? Mine is the following, which I openly admit is *debatable*: when Hegel’s speculative optimism (at least within the doctrine of objective spirit) seems to be contradicted by the state of the world or to contrast with what we are given to know of it, it is rooted not simply in the *Logic* as a theory of discourse and of being (onto-logic) but also in the doctrine of absolute spirit, or at least in that which within objective spirit echoes absolute spirit (“the spirit of the world”). If our concern is to discern the effective truth of Hegelian discourse and to make good use of it—in other words, if we read Hegel from a perspective that is neither historical nor “technological” in Martial Gueroult’s sense—a good rule would seem to be to practice an *epokhè* toward statements whose strength of conviction seems exhausted as well as toward the context of meaning they belong to and to separate them (as much as possible, which can only be measured on a case by case basis) from the rest of the analysis. To return to my earlier example, we can take advantage of Hegel’s analyses of the tensions of civil society and “social suffering” without thereby believing that the institutionalization of social life and good government policy necessarily provide a positive and definitive solution to these tensions. This amounts to considering that it is dialecticity that

21. See *W* 11, p. 567. See also chapter 6 below.

22. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974), 4:619.

23. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 51. See Dieter Henrich’s commentary in his Introduction, 14–16.

constitutes the living, and possibly topical, element of Hegelian analyses but also that we probably must renounce what was perhaps for Hegel himself a purely metaphysical conviction: faith in a “true reconciliation that has become objective”<sup>24</sup> woven into the fabric of the human world. No doubt in doing so we sacrifice what is most ambitious in Hegel’s metaphysics — that which, from his point of view, guarantees the “positively rational” coherence of the system: not only the doctrine of absolute spirit but also a significant part of the teaching of the *Logic*. It seems to me that this sacrifice is necessary because of what we are and what our world is: we no longer live up to the heights of absolute spirit. But to pronounce this diagnosis is still to be Hegelian in a certain way, by accepting the congruence of the rational and the actual.

24. *RPh*, § 360, *GW* 14.1, p. 281 (*Elements*, 380; see *Outlines*, 323).

## PROLOGUE

### The Actual and the Rational

“Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig.”<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly the most often quoted expression in the entire Hegelian corpus and also the one that has most contributed to Hegel’s bad reputation — perhaps we should say, to his bad reputations. Doesn’t it contain within it all the ambiguities of *speculative dialectics*, to use the term that constantly reappears in the writings of Hegel’s enemies? This, in any case, is what some of the most perspicacious first readers the *Philosophy of Right* already suspected, first and foremost Nikolaus von Thaden, a worthy representative of the Prussian administration that the work in question allegedly aims to glorify. In a letter to Hegel dated August 8, 1821, von Thaden presents “what was displeasing in [its] politics” to him, “a faithful soul, a zealous disciple.”<sup>2</sup> There follows a long list of criticisms that constitute the first and nearly definitive version of the liberal argument against the *Philosophy of Right*. The disappointed disciple suspects Hegel of having, “out of enthusiasm for the princes,” “justified the

1. “What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational.” *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 24 (*Elements*, 20; see *Outlines*, 14).

2. Johannes Hoffmeister, ed. *Briefe von und an Hegel* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952–1960), 2:278. For an English excerpt, see Hegel, *The Letters*, 462–65.



reality that exists in most states,"<sup>3</sup> and in particular in the Prussian state—in contradiction with the teachings that can and must be drawn from his philosophy and with the views that he had presented in the "famous article" of 1817 on the states of Wurtemberg. Von Thaden suggests that this piece, considered the most liberal of Hegel's texts (even if some, e.g., Niethammer, find it too "governmental"—according to him, it "defends a bad cause with great wit"<sup>4</sup>), might well contain Hegel's "true" political philosophy, meaning the only philosophy that conforms to the requirements of the system. Thus, the expression from the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* deserves special treatment. For von Thaden, this proposition, admittedly "the greatest, highest, and most important of all" is "philosophically true," but it is also "politically false,"<sup>5</sup> since it amounts to giving philosophical approval—Haym says "benediction"—to the most contingent and contestable aspects of reality: for example, the repressive and conservative policy of the Prussian state in applying the Carlsbad decisions after 1819. But the letter discusses only this latter aspect of the question. Von Thaden admits that this phrase from the preface is, in general, faithful to the broad lines of Hegelian philosophy; however, although he explains why it seems to him politically false or inappropriate, he does not say how it is philosophically true. So what then, exactly, does the equivalence of the actual and the rational mean when measured against the logical-systematic requirements of Hegelian philosophy?

### The Real and the Actual

According to the common translation—which corresponds to the most frequent interpretation and, it would seem, to the obvious meaning of the words—the phrase from the 1820 preface means "what is rational is real and what is real is rational." It is easy to see where such an interpretation leads, for the vision of Hegelian philosophy that remains most widespread rests on it. When Hegel postulates that "all that is real is rational," doesn't he radically deny contingency, and in this way doesn't he sacrifice freedom—which he nevertheless constantly invokes—to a costly necessitarianism? Of course, we can note in passing the unconscious addition of a universal qualifier that

3. Hoffmeister, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, 2:278.

4. Letter to Hegel, dated December 27, 1817 (*ibid.*, 2:172).

5. Hoffmeister, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, 2:279; Hegel, *The Letters*, 463.

is absent from the text, as well as the omission—or at least relegation to the rank of a mere indirect filler—of the other half of the couplet, which proclaims the actuality of the rational. But, at bottom, this does not change much. In the eyes of nearly all, Hegel remains the philosopher for whom being is but the garb of the concept and who thus embodies the most extreme version of idealism's mad ambition to "deduce" or "construct" everything that exists, including—as Krug perfidiously noted—the pen used to refute it.<sup>6</sup> From this fundamental and fundamentally false position follow the other vices of such a philosophy: first and foremost, what Haym and others called its quietism, its irresistible tendency to accord the "benediction of the concept" to everything that exists and everything that is done, including the most revolting acts. And from there comes the imputation of conservatism that among Hegel's opponents is so often associated with metaphysical suspicion of what is perceived as blind necessitarianism. Thus, Haym writes in the fifteenth chapter of his book on Hegel:

In contrast with a politics of progress [embodied by Fries], the preface gives classical expression to the spirit of the Restoration, it pronounces *the absolute formula of political conservatism, quietism, and optimism*: . . . what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational.<sup>7</sup>

In the century that followed, interpretations went even further, to the point of seeing in Hegelian philosophy an early anticipation of Nazi or Stalinist totalitarianism. The move from the tyranny of the concept to tyranny tout court would appear plausible: certain interpretations—though not necessarily the strongest ones—bluntly proclaimed it.<sup>8</sup>

6. See *W* 2, p. 195–97. On the question of contingency, see Dieter Henrich, "Hegels Theorie des Zufalls," in *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971); Jean-Marie Lardic, "La contingence chez Hegel," in G. W. F. Hegel, *Comment le sens commun comprend la philosophie*, trans. Jean-Marie Lardic, 63–114 (Arles: Actes Sud, 1989); Bernard Mabille, *Hegel: L'épreuve de la contingence* (Paris: Aubier, 1999).

7. Haym, *Hegel und Seine Zeit*, 365. Haym also says that "the Hegelian system became the scientific home of the spirit of the Prussian Restoration" (359).

8. See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966); Hubert Kiesewetter, *Von Hegel zu Hitler: Die politische Verwirklichung einer totalitären Machtstaatslehre in Deutschland, 1815–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1995); Ernst Topitsch, *Die Sozialphilosophie Hegels als Heilslehre und Herrschaftsideologie*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Piper, 1981).

It is sometimes forgotten that in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia* (1827), Hegel formally contests such an interpretation of the dictum from the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* while at the same time conceding that “these simple propositions have seemed shocking to many.”<sup>9</sup> To read him as saying that “[all] the real is rational” is to ignore the conceptual distinction that the *Science of Logic* establishes between *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit*, between the reality of empirical, contingent *Dasein*, as it is analyzed in the first section of the logic of being, and actuality, as it is presented in the third section of the logic of essence. There, Hegel specifies:

But when I spoke of actuality, it should have been evident in what sense I am using this expression, since I treated actuality in my more extensive *Logic*, too. There I directly distinguished it not only from what is contingent (which, after all, exists as well), but also and more specifically and precisely from existence [*Dasein*], concrete existence [*Existenz*] and other determinations.<sup>10</sup>

The real in the sense of the *Logic* is that which, characterized by the finitude of its qualitative determination and the variability of its quantitative limit, can always be other than what it is and even—this is the meaning of the famous being-nothing-becoming sequence with which the *Logic* opens—necessarily and incessantly *becomes* other than it is. Existence (*Dasein*), whose reflected expression is “reality,” is “being with a non-being”:<sup>11</sup> it suffers from an insurmountable negativity that identifies its positivity as a mix of being and nonbeing, being-self and being-other. However, within what is commonly called the real, this negativity remains enveloped, so to speak, within the massive and “naive” positivity of the existent, of what merely exists.

In *reality*, as quality with the accent on being an existent, that it is determinateness and hence also negation is concealed; reality only has, therefore, the value of something positive from which negating, restriction, lack, are excluded.<sup>12</sup>

9. *Enzykl*, § 6 Anmerkung, *GW* 20, p. 45 (*Encyclopedia* 34).

10. *Enzykl*, § 6, *GW* 20, p. 45 (*Encyclopedia* 34).

11. *WdL* 1<sup>1</sup>, *GW* 11, p. 67.

12. *WdL* 1<sup>2</sup>, *GW* 21, p. 99 (*Science of Logic*, 85).

Thus, the real is existence in its insurmountable contingency and its factuality but also in the deceptive obviousness of its presence: it is *there*.

Actuality, on the other hand, is “essence which is one with its appearance,”<sup>13</sup> “the unity, become immediate, of essence and existence, or of what is inner and what is outer.”<sup>14</sup> The result is that in the reality of immediate concrete existence, mediation, which is constantly hidden, can only manifest itself in the corrupting form of alteration and change, whereas what is actual is “exempted from *passing-over*.”<sup>15</sup> But it is exempted precisely because its exteriority, its phenomenality or concrete existence (*Existenz*, as opposed to simple *Dasein*), do not presuppose any *Hintergrund*, any background on which its being and meaning would depend. From a Hegelian point of view, it is thus obvious that reality is something quite different from actuality: the two correspond to different levels of thought about what is. It is quite possible that actuality could be entirely rational, though the *Logic* does not specifically say so. On the other hand, reality cannot be absolutely rational, and the (empirical) real is often not rational at all: “Who is not smart enough to be able to see around him quite a lot that is not, in fact, how it ought to be?”<sup>16</sup> No doubt reality cannot be assigned any coefficient of rationality inasmuch as instability, variability, and inequality are inherent to it.

### The Logical Status of Actuality

However, we are not out of the woods yet. Not satisfied with the *Encyclopedia*'s clarification, Rudolf Haym formulated a weighty objection. The dictum from the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* “contains in concentrated form all the duplicity of the system” in that, through conscious play on the “empirical” and “ideal” meanings of the term *wirklich*, it leads either to a contradictory conclusion or to a tautological one. If the term *wirklich* is taken as it is usually understood, in the sense of empirical reality, then the Hegelian thesis is contradictory, for it is obvious—Hegel himself agrees—that the real is saturated with irrationality. One could then just as easily write “the real is not real.” But if we distinguish between *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit*, as the *Logic* tells us to, then the

13. *WdL* 2, *GW* 11, p. 243 (*Science of Logic*, 339).

14. *Enzykl*, § 142, *GW* 20, p. 164 (*Encyclopedia* 213).

15. *Enzykl*, § 142 Anmerkung, *GW* 20, p. 164 (*Encyclopedia* 214).

16. *Enzykl*, § 6 Anmerkung, *GW* 20, p. 46 (*Encyclopedia* 30).

preface's slogan becomes a tautology pure and simple: for what is the actual in the Hegelian sense if not precisely that which, within the real, is able to reveal its rationality? The famous catchphrase "what is actual is rational," then, says nothing more than "what is rational is rational."<sup>17</sup> In one case, one insists on the *actuality* that the rational has or must have, and the Hegelian dictum takes on a revolutionary cast: the real must be made to conform to what the philosopher considers to be rational. In the other case, one emphasizes the *rationality* of the actual (in the sense of what is given), and one arrives at conservative conclusions: the real, as it is, must be credited with rationality for, as Hegel says, "what is is reason."<sup>18</sup> But this cultivated ambiguity comes at the cost of an unacceptable doubling of the concept of *Wirklichkeit*: there would be an "empirical, phenomenal" actuality and a "true, rational" actuality.<sup>19</sup>

Is it possible—and if so, how—to respond to this objection, one of the strongest ever made against the 1820 preface's formulation and perhaps even against Hegelian philosophy overall, of which it stands as an emblem? To find out, it is necessary to return to the analysis of actuality developed in the *Logic*. If we want to avoid not only Haym's conclusions but above all the suspicion of inconsistency that they cast over the system (the same term has two distinct and incompatible meanings), we should of course maintain the conceptual unity of *Wirklichkeit*, which does not rule out recognizing within it a specific semantic thickness analogous to that of other terms Hegel seizes onto in order to reproduce—thanks to lexical suppleness and in spite of the limitations of the propositional form—the very movement, the processuality, that constitutes all reality. The best example of the lexical polyvalence that Hegelian philosophy acquires by exploiting the lexical resources of natural language is of course the famous *Aufheben*, which as Hegel emphasizes has, in ordinary language, the double meaning of "to preserve" and "to put an end to." He adds the following specification, which seems to apply to all the other terms that speculative philosophy uses in order to think the real in its processuality:

17. Haym, *Hegel und Seine Zeit*, 368 ff.

18. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 15 (*Elements*, 21; see *Outlines*, 15). See Haym, *Hegel und Seine Zeit*, 369: "Revolutionary in its logical part, the system is conservative in its practical part." This judgment is identical to Engels's in *Ludwig Feuerbach*, where, however, the intention is the opposite: to valorize the system's revolutionary potential.

19. Haym, *Hegel und Seine Zeit*, 368.

It must strike one as remarkable that a language has come to use one and the same word for two opposite meanings. For speculative thought it is gratifying to find words that have in themselves a speculative meaning.<sup>20</sup>

We can in fact consider that it is the suppleness of natural languages (a word never has *one* meaning or *one* context of use) that makes them more suitable than formalized language for expressing dialecticity or processuality. But it is clear that mobilizing the resources of language is quite different from passively accepting its ambiguities. We then assert that there is no confusion between "reality" and "actuality" in Hegel's texts, or between the trivial meaning and the philosophical meaning of "actuality," though this does not mean that Hegel does not play on the proximity between these terms and these meanings in common language.

So what then of *Wirklichkeit* within Hegelian logic? We must first consider where the examination of *Wirklichkeit* takes place: not within the doctrine of being, like the examination of reality, but rather within the doctrine of essence. It is not part of the study of thought in its immediacy but rather of thought "in its reflection and mediation."<sup>21</sup> This placement indicates that the actual, unlike simple, real *Dasein*, is from the outset given a depth that has to do with the fact that within it the inessential and the essential, contingency and necessity, are intertwined: there is, in actuality, a distance of self from self, a mobility, an active reflexivity that contrasts with the immediate coincidence with itself or with its own determinacy that is the hallmark of concrete existence, of the real in its immediacy. Essence designates in general the negativity and reflexivity that are always inherent to being in the apparent immediacy of its positivity or existence: "essence is past—but timelessly past—being."<sup>22</sup> Consequently, within *actuality* in the logical sense of the term, immediacy and mediation, exteriority and interiority, negativity and positivity are copresent, and each expresses itself in the terms of the other. The actual is an immediacy that carries within itself the present trace of the mediation that structures it: it is an exterior term that is entirely inhabited by the interiority toward which it points; a positive saturated with negativity. But this distance from self, this reflexivity,

20. *WdL* 1<sup>2</sup>, *GW* 21, p. 94 (*Science of Logic*, 82).

21. *Enzykl*, § 83, *GW* 20, p. 120 (*Encyclopedia* 133).

22. *WdL* 2, *GW* 11, p. 241 (*Science of Logic*, 337).

is here—contrary to the first two sections of the logic of essence—grasped in the movement of its reduction and not any longer in the movement of its emergence. This is the sense of the distinction between the shining (*Scheinen*) of essence, or its reflection within itself, and the appearance (*Erscheinen*) of this essence, understood as interiority, within the externality of a concrete existence or a phenomenon (*Erscheinung*) and the (self)-manifestation of actuality.<sup>23</sup> *Wirklichkeit* in its totality designates the mobile, processual coincidence of the inner and outer, whatever name they go by: substance and accident, necessity and contingency, cause and effect. This process is what Hegel calls *manifesting* or *revealing*, where revealing is understood as the fact that essential “interiority” “is, in and for itself, nothing *but this: to express itself*.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, unlike the forms of immediacy previously encountered (being, existence, phenomenon), “the actual is therefore *manifestation*. . . . This means that in its externality, and only in it, it is *itself*.”<sup>25</sup>

We must be more precise. Actuality is the culmination of the dialectics of essence, and Hegel, outlining a comparison between the structures of essence and the structures of being, suggests that actuality is in a sense the being for self of essence, just as existence and phenomenon are essence’s concrete existence:

Absolute essence in this simple unity with itself has *no existence* [*Dasein*]. But it must pass over into existence, for it is *being-in-and-for-itself*; that is to say, it *differentiates* the determinations which it holds *in itself*. . . . Since essence is at first *simple* negativity, in order to give itself existence and then being-for-itself, it must now posit in *its* sphere the determinateness which it contains in principle only *in itself*.<sup>26</sup>

With actuality, essence bends back on itself, so to speak, or rejoins itself after having exposed itself to the risk of externality. But this does not mean that the actual has absorbed the essential figures of externality (existence, ap-

23. On these three dialectical modalities of essence and the relation between them, see *WdL 2, GW 11, p. 380–81 (Science of Logic, 477–78)*.

24. *WdL 2, GW 11, p. 368 (Science of Logic, 464)*.

25. *WdL 2, GW 11, p. 381 (Science of Logic, 478)*. See *Enzykl, § 142, GW 20, p. 164 (Encyclopedia 213)*: “The utterance [*Ausserung/exteriorisation*] of the actual is the actual itself.”

26. *WdL 2, GW 11, p. 242 (Science of Logic, 338–39)*.

pearance) into a pure interiority; to the contrary, actuality is in a sense nothing but externality; its interiority is exhausted in its external expression. This is explained by the specific characteristics of essence’s process. Born out of the initial and massive duality of “indeterminate” essence and the appearance to which being is temporarily reduced with regard to essence, the process by which essence *posits* its determinations—identity and difference, foundation and what is founded, essence and existence, essentiality and phenomenon, inner and outer—can be understood as a way of confronting, in order to overcome it, the dualistic tendency of the metaphysics Hegel is combating. The thought of actuality, “essence which is one with its appearance,”<sup>27</sup> requires abandoning all understanding of what is on the basis of a presupposed background; it manifests the full coincidence of being and reason for being in a movement in which what is revealed is not united with the medium of being within which it manifests itself. Thus, what Hegel says about the necessary in his presentation of absolute necessity can be applied to the actual in general: it “only *is* because it *is*.”<sup>28</sup> It is absolutely, without remainder—this is its dimension of externality or existence—but it is *because* it is, it is the *raison d’être* of its being—this is its dimension of inwardness or reflexivity.

The end of the second book of the *Logic* and the beginning of the third teach us that this process of constituting a surface without depth—or rather, a surface that is its own depth—leads from essence, which is an inwardness “glowing” or “appearing” within a network of external configurations, to *concept*, which is the free subject of infinite self-affirmation and is its own “development.”<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the actual, capable of manifesting itself from itself and not within a foreign or predetermined milieu is, at bottom, nothing other than the prefiguration of the concept, freedom expressing itself—and it *must* do so—in the vocabulary of necessity. In other words, its process guarantees the conversion of necessity into freedom. But, insofar as actuality still bears the trace of the dualities whose *Aufhebung* it constitutes, it still only stands “on the threshold of the Concept.”<sup>30</sup>

27. *WdL 2, GW 11, p. 243 (Science of Logic, 339)*.

28. *WdL 2, GW 11, p. 391 (Science of Logic, 487)*.

29. “The progression of the Concept is no longer either passing-over or shining into another, but *development*.” *Enzykl, § 161, GW 20, p. 177 (Encyclopedia 237)*. The addition to this paragraph clarifies that with this development, “only that is posited which is already implicitly present.”

30. *Enzykl, § 156 Zusatz, W 8, p. 302 (Encyclopedia 231)*.

*Wirklichkeit* is thus the becoming concept of being, always already mediated by the negativity of essence — and only this becoming. Let us admit that in the Hegelian system, the rational is identified with the concept. Strictly speaking, this is true only of the idea, which corresponds to “the proper philosophical meaning of ‘reason.’”<sup>31</sup> But the idea, which itself is only “the unity *in-itself* of the subjective and the objective . . . posited as *being-for-itself*,”<sup>32</sup> is at bottom nothing other than the coming to expression of the immanent rationality of the actual, of its being-concept.

As distinct from mere appearance [*Erscheinung*] actuality, being initially the unity of inward and outward, is so far from confronting reason as something other than it, that it is, on the contrary, what is rational through and through; and what is not rational must, for that very reason, be considered not to be actual.<sup>33</sup>

But the rationality of the actual stands in need of an explanation: the word *concept* is the *name* for this explanation.

We may thus say that the analysis of *Wirklichkeit*, as it is carried out at the end of the objective logic, describes the movement of the rational arriving at the position of *subject* of the *real* or of objectivity, where subjectivity is understood not as an anthropological determination but as the very vitality of the concept — the concept, “which, being dialectical, breaks through its own barrier, and opens itself up into objectivity”<sup>34</sup> — and where reality is understood as the infinitely open field in which “objective thought” — a thinking production of being by itself — is deployed. This last formulation expresses nothing other than the immanence of thought to the world, to actuality in the logical sense of the term. By its constitution, actuality thus testifies to the congruence of the “rational” and the “real”:

To say that there is understanding, or reason, in the world is exactly what is contained in the expression “objective thought.” But this expression is inconvenient precisely because “thought” is all too commonly used as if it

31. *Enzykl*, § 214, *GW* 20, p. 216 (*Encyclopedia* 88).

32. *Enzykl*, § 212, *GW* 20, p. 214 (*Encyclopedia* 86).

33. *Enzykl*, § 143 Zusatz, *W* 8, p. 280 (*Encyclopedia* 214).

34. *Enzykl*, § 192 Zusatz, *W* 8, p. 345 (*Encyclopedia* 268).

belonged only to spirit, or consciousness, while “objective” is used primarily just with reference to what is unspiritual.<sup>35</sup>

In a sense, then, Haym is not wrong to judge the Hegelian identification of the rational with the real and the real with the rational to be either tautological or grossly contradictory. However, there is one crucial caveat: this identity is neither a fact nor a given but rather both the stakes and the result of an infinite process of adjustment between the concept and being, a process whose fundamental constitution the *Logic* exposes and whose concrete figures are presented, in all their diversity, by the “real sciences,” in particular the doctrine of objective spirit. This is why in the 1819–1820 course on the philosophy of right, we find the equation from the 1820 preface expressed in terms of movement: “what is rational *becomes* actual, and what is actual *becomes* rational.”<sup>36</sup>

### “Reason That Is”

What does the phrase whose speculative content I have just presented imply for the “real [philosophical] sciences” and in particular for the doctrine of objective spirit? This is the question of the “relation of philosophy to actuality,” which gives rise to “misunderstandings.” The principled answer that Hegel gives to this question comes out of his understanding of actuality but also exceeds it in part. Here is his answer:

Since philosophy is *exploration of the rational*, it is for that very reason the *comprehension of the present and the actual*, not the setting up of a *world beyond* which exists God knows where.<sup>37</sup>

This sentence highlights another aspect of the thesis of the rationality of the actual, one that the rest of the preface forcefully emphasizes, with clearly polemical intent:<sup>38</sup> the refusal of all *normativism*. It is not philosophy’s task to prescribe what reality must or should be, for *beyond* the real or being there is

35. *Enzykl*, § 24 Anmerkung, *GW* 20, p. 67–68 (*Encyclopedia* 56).

36. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts*, 51. There is no need to indulge in haphazard conjectures about why Hegel did not, in the end, retain the preface’s formulation.

37. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 13 (*Elements*, 20; see *Outlines*, 13).

38. I do not deal with this aspect here. Information on the context can be found in the “Présentation” section of my translation of the *Philosophy of Right* as well as in Adriaan Peperzak’s

nothing; in any case, nothing other than the void of an incantatory and self-referential discourse. Philosophy's task is rather to "to comprehend *what is* . . . for *what is* is reason."<sup>39</sup> *What is*: not, of course, immediate concrete *Dasein* insofar as it is empirical, or even existence or phenomenon, which are always as if at a distance from the essentiality they reflect, but rather the actual, the present as the presence and actuality of the rational. *Reason*: not an abstractly normative reason claiming to teach the world how "it ought to be"<sup>40</sup> but rather reason that is the "*thought* of the world,"<sup>41</sup> or the self-thought of a world that discovers that it bears truth, and learns to regard itself as such. But then, if the equation of the actual and the rational signifies nothing other than the congruence of rationality with itself, the concordance of "reason as self-conscious spirit" and "reason as present actuality,"<sup>42</sup> then isn't Haym's suspicion that the Hegelian formula is a flat-out tautology justified in spite of what I have just tried to claim?

To answer this question, it is useful to refer to what Hegel says about Plato's *Republic* in the *Philosophy of Right* and in the lectures on the history of philosophy. His argumentation should be compared with Kant's on the same subject;<sup>43</sup> the comparison shows that although the two philosophers have different strategies, when it comes to the relationship between ideality and normativity, they both seek to do justice to what, in Plato, falls under the "tension of the concept." What does Hegel say? The Platonic city is "a proverbial example of an *empty ideal*"<sup>44</sup> because it rules out choosing one's social position (which is imposed) or one's spouse (sexual communism) as well as private property: it eliminates everything that modern mankind demands in the name of the idea of freedom. These measures do indeed consistently exclude "the principle of subjective freedom."<sup>45</sup> But this exclusion is not some whim

meticulous commentary in the preface to *Philosophy and Politics* (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic, 1987).

39. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 15 (*Elements*, 21; see *Outlines*, 15).

40. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 15 (*Elements*, 21; see *Outlines*, 15).

41. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 16 (*Elements*, 23; see *Outlines*, 16).

42. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 15 (*Elements*, 22; see *Outlines*, 1).

43. See *KrV*, *Ak.* 3, A 316, B 372–73.

44. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 14 (*Elements*, 20; see *Outlines*, 13).

45. *GdP*, *W* 19, p. 123 (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 109). Hegel also speaks of "repression of the principle of individuality."

of Plato's or the trait of a totalitarian fantasy. It proves that he, better than his contemporaries, understood just how much the principle of autonomy—which philosophy was the first to valorize by proclaiming everyone's right to think for himself—contradicted the very essence of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, whose purest expression is democracy:

Established ethicality [*Sittlichkeit*] has in general the relation of the substantial, and therefore is maintained as divine. This is without question the fundamental determination. The determination which stands in contrast to this substantial relation of the individual to established morality is the subjective will of the individual.<sup>46</sup>

The *Republic* declares the incompatibility of Greek *Sittlichkeit* and the "substantial" rationality around which it was ordered with subjective self-determination; in imagistic terms, it demonstrates the necessity of Socrates' execution and perhaps also—though developing this point would lead us too far astray—Christ's. It was Plato's great merit to have foreseen—precisely in trying to eliminate it—the political effect that the emergence of "subjective freedom"<sup>47</sup> would necessarily have. It is the hallmark of modern *Sittlichkeit* to hold that the universal cannot truly be universal unless it welcomes within itself the principle of particularity and recognizes the right of subjects to think and desire for themselves and that the state must let develop within itself a civil society that carries its "unilateral principle" to its logical conclusion. Indirectly, Plato helps us think through this. In a single movement, the author of the *Republic* grasped "the nature of Greek ethics" and discerned that it was "being penetrated by a deeper principle"<sup>48</sup> that would rattle and then replace it: he exposes the essence, in all its rationality, of the *polis*, pointing out the historical limits of this rationality and, consequently, the inscription of *all* rationality within a *history*. Thus, he simultaneously demonstrates the rationality of the actual (the *Republic* is an ideal-type that captures the deep meaning of

46. *GdP*, *W* 19, p. 113–14 / (G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, *Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. Frances H. Simson and E. S. Haldane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 98 modified).

47. *RPh*, § 124 Anmerkung, *GW* 14.1, p. 110 (*Elements*, 151 see *Outlines*, 122).

48. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 14 (*Elements*, 20; see *Outlines*, 13).

Greek historical reality) and the actuality of the rational (what this philosophy proscribes is precisely “the pivot on which the impending world revolution turned”<sup>49</sup>).

The equivalence of the rational and the actual, of reason that thinks and reason that is, is thus no more tautological when it is grasped in the domain of objective spirit than it is in a strictly logical context: moreover, who would claim that the *Republic* proposes a copy of the Athenian city or even a simple inverted image of it? The identity between them is of the order of a process or a history. As Plato’s example shows with perfect clarity, this history is the history by which objective spirit as ethicality (*Sittlichkeit*) produces an image of itself in *thought* and in so doing works toward its own transformation. Hence, it becomes clear that Hegel’s resolute refusal of normativism — philosophy always comes too late to tell the world what it *must* be — does not at all prevent the concept from having intrinsic normative power. To the contrary, philosophy demands it if it is true that the idea “is not so impotent that it merely ought to be, and is not actual.”<sup>50</sup> But this normativity remains immanent to the field of objectivity to which it applies. It is therefore necessary to stop representing the concept or norm as the product of a subjectivity defined at an anthropological level, freely disposing of its productions. The norm of the true — the “rational” — far from any separation between *Sollen* and *Sein*, which, according to Hans Kelsen,<sup>51</sup> is the precondition of any coherent normativism, is present at the heart of the historical world — the “actual” — “as the rose in the cross of the present,”<sup>52</sup> to quote the enigmatic expression from the 1820 preface. In my opinion, we may take this to mean that the true — the speculative — is something like an indicator of the fact that, within a world not yet reconciled with itself, a world prey to suffering and contradiction, the dimension of *Versöhnung* is not only present in the mode of the implicit or potential but is truly actual inasmuch as it is this alone that makes it possible to conceive of a *future* for the world. But, at bottom, is this future of a historical world itself historical in nature? Is it *another* figure of the world or *another* world?

49. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 14 (*Elements*, 20; see *Outlines*, 13).

50. *Enzykl*, § 6 Anmerkung, *GW* 20, p. 46 (*Encyclopedia* 30).

51. “The difference between is and ought cannot be explained furthermore. We are immediately aware of the difference.” Hans Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law* (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1989), p. 5.

52. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 15–16 (*Elements*, 22; see *Outlines*, 15).

## The Object of the Doctrine of Objective Spirit

What does the doctrine of objective spirit as a “real science” deal with? With the real, of course, or rather with the actual, whose immanent rationality or concept this doctrine brings to expression. As the example of the *Republic* has very clearly shown, this does not mean that it is a mere copy of the real: to grasp the rationality of the actual is to reveal the drive that moves the real and carries it beyond itself; it is to think the contradiction that will usher in a new world. The 1820 preface contains famous, though enigmatic, remarks on this topic. Let us first highlight two judgments that at first seem contradictory at the very least: philosophy “is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*,”<sup>53</sup> and “what matters is to recognize in the semblance of the temporal and transient the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present.”<sup>54</sup> How can philosophy simultaneously be the “daughter of its time” and the expression of a timeless truth — even when its object is intrinsically historical? What, indeed, can a political *philosophy* speak of if it has no normative vocation and if its object — the state — is by its nature engaged in history and exposed to contingency?

A passage from the preface can put us on the path to answering these questions:

This treatise, therefore, in so far as it deals with political science, shall be nothing other than an attempt to *comprehend and portray the state as an inherently rational entity*. . . . Such instruction as it may contain cannot be aimed at instructing the state on how it ought to be, but rather at showing how the state, as the ethical universe, should be comprehended.<sup>55</sup>

It should henceforth be understood that it is not philosophy’s role to imagine what the state should be: as we have seen, Hegel judges all forms of normativism to be incompatible with the subordination of thought to the present or the actual. But in what sense is it philosophy’s task to present how the state *must be comprehended*? According to a perspective such as that of Haym or

53. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 15 (*Elements*, 21; see *Outlines*, 15).

54. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 14 (*Elements*, 20, modified; see *Outlines*, 14).

55. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 15 (*Elements*, 21, modified; see *Outlines*, 14–15).

Itling, this affirmation proves Hegel's political "quietism," or, to put it harshly, his servility; didn't he write to chancellor Hardenberg in 1821 that the *Philosophy of Right* was "the immediate auxiliary to the government's beneficent intentions"?<sup>56</sup> But it seems to me that this statement can be understood in another way if we agree to take seriously the stated claim of Hegel's philosophy to be both "exploration of the rational" and "comprehension of the present and the actual."

Philosophy is a thinking of the present. Its vocation is thus to be the rational knowledge of actuality, or rather to let actuality arrive, within itself, at awareness of its own degree and shape of rationality. But just as actuality is not identical with reality, the present that philosophy thinks is not what occurs contingently; it is the timeless presence of the rational within the time of the event:

In philosophy . . . we are concerned not with what belongs exclusively to the past or to the future, but with that which *is*, both now and eternally—in short, with reason. And that is quite enough to occupy our attention.<sup>57</sup>

We must add that this eternity of the rational, emphasized quite provocatively at the beginning of the *Science of Logic*,<sup>58</sup> has no place that is distinct from the real: it *reveals* itself in the real not as a masked inwardness but rather as the mediation that binds the real to itself. Despite the preface's recourse to a metaphorical register that evokes the essentialist representation of a background truth (there is a "brightly colored covering" that one must "penetrate" in order to find the "core" of truth),<sup>59</sup> in the "real science" of objective spirit, Hegel maintains the teaching of speculative logic: that is, that the revelation or manifestation that is proper to the actual in its rationality (in its becoming-

56. Hoffmeister, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, 2:214. Cf. Hegel, *The Letters*, 459.

57. G. F. W. Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1955), 210; *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 171.

58. "This content [of logic] is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit." *WdL* 1<sup>1</sup>, *GW* 11, p. 17, or *WdL* 1<sup>2</sup>, *GW* 21, p. 34 (*Science of Logic*, 29).

59. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 14 (*Elements*, 21; see *Outlines*, 14).

concept) is not that of an "Other" of the actual; its "being-there is only the *manifestation of itself*, not of an other."<sup>60</sup>

In these circumstances, what is the object of political philosophy (in Hegelian terms, the doctrine of objective spirit) given that this object can be defined analogously to that of other "real sciences"? What is it to teach "how the state must be recognized"? It is to show, within the real, the presence of what both "actually" structures it and what attests to its immanent limitation. To think the political—but also law, civil society, and history itself—as "the image and actuality of reason"<sup>61</sup> is to measure what, within its *own* constitution, exceeds it. Not in the sense that there would be, beyond the state and history, an absolute, intangible, metaphysical truth: infinite spirit has no space distinct from the space of spirit in its subjective and objective finitude. But rather in the sense that the thought of truth—and also the thought of the truth of the state and history—is that which assigns them a limit from within simply because it is of the order of knowledge. Philosophy, as the thought of the rational in actuality, indicates the insurmountable limit of every form or degree of actuality, which stems from the fact that its thought logically precedes its being (which is paradoxically expressed as a chronological delay):

When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.<sup>62</sup>

The thought of spirit in its actuality only comes at dusk, precisely when one of its figures ceases to be actual. This is why this thought only becomes complete in transgressing its object—that is, in revealing itself to be philosophy tout court. The conjunction of the rational and the actual, the cornerstone of Hegel's philosophy, demonstrates the "relativity of political philosophy"<sup>63</sup> at the same time as it defines its task.

60. *Enzykl*, § 142, *GW* 20, p. 164 (*Encyclopedia* 393).

61. *RPh*, § 360, *GW* 14.1, p. 281 (*Elements*, 380; see *Outlines*, 323).

62. *RPh*, *GW* 14.1, p. 16 (*Elements*, 23; see *Outlines*, 16).

63. Bernard Bourgeois, *La pensée politique de Hegel* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), 6.