CHAPTER 9

Self-completing alienation: Hegel's argument for transparent conditions of free agency

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Most people have a sense of what it is like to feel alienated. Yet alienation remains among the most elusive concepts in social and political theory. The range of the term in ordinary usage extends from simply referring to a vague feeling of discontent all the way to implying a Marxist conception of capitalist false consciousness. To be a philosophically productive concept, alienation cannot just refer to a merely subjective inner state over which the individual has sole authority. But "objective" theories are also problematic, for they assume a view of human nature, or full human potential, that any person can be alienated *from* (that would define true rather than false consciousness). An advantage of such an objective theory would be its ability to give quasi-verifiable criteria for predicating the "alienation" of an individual, given that individual's activities, desires, etc. Yet the phenomenon of alienation is ineliminably first-personal. Even if an objective theory could arrive at a "correct" view of human nature, it could not account for an essential dimension of alienation. What we need is a framework for thinking of alienation that avoids the pitfalls of purely internal and purely external conceptions. We need a view that treats individuals as bearers of propositional attitudes and as discrete persons standing in determinate relations to public norms. Such a framework is provided by the concept of intentional action. Actions take place in contexts common to many individuals and, *qua intentional*, they cannot be reduced to mere behavior. An account of successful action and its social conditions can secure a contrasting account of alienation. The benefit of Hegel's peculiar dialectical mode of argumentation, in which he builds up an account of action by depicting a process of overcoming alienation, is that he achieves a normative transparency that is grounded in practice and is thus justified within and for the agent perspective.

The section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* titled "Self-Alienated Spirit; Culture," describes a set of historically specific social worlds in which individuals interact with each other in a series of conflicted normative

landscapes. The culture that Hegel portrays through the figure of Rameau's nephew from Diderot's famous dialogue gives way to the conflict of the Enlightenment with religion. This conflict ends with the triumph of the Enlightenment and is followed, finally, by the Absolute Freedom of the French Revolution. Understanding why this historical progression as a whole falls under the rubric of alienation can contribute to a deeper appreciation of the preconditions of contemporary political life and theory. While most liberal theories of political rationality are clear descendants of the victory of the Enlightenment, few of their adherents take the problem of alienation as seriously as Hegel does in the *Phenomenology*.[1] Contractarians, utilitarians, and rational choice theorists seldom deal with alienation. When they do, it is often just as a phenomenon to be avoided or ameliorated with the proper distribution of basic goods or the maximization of preference-satisfaction. But much of the experienced "depth" of political life – the sources of motivation for thinking that the pursuit of justice is indispensable to a good life – depends on the specter of alienation hovering over the individual in modern society. Hegel is, of course, well known as a theorist of reconciliation, and one should never ignore this positive goal of his thought. However, there is no *final* reconciliation for Hegel of the sort that would put an end to all difference and conflict. We can only think of ourselves as accomplishing the activity of reconciliation in so far as there is a possibility that we could fail, that we could become alienated. One of Hegel's points is that we know the value of successful rational norms only if we know the experiences of failure from which they were born. The harder point is that a society can be free only if the conditions for alienation remain present, for only under such conditions can we actively achieve and sustain freedom by incorporating the causes of conflict into our norms.

I proceed in five stages. First (section 1), I explain why alienation is such a central issue in the *Phenomenology* by examining some pivotal formulations in the Preface and Introduction. Second (section 2), I unfold a concept of alienation through a contrasting series of conditions of successful action. I thus present my conclusions first in order to provide a clear outline for reading the progression of Hegel's conceptual forms in the remaining three sections. Third (section 3), I turn to "Self-Alienated Spirit;

[1] Hegel does not dwell on alienation in the *Philosophy of Right*, though there is good reason to think from the student transcripts of his lecture courses that it remained an important issue for him. The Enlightenment theory that did take alienation seriously was, of course, Marxism. Marx's early inspiration came from the *Phenomenology*, and he cites Hegel's Rameau as the prototype for the alienated worker.

Culture," where Hegel establishes the transparent social conditions for successful action by viewing the individual caught up in, and overcoming, normative conflict. Fourth (section 4), I read the Enlightenment's conflict with religion as establishing a further form of transparency. Fifth and finally (section 5), I show how the move from the shape of utility to Absolute Freedom generates an explicitly political condition for non-alienated agency.

1

The importance of alienation for Hegel's project comes out in the Preface,[2] where he inveighs against the "mere edification, and even dullness" of a philosophy of the mere "in-itself," in which "otherness and alienation [*Entfremdung*], and the overcoming of alienation [*Entfremdung*], are not serious matters" (18, ¶19).[3] Hegel writes in this passage that the essence becomes "for-itself" through the "self-movement of the form," and that the essence can only be expressed as actual, as "subject," in "the whole wealth of the developed form" (19, ¶19). With "self-movement of form," Hegel is referring to a dialectical process in which self-consciousness undermines in a determinate manner its own claims to objectivity, thereby "producing" the further conditions of an increasingly comprehensive knowledge of the world. When Hegel invokes "the whole wealth of the developed form" as necessary for his project, he commits himself to showing not only that theoretical access to objectivity is grounded in self-consciousness (Chapters I–III), but also that this objectivity is realized in the actual world shaped through the concrete manifestations of self-consciousness (a process including not only Chapter IV, but also the accounts of Reason and Spirit in Chapters V and VI).[4] Hegel sums up his alternative to foundationalist programs of grounding with the famous claim that the "The True is the whole" (19, ¶20). Only

[2] There is good reason to think that alienation became a primary concern only in the course of writing the *Phenomenology*, since the Introduction, written first, makes no mention of alienation. I cannot in this chapter address this complicated issue of a shift in plan, except to say that I would insist that even with such a shift the work retains its integrity. Alienation is a natural mode of the method of experience described in the Introduction.

[3] In this chapter, I translate both *Entfremdung* and *Entäußerung* as "alienation." Even though there are many places in the text where one should distinguish the two, for our purposes Hegel's frequent interchangeable uses of the two terms are the only ones that matter. In quotations I will indicate in brackets which term is being translated.

[4] There are many possible divisions of the *Phenomenology*, including the many different divisions that Hegel himself made. For my own division here, into two main sections followed by "Religion" and "Absolute Knowing," I take my cue from Hegel's recapitulation in the first eleven paragraphs of "Absolute Knowing."

in the totality of the "developed form" reached at the end of the process is the truth of any of the parts secured. This process includes the basic desires and drives, the "science" of phrenology that allegedly measures one's self-conscious activity in one's skull, and extends to the ethical and political configurations of Roman right, French culture, and the morality of conscience. The goal is to redeem immediacy or substantiality by showing how self-conscious activity makes explicit what is contained in immediate claims to knowledge.

In the dialectical process of experience, alienation can be viewed as the moment of opposition to each new presumed shape of self-conscious unity. In the *Phenomenology*, the unity takes the shape of various forms of immediacy, including (at the outset of the Spirit chapter) the immediate ethical substance of the ancient Greeks. Alienation thus goes to the heart of the *Phenomenology*'s project of the development of substance into subject, of what is *in-itself* into what is *for-itself*. For clarity's sake I will hazard definitions of these operators (and of *for-another*) up front. In unpacking these terms, I am advocating an inferentialist interpretation of Hegel's method and logic that interprets his *holism* as defining content through broadly inferential relations between all the moments of the developed system.[5]

In-itself: An entity or a property X is in-itself in so far as X is conceived as having content or meaning apart from relations to other entities or characteristics.[6]
For-another: An entity or a property X is for-another in so far as X is conceived as having content or meaning through its relation to what is different from it.

[5] This kind of interpretation has been brought to the fore by the work of Brandom (1994, 2000, 2002a, 2004). Though Brandom's work has drawn renewed attention to Hegel from a broader philosophical audience, it has been received less favorably by Hegel scholars due to doubts about the actual fit of Brandom's reading with Hegel's texts and hesitancy about getting embroiled in the thickets of Brandom's own semantics. I give here three main aspects that I endorse and that can serve to define such an inferentialist interpretation without getting into the most controversial theses and obscure details. Each is identifiable by contrast with a familiar philosophical approach: (1) Contrasted with representationalism, we can call the inferential approach *judgment–functional*. Content according to this view is first and foremost secured through the functional role of a term in possible judgments, or more generally through its role in reasoning. (2) Contrasted with formalism, there is a *pragmatic–expressive* dimension, which sets out from practice, from what we do with concepts, and views logic as making explicit the formal rules implicit in the ground-level inferences. (3) Contrasted with atomism and foundationalism, a commitment to *holism*, to a self-generated and (at least provisionally) complete system of relations in which terms are individuated through the relations in which they stand to other terms. For a sympathetic critique of Brandom's interpretation, see Pippin (2005).

[6] This formulation works least well when Hegel uses "in-itself" adverbially, as in his frequent comments that a transition has occurred "in-itself or for-us." In that use (which Miller sets apart by translating it with "implicitly") the contrast is simply with the transition occurring *for* the consciousness that "we" are observing.

The concepts of in-itself and for-another are direct opposites in that to be conceived purely as "in-itself" is to be conceived as excluding all "for-another" characterization.[7] Hegel often uses "for-another" to indicate that the object can stand as a *relatum* but not what it is related to, since to be "for-another" does not necessarily mean that we know what that other is. In the case of "utility" things are for-another in so far as they are there to be used, but the questions "by whom?" and "for what?" have no fixed answers.

In the process of overcoming alienation, and in the *Phenomenology* as a whole, the dominant operator is "for-itself," for this operator most directly expresses the subjectivity that Hegel aims to unite with substance. In an instructive discussion in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel writes that "for-itself" characterizes both consciousness and self-consciousness, but in different ways. Consciousness is a kind of "appearing," or a "dualism" of "knowing external objects, on the one hand, and being-for-itself, on the other." This for-itself of consciousness can be rendered in Kantian terms: the determinations of a manifold can be "taken up" by the subject, or unified in judgments in which all representations can be accompanied by "I think." Hegel writes that "for-itself" also expresses self-consciousness, which is being for-itself "as *completed* and *posited*,"[8] meaning that all its dimensions have become explicit. The following definition gives four aspects of the for-itself, all of which belong to this completed shape, though not all are included in each and every use of the term.

For-itself: An entity or a property X is for-itself in so far as X is conceived as possessing determinate content or meaning (1) through its relation to itself, (2) through relating itself to what is different from it, (3) in so far as what it different from it has become one of its own "moments," and (4) in that it has made itself into a moment.[9]

"For-itself" can also be the opposite of "for-another," because "for-another" lacks the aspect of self-relation. More specifically, it lacks the aspect of relation or difference that is "inner difference."[10]

[7] These are the two main moments of what Hegel calls Dasein. I will leave this term untranslated in this text, though the cumbersome "determinate being" does convey the basic meaning of an entity or a property that is defined in part by contrast with other entities or properties. See Quante (2004b), 39, n. 29.

[8] Hegel (*Werke*), vol. 5, 175; (*SL*), 158.

[9] The last, trickiest aspect, is essential to what distinguishes Hegelian self-consciousness from Fichtean self-consciousness. Fichte's absolute principle of I = I is self-consciousness as an absolute in-itself, whereas for Hegel such an abstraction is itself a moment. See the *Phenomenology*, 99–100, ¶162.

[10] Hegel's target for the "truth" is of course what he calls the *in-and-for-itself*. I cannot defend my interpretation of this terminology in this chapter, but I would claim that it requires only adding to the above definition of the "for-itself" the following: "and in so far as the relations to others that it

We are now in a position to understand how these terms are related to Hegel's more familiar epistemological description of the *Phenomenology* as a self-completing skepticism. This skepticism is directed against various versions of the "in-itself" as an (epistemic or practical) authority resistant to the power of self-conscious activity, of the "for-itself." Such a skepticism is completed when every obstacle (i.e. source of authoritative claims) between such activity and what counts as objective has disappeared. Of course, skepticism as traditionally understood raises issues about belief, not about action. Hegel's innovation with alienation is to make it the *operative figure of skepticism at the level of action*. The alienated self does act and yet is not committed to the rationality of the action. Such agents need not be skeptics about the justification of beliefs about the world, but in Hegel's telling they often are: the most alienated individual, Rameau, is a thorough skeptic about any intrinsic ethical value, and the Enlightenment takes a skeptical stand against religion.[11] A self-completing process of alienation would completely expose the normative field of action to self-consciousness, such that there remains no authority beyond what can stand in relations of reason-giving between individual agents. Something objective in-itself (e.g. the good, the noble, God, etc.) would be meaningful only in so far as it successfully functioned in reasons that free subjects could identify with and give to each other in a satisfying (i.e. mutual) manner.

In the method of experience that Hegel sets out in the Introduction, alienation can be seen as playing a distinctive role in the process that Hegel calls *determinate negation*. Such negation takes place in the breakdown of the authority of the in-itself, in a distinct kind of failure of truth that can serve as the positive basis for new conceptual shape. The failed shape, before the transition to the new shape has occurred, is a state of alienation (in the first real stage of action in the *Phenomenology*, this is Faust's subjection to "the law of necessity") in which one has discovered that one is not who one took oneself to be. One's object, even oneself, has become only for-another, part of a relation over which one does not have authority.[12] What is different about "Self-Alienated Spirit; Culture," is that

contains as moments *exhaust* its determinations." The way to know whether the moments do "exhaust" the determinations is by situating X within a totality of relations, a whole in which nothing is left outside of the relations to count as a mere other to X.

[11] When Hegel introduces the Enlightenment, he actually mentions that skepticism is a "subordinate shape" compared to the Enlightenment as the cultural movement in which skepticism has penetrated the culture's self-understanding (293, ¶541).

[12] My claim is that this process of determinate negation begins with Reason B to have the explicit character of alienation in the sense that we use the term in social and political discourse. I am also claiming, though, that when Hegel uses the term in the Preface to refer to the process of the book as a

alienation is the norm, so each in-itself already comes with an opposing moment from the beginning (e.g. State power with wealth, faith with "pure insight"). Each moment of alienation from a purportedly natural or essential determination (of value, of social identity, etc.) sets the stage for a more ideal, more rational conception of action. These conditions become explicit one by one because alienation has been "taken seriously" as a determinate practical failure.

2

G. E. M. Anscombe's account of action in *Intention* is a useful starting point for thinking about Hegel on alienation, for her goal is to shift the weight of what is "intentional" in action from describing some inner state of the agent to the performance of the action itself.[13] Anscombe's basic condition for an action counting as intentional is that a certain sense of the question "Why?" is applicable. In her account, the answer to the question will give one's reasons for action, which will refer to one's main purpose and those aspects of the purpose that make the action worth accomplishing. One might think that alienation is the condition in which Anscombe's "certain sense" of the question "Why?" is denied application, but that would be wrong. With alienation the question "Why?" is not denied application, but the answers are unavailable or unsatisfying. Alienation is not like the cases of individuals knowing what they are doing only by observation that Anscombe discusses as denials of application.[14] Alienation is in some sense always self-alienation, for one must be invested in one's activity to be alienated from it, and that means that the question "Why?" is applicable.[15] To put the point most generally, one is alienated when one recognizes the need to give reasons for one's action, yet those reasons are either unavailable or fail to count as reasons.[16] I can thus give a first, provisional formulation of alienation:

whole, he is inviting us to think of the breakdown of even the most basic forms of knowing (e.g. "Sense-certainty") as a kind of alienation. In the more basic cases of knowledge, this alienation takes the form, for instance, of not being able to say what one means (Hegel's example at the end of "Sense-certainty" is "this piece of paper," which is already more "universal" than the speaker meant it to be).

[13] Anscombe (2000), 9. For a systematic account of Hegel's philosophy of action as presented in the *Philosophy of Right*, see Quante (2004b).

[14] She writes of "the knowledge that one denies having if when asked e.g. 'Why are you ringing that bell?' one replies 'Good heavens! I didn't know *I* was ringing it!'" (2000), 51.

[15] One can think of Marx's conception of alienated labor as typical in this respect. For an excellent discussion of Hegel and Marx on action and alienation, see Bernstein (1971), Part I.

[16] Though I consistently talk about reasons throughout this account, I do no mean to deny that alienation can often be described in terms of desires.

A1: An individual is alienated when he fails to be able to answer satisfactorily the question "Why" about his action, though the question is applicable.

With the generic "satisfactorily" I leave intentionally vague the success conditions of such an answer, of such reason-giving. The basic idea, which is what the subsequent conditions are in part working out, is that the agent must achieve an equilibrium of rationality with the other agents to whom the answers are given. The telos of action is thus what Hegel calls "mutual recognition." Such recognition is not directed primarily to isolated attempts at reason-giving, but to the patterns of reason-giving that one gives across various contexts. One could still fail in reason-giving if one successfully answers the question in very different ways in different contexts, such that one regularly succeeds, but one fails "on the whole" because one is trying to maintain incompatible sets of reasons.

In identifying the further conditions of rational action from the dynamics of alienation, my account builds from the idea of merely intentional action towards the idea of autonomous action. In terms of Hegel's narrative of shapes of Spirit, the space of *Bildung* lies between the realm of abstract Roman right and the post-revolutionary German moral worldview. It makes sense to think of the basic intentional action in **A1** as equivalent to abstract right. Such action is appropriate to the level of the "person," the individual who can own property and who is competent to enter into contracts with others. What I am calling the transparent conditions of free agency are those conditions generated on the assumed basis of personhood, in which the arbitrariness of the cultural and political landscape created by merely formal right is progressively eliminated. These conditions achieve publicity and transparency through the process of determinate failure, an instance of Hegel's overall pragmatic strategy in the *Phenomenology* of moving from concrete use to formal requirements. The process of self-alienation is the historical story of late medieval and early modern Europe as it progresses to the point at which the autonomous moral subject could become the basis for political citizenship. The conclusion of Hegel's story, his account of the moral worldview and the action of conscience, is beyond the scope of this chapter, though in retrospect (at the conclusion of "Spirit") it is revealed as the telos towards which the early stages have been working.[17]

In Hegel's treatment of alienation, there is always a definite someone who asks the question "Why?," and there is always a potential struggle over

[17] I examine this telos in my *Hegel's Conscience*, forthcoming.

whose (kinds of) reasons will win out. Hegel does not assume any fixed conception of "giving reasons" or of the "healthy human understanding" that would make one individual's reasons automatically into reasons for another. The failure in being able to answer the question "Why?" can be a failure on the part of the speaker, but it can also be a failure on the part of the questioner. The questioner can fail to recognize the agent as free, not in the sense of incompatibilist positions in debates over free will, but in the sense of the capacity to be the source of reasons. In Hegel's view this self-conscious agency did not exist for most of human history, and alienation could therefore not have been an issue. But in the early modern period that is Hegel's focus in thematizing alienation, one's judgment comes to count as decisive for establishing the meaning of one's action. We can therefore add a certain condition **I1** to the scenario:

I1: The answer and the question presuppose that the agent affirms the reasons for action as dependent upon his own free judgment.

One may be able, for instance, to give reasons for the action, but if one is just reciting them, and is not *avowing* them, one would count as alienated.[18]

With this addition to our concept of alienation, the problem arises that we seem to have just pushed the "interiority" of alienation back one step, such that one's "free judgment" is an ineffable addition to the stated reasons that one gives. It seems that the reasons given could be exactly the same in the cases of two different agents, yet one agent would be and one would not be alienated solely based on a quality that others cannot assess. The condition must be made explicit. We need to know how communication about the content of actions has authority as expressing free judgment. Ascriptive language must have acquired a certain publicly binding character such that one's declared intention determines (provisionally) what an action is and expresses one's self-imposed commitment to it. Anscombe made the point that only under certain descriptions of our actions are they done intentionally. Accepting this claim, we should stress that in the moral and political sphere the proper description of an action is often highly contested. We need a conception of language such that when one expresses one's reasons in that language, there is an assumption that one knows that the language expresses the nature of the action for oneself and, presumptively, for other agents. This condition can be given in terms of transparency – nothing is held back in giving one's reasons. The language just says what I meant in doing the deed, and others can assume

[18] For a discussion linking avowal and intentional action, see Moran (2001), especially chapter Four.

that there is no gap between my declarations (the reasons I give to others as justifying) and my motivations (the reasons on which I actually act). This produces:

I2: The answer and the question presuppose that his language expresses his commitment to the transparency of those reasons in determining the action.

It is important to stress that just "what I intended" is not fixed once and for all by the agent's initial formulation. The responses of others may alter the very nature of my action, but for the process of communication to succeed, for my reasons to be satisfying in Hegel's sense of mutuality, **I2** must hold. Problems with language can come from systematic hypocrisy or from deficiencies in the moral grammar of the society (indeterminacy, ambiguity, insufficient complexity). Problems can also arise from misunderstanding the expressive character of language itself, which does not merely describe a certain set of events. In many cases (especially in the case of religion, as we shall see) the meaning of those events *as actions* is inseparable from the expressive language.

The account of alienation that I have given thus far is bound to strike many readers as terribly formal, and so it is. Something needs to be said about the content of one's answers, about the kinds of reasons that one will give for one's actions. When we act we typically have a purpose, an objective, that we are aiming to accomplish. The scope of alienation as a social problem stems from the many ways in which what one finds oneself doing and what one takes to be important to one's life can come apart. We might give another success condition, then, for intentional action:

I3: The answer and the question presuppose that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent's conception of a fulfilling life.

This addition remains rather formal, though it does exclude reasons of the sort that Hegel describes with the language of the mere "in-itself," reasons that are beyond the potentially transformative capacities of self-conscious individuals. But the condition thus formulated is incomplete, for it allows success even in cases in which one is not fully in command of the rationality of the means, i.e. the specific actions that actually accomplish one's ends. Thus, a few years ago in the USA one might have found someone in the mall buying some luxury cooking implements, who, when asked: "Why are you buying those?," could have sincerely answered: "To support the war effort." Being a good citizen is a central purpose in his life, yet one could claim that this reason-giving failed because he could not

tell a convincing story connecting the specific action to the final purpose that generated the decisive reason. A further deficiency of **I3** is that it is too subjective, for it does not place any objective constraint on what counts as a fulfilling life. We should leave the nature of a fulfilling life open, but not completely open, for a purpose must have some social standing for a claim of alienation to be warranted. We should therefore give **I3***:

I3*: The answer and the question presuppose that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent's conception of a fulfilling life, and the agent can provide a story connecting his specific actions in recognized social space to those core purposes.

Of course there are many such stories one could tell, and we should not be too quick to call someone alienated whose stopping-point in his reason-giving is different from our own. We do not need to fully comprehend the significance of another's core purposes, but these purposes need to be comprehensible enough that actions in public space can be viewed as transparent to (i.e. as fulfilling) those purposes.

Taking all the previous conditions together with **A1**, we have:

A2: An individual is alienated when he fails to be able to answer satisfactorily the warranted question "Why" about his actions, where the answer and the question presuppose that he affirms the reasons for action as dependent upon his own free judgment, that his language expresses his commitment to the transparency of those reasons in determining the action, that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent's conception of a fulfilling life, and the agent can provide a story connecting his specific actions in recognized social space to those core purposes.

Failure to meet any of the conditions (**I1, I2, I3***) is sufficient for one to count as alienated. There are some puzzles that arise here, mostly having to do with first-person/third-person asymmetries, for alienation can be predicated of oneself and predicated of others. It seems that one could satisfy **I2** and **I3***, for instance, yet not satisfy **I1**, and not even be aware that one is failing to satisfy **I1**. From the outside we might want to say that someone is alienated even though that agent himself feels no dissatisfaction.

3

Hegel's account of alienation does not begin as one might expect by taking as given something natural, or even rational, and then describing agents who diverge from that stable basis. Rather, he locates the social world's basic oppositional concepts as alienated from each other. Hegel writes that

the substance has developed moments that stand in opposition to one another, and that "Thinking fixes this difference in the most universal way through the absolute opposition of *good* and *bad*, which, shunning each other, cannot in any way become one and the same" (269, ¶491).[19] Hegel claims that these concepts themselves are alienated, for their meaning can be secured only by reference to what they exclude, despite the fact that the opposites are supposed to "shun each other." His overall point in tracing the fate of the original opposition of "good" and "bad" is that self-alienated individuals can arise only from within a culture whose moral grammar has already become problematic. Of course, subjects will become alienated in a more familiar sense through these concepts, as the value terms in their descriptions of their actions become unstable.

The first, naïve consciousness, identifies the good with the in-itself or unchangeable and the bad with the for-itself or transitory. The good is initially identified with State power, with selfless devotion to the State as the "absolute foundation and existence" (270, ¶494) of the deeds of the individuals. The bad is identified as wealth, which initially seems to be the principle of acting only for self-interest. The eventual result of Hegel's analysis of the shapes of State power and wealth is that they each contain both moments, of being in-itself and being for-itself, and therefore can be taken as good or bad. Their status as *essentially* one or the other is doubtful, which creates the need for a new way to secure the proper descriptions of the social space and individual actions. The opposed value terms do not neatly inhere in institutional reality, so the individual is left to judge for himself which is good and which is bad. Hegel is describing here a kind of space of individual rationality that opened up in late medieval and early modern culture in which the individual came detached from a specific inherited set of social roles.[20] As such, "self-consciousness is the relation of its pure consciousness to its actuality, the thought essence to the objective essence; it is essentially *judgment*" (271, ¶495). We can think of this transition as granting a new authority to individual self-consciousness, thereby changing the character of intentional action and making what we call alienation possible. This transition, effected through the indeterminacy of how value terms identify features of social space, introduces what I called condition **I1**.

[19] Valuable commentaries on this section as a whole can be found in Pinkard (1994), Harris (1997), and Siep (2000).

[20] See Pinkard (1994), 154.

While the initial forms of judgment try to hold the line on identifying the State and wealth with the good and the bad, respectively, the result of introducing the figure of judgment is that two further oppositional categories arise, the noble and the ignoble. The characteristic action of the noble consciousness leaves an unredeemed particularity/interiority in the intention that leads to the next stage of alienation. While the noble individual should stand in a transparent relation to State power, he retains a "*particular for-itself*" (275, ¶506)[21] that disrupts his relationship to State power. The problem is that although the "counsel" of the nobles seems to be for the "universal best," there is always the suspicion that a "particular willing" (275, ¶506) is behind this advice. In terms of our concept of alienation, the individual's language does not express a commitment to the transparency of the reasons he would give for his counsel.

The required alienation, the "true sacrificing of *being-for-self*,"[22] occurs only in the language exemplified in the court of Louis XIV. Here, language comes on the scene in its "distinctive meaning," and with it condition **I2**. Contrasting this new decisive shape of language with its earlier appearances, Hegel writes:

> But here it has for its content the form itself, the form which language itself is, and is authoritative as *language*. For it is the *Dasein* of the pure self as self; in language, self-consciousness *as singularity being-for-itself*, comes as such into existence, so that it is *for others*. (276, ¶508)

The self-consciousness that became authoritative in judging good and bad now takes on Dasein, a determinacy that other subjects can assess directly, without the need to look behind what I am saying. The main initial point here is that my authority as a self-conscious judge is exhausted by what I can say, what moves I can make in our language game. This development is both a gain in the articulacy of our relation to others as well as a source of possible loss in the individual's sense of self-sufficiency. Hegel continues:

> Otherwise the "I," this *pure* "I," is not *there*; in every other expression it is sunken in an actuality, and is in a shape from which it can withdraw itself; it [the pure self] is reflected back into itself from its action, as well as from its physiognomic expression, and dissociates itself from such an insufficient existence, in which there is always at once too much as too little, letting such incomplete Dasein remain lifeless behind. Language, however, contains the self in its purity, language

[21] This renders the unusual "*besonderes Fürsich*." Miller translates this as "self-interest," which captures the spirit of the claim but obscures its logical import.

[22] In this remark Hegel is using "for-itself" in the sense of a kind of interiority that must be alienated in order that the individual "for-itself" can take on a certain public authority, as it does in the figure of Rameau (of who Hegel explicitly writes that he represents success in bringing State power under the control of the "for-itself").

alone expresses the "I," the "I" itself. This *Dasein* of the "I" is, as *Dasein*, an objectivity which has within it the true nature of the "I." The "*I*" is *this* [particular] "I" – but equally the *universal* "I"; its appearance is also immediately the alienation [*Entäußerung*] and vanishing of *this* [particular] "I," and as a result the "I" remains in its universality. (276, ¶508)

The "I," the self-determining source of reasons, is inadequately expressed in any other form than language. Only in language is there a network of functional relations to match the self's powers of inference. When Hegel writes that the objectivity of language has "the true nature of the 'I,'" he is making a point about the I as an essential indexical, standing for me as an individual and as the universal I of any subject. Hegel extends the point about the use of "I" to the subject's language in general. I speak in the first person, but what I say cannot simply represent my private opinion, my immediate particular intended meaning. My particularity is alienated, and the particularity vanishes, for what I say now exists in the common network of signification. Hegel concludes by describing language's uptake:

> The "*I*" that expresses itself is *perceived*; it is a contagion which has immediately passed over into unity with those for whom it is there, and is a universal self-consciousness. That it is *perceived* means that its *Dasein dies away*; this its otherness has been taken back into itself; and its Dasein is just this: that as a self-conscious *Now*, as it is there, *not* to be there, and through this vanishing to be there. This vanishing is thus itself immediately its abiding; it is its own knowing of itself, and its knowing itself as a self that has passed over into another self that has been perceived and is universal. (276, ¶508)

This language has the power of a "contagion" that makes a certain demand on its listeners, for they interpret themselves through the same language, and cannot help but take up new uses of words into their webs of meaning. Hegel's description here also highlights the self's dependence on those who are "infected," who hear the words spoken. I know what I have said only through the mediation of my audience. My words are "taken back" by universal self-consciousness in the sense that we know what I have said as putatively counting as universal, as a reason. This is the transparency in condition **I2**, the condition that establishes the connection between my actions and what I can say about them.

Language is a form of interaction that is especially suited to Hegel's goal of achieving symmetrical relations between subjects,[23] but that also opens up new possibilities of alienation. The "heroism of flattery" (278, ¶511), as

[23] The language of action is only completed as mutual recognition in the course of "Conscience, the Beautiful Soul, Evil and its Forgiveness."

Hegel calls the French court culture, sets the stage for the discussion of Rameau, who is *the* representative figure of the world of culture.[24] He might seem to illustrate the deficiencies of language rather than language's importance, for Rameau's chief characteristics are his witty speech and his lack of commitment to anything. But we must keep in mind Hegel's method. He is showing how the concept of language takes over the normative field, becomes the only thing that matters. In that move to an extreme the concept breaks down and the next condition is born.

The unlikely agreement of Hegel's method with Rameau's madness comes out in Hegel's advocacy of Rameau against the philosopher in Diderot's dialogue. This contrast reads very much like the contrast in the Preface between Hegel's method and the Schellingean idealism that he compares to the night in which all cows are black, the form as in-itself or absolute intuition that has not taken alienation seriously. Here, though, the comparison is expressed in terms of language. The honest consciousness is *monosyllabic*, always referring to the simple noble and good (i.e. to the in-itself). In his honesty, he is a foundationalist who would assert his "basic beliefs" as the ground of ethics. Though Rameau only has his personality at the table of the rich, he manages to be "for himself" even in this humiliated position, for he has mastered all the different moves in the language (all the different moments) and is aware that he can recombine them almost at will. In his hilarious and shocking speech he takes to the extreme the insight that mastery of the language includes the ability to formulate novel sentences. Against the monosyllabic view, Hegel writes that one cannot demand of Rameau that "reason that has reached the spiritual cultured consciousness should give up the widespread wealth of its moments" (285, ¶524). It is striking that Hegel refers to Rameau as reason, and as spiritual, while Diderot's philosopher is without spirit, *geistlos* (Hegel also remarks that the "the Concept is the ruling element" (283, ¶521) in Rameau by contrast with the merely honest consciousness). This claim makes sense only on an inferential interpretation of Hegel's project. If content is secured through the functional relations of the "moments" that consciousness commands, it follows that the agent who has maximum mastery of the possible moves in social space comes closest to the concretely rational, and that the agent who has only a limited vocabulary hardly has any meaning at all.[25] Rameau is fully aware of his power and his alienation, for he is "confusion transparent

[24] For fuller discussions of this section, see Price (1998) and Speight (2001).

[25] This also makes sense of the odd claim that Rameau "knows better than each what each is, no matter what its specific nature is [es weiβ besser, was jedes ist, als es ist, es sei bestimmt wie es wolle]" (286, ¶526).

to itself" (284, ¶523). He represents a completed form of the "for-itself," expressing all four of the features I outlined in section 1. In his self-transparency, and in his recognition that all is vain, even (or especially) himself, he makes his own subjectivity into a moment and implicitly accomplishes the transition to the next stage.

4

Though Rameau has a wealth of material at his disposal, his activity remains in a certain sense merely formal, for there is no stable content that could anchor the truth of anything he says or does. He has the purposes of pursuing power and wealth, yet he is aware that these are vain pursuits and he borders on the sheer nihilism of valuelessness. The subsequent shapes of "pure insight" and faith arrive as a pair of forms of pure thought, a retreat from the contingencies of culture to the truth of standards beyond money and power. These two shapes both attempt to re-establish stability in the objective world (in terms of **I3**, of what could underwrite a fulfilling life), though they are initially opposed to, alienated from, each other.[26] In portraying the confrontation of the Enlightenment with religious faith, Hegel accomplishes three main conceptual shifts. He (1) corrects the initially one-sided view of Enlightenment rationalism that the language of action is theoretical or observational, rather than practical or expressive, he (2) overcomes any further imagined "pure in-itself," and he (3) derives a conception of utility that establishes a new standard for non-alienated action.

The dominant theme of the Enlightenment attack on faith is that a class of priests has intentionally deceived the mass of people into accepting false beliefs in God, the afterlife, etc. One of the most striking aspects of this text is that Hegel objects to the kind of alienation that the Enlightenment attributes to the people.

> The Enlightenment talks about this as if by some hocus-pocus of conjuring priests, something absolutely *alien* and *"other"* to consciousness had been foisted on it as its own essence . . . How are delusion and deception to take place where consciousness in its truth has directly the *certainty of itself*, where in its object it possesses *its own self*, since it just as much finds as produces itself in it? . . . in the knowledge of

[26] Jon Stewart (2000), 332 ff., claims that the structure of "Lordship and Bondage" is replayed in the conflict of Faith and the Enlightenment. I do not see any evidence for this claim, though I do see evidence for such a replay in the relation of Rameau to the rich.

the essence in which consciousness has the immediate *certainty of itself*, the idea of delusion is quite out of the question. (298–299, ¶550)

Hegel criticizes here a certain use of the concept of alienation that he himself had employed in some of his earliest writings.[27] He calls the Enlightenment "completely foolish" in this regard because it admits that all the possible criteria for truly identifying with something as one's essence are met in the case of religion, yet it claims that the people are alienated nonetheless.[28] Hegel is not saying that anything one believes with certainty is immune to error. He stresses that in religion consciousness finds itself *and produces* itself through action.[29] The faithful's relation to the religious essence (i.e. God) is not that of a knower making an ordinary theoretical claim about what exists. It is more like a practical claim about the description under which my action is intentional. Such a description, affirmed by a religious community, expresses (less sympathetically, "projects") the divine object that the faithful take to be the essence. How would one, from the outside, assess the success conditions of religious action? If I eat a certain piece of bread and take a sip of wine, and you ask me "Why?," the answers I might give (e.g. "to save my soul") are hardly assessable with the concepts of, say, natural science.

Hegel specifies this problem, and gives an indication of how religion itself can be complicit in this falsely ascribed alienation, in discussing the "ground" of religious belief. The Enlightenment argues for the absurdity of religion by "scientifically" examining the sources of religious revelation. It "falsely charges religious belief with basing its certainty on some *particular historical evidences*," claiming "that its certainty rests on the accidental *preservation* of these evidences" (300–301, ¶554). In religious practice, relying on evidence that can be evaluated from a theoretical, observational point of view would mean abstracting one's devotional practice from its

[27] Hegel's "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" from 1795–6 reads much like the Enlightenment attack on faith that he describes here. In the 1800 text that is supposed to be a reworking of the original, Hegel begins by criticizing his own rationalist conception of positivity as too simplistic. Between these texts Hegel underwent one of his most decisive shifts in thought through his interactions with Hölderlin in Frankfurt.

[28] Recent work in political theory has returned to Hegel's theme here, pointing out the limitations and overly satisfied self-image of Enlightenment secularism. See Connolly (1999).

[29] Summarizing his own, peculiarly Protestant conception of what religion truly is, Hegel writes: "But the absolute essence of faith is essentially not the *abstract* essence that would exist beyond the consciousness of the believer; on the contrary, it is the Spirit of the community, the unity of the abstract essence and self-consciousness" (298, ¶549). I cannot discuss here the very difficult question of how Hegel thought he could preserve a religion (as a shape of "Absolute Spirit") that is reconciled with a political order that does not invoke religion in its justifications. It is the latter limitation, and not the elimination of religion altogether, that is Hegel's aim in "Self-Alienated Spirit; Culture."

distinctive character as a kind of action. The interpretation of religion by the Enlightenment can produce a kind of self-alienation by corrupting the "unsophisticated relation" of faith to the "absolute object." Hegel thus considers the attitude of faith that "seriously thinks and acts as if those evidences were a matter of importance," and he asserts that such a faith would merely demonstrate that "it has already let itself be seduced by the Enlightenment" (301, ¶554). The whole appeal to evidence is a misunderstanding of faith. The Enlightenment assumes that its question "Why?" must be answered in a certain way, a way that faith cannot answer and remain the distinctive practice that it is.

The victory of the Enlightenment over faith brings out the difference of **I3** and **I3***, of one's ultimate purposes and the specific actions taken to reach them. Hegel claims that the downfall of Christianity as the dominant cultural form results from its attempt to have a "separate housekeeping" (310, ¶572) for the divine and the profane. Faith is alienated, and must fall to the Enlightenment, because it cannot avoid answering the question "Why?" from two different perspectives in mutually incompatible ways. Even if one grants religion the use of ordinary objects (bread, wine) for sacraments, and grants the traditional stories that connect these rituals to the "absolute essence," there remains a way that the justification of action breaks down. One's worldly actions will have their set of ends (e.g. accumulating property) and devotional practice will have a different set of ends (e.g. getting closer to God). The Enlightenment merely brings these two sides together, showing their inconsistency. The shape of faith can satisfy **I3**, but not **I3***, for at some point the mutually incompatible ends disrupt the stories one must be able to tell about how one's specific actions contribute to one's overall ends.

Following the defeat of faith, the kingdom of heaven will have been "ransacked" (310, ¶573), its goods brought down to earth in the victory of Enlightenment rationality. Hegel interprets the Enlightenment as a kind of radical empiricism that returns to the level of "Sense-Certainty" with the conviction that the immediate individual consciousness and the sensible world are absolute (303, ¶558). The initial overcoming of alienation is effected through the Enlightenment's mode of relating individual consciousness to the "absolute essence," which it conceives as that which has no predicates (as the vacuum of the materialists). Because there is no determinacy to the absolute essence, the value of things in this world is simply up to the self-conscious individual. Things can be taken as we "need," either as in-itself or for-others. To be both of these simultaneously, to be an immediate determination with value and yet to be so only in relation to

others, is to be something *useful*. Hegel sums up the attitude of this Enlightenment in writing that: "As he immediately is, as a natural consciousness *per se*, man is *good*, as an individual he is *absolute* and all else exists for him." The individual can think of himself "as one who has come from the hand of God, walking the earth as in a garden planted for him" (304, ¶560). This is a kind of naturalism in which material objects are defined through their uses for us, and in which we ourselves are "universally useful members of the group" (305, ¶560) in which we use others and are used in turn.

But in this first conception of utility, the Enlightenment remains alienated in a familiar sense that Hegel associates with early romanticism. The Enlightenment wins the contest with religion but it is not yet satisfied, for it is "only individual," and "what speaks to Spirit is only a reality without any substance, and a finitude forsaken by Spirit" (310, ¶573). The rationality characteristic of this phase of the Enlightenment is atomistic, both because the individual knower is the basic bearer of truth, and because individual representations are taken as basic building blocks of knowledge. But in that "its truth is only an empty beyond" (310, ¶573) there arises a longing for something more, for a genuine core purpose to give meaning to its particular acts. The Enlightenment thus has what we might call a romantic reflex, a longing for what it has overcome. The only "*fulfilled object*," the only object with determinate content, is the "*lack of selfhood* of the useful" (311, ¶573). In principle, everything objective now stands as a possible means to accomplish my purpose, so in answering questions about my purposes I describe the world only as it presents itself for my use. What is missing here are those characteristics that make the purposes worth pursuing in the first place, that give my objectives meaning beyond my mere enjoyment.

5

The Enlightenment decisively overcomes alienation when it realizes that the very idea of purposes beyond the ordinary is unnecessary. If there is no "absolute emptiness" with which to contrast the finite sensible world, there is no cause for alienation, no reason for the useful to remain lacking in selfhood. Hegel writes:

> This distinguishing of the moments leaves their unmoved [unity] behind as the empty husk of pure *being*, which is no longer actual thought, no longer has any life within it; for this process of differentiation is, *qua* difference, all the content. This

process, however, which posits itself *outside* of that *unity*, is an alternation – an alternation which *does not return into itself*, of being-*in-itself*, of being-*for-an-other*, and of being-*for-itself* – it is actuality as object for the actual consciousness of pure insight – *Utility*. (314, ¶579)

The realization is that pure being is a superfluous "empty husk" that no longer has any life within it. To say that the process as difference is "all the content" is to realize that no transcendent purposes actually contribute anything to our reasons, and that our core purpose can be utility itself. In terms of **I3***, this version of utility is the realization that there is no fulfillment outside of the ordinary purposes themselves, so there is no cause for disparity between one's purposes and the available stock of reasons. In terms of the achieved objectivity that Hegel will summarize in Absolute Knowing, utility is such an important stage because "self-consciousness sees right into the object, and this insight contains the *true* essence of the object (which is to be seen through or to be *for another*)" (316, ¶518). This claim occurs in a summary in which Hegel describes utility as uniting the being-for-itself of Rameau and the being-in-itself of faith. It is a conclusion that is both momentous and deflationary. He writes, "*truth* as well as presence and *actuality* are united. The two worlds are reconciled and heaven is transplanted to earth below" (316, ¶518). Being-in-itself becomes being-for-another through a conceptual move that ultimately plays out in the transition to Absolute Freedom: the in-itself is converted to intersubjective validity, to what others accept as transparent reasons.

In the transition to Absolute Freedom, Hegel notes that this conversion has already implicitly happened, for self-consciousness itself has become the essence of the objects, so that there is no objectivity besides other self-consciousnesses. What remains of objectivity is only an "empty semblance," since the being-in-itself of the objective world has already become a passive being-for-another. Hegel indicates the radical intersubjective implication of utility in writing that pure insight is now "the pure concept, the looking of the self into the self, the absolute seeing *of itself* doubled; the certainty of itself is the universal subject and its knowing concept [*wissender Begriff*] the essence of all actuality" (317, ¶583). Because self-consciousness is now all of reality, it is not stuck at the level of "mere intention" or representation, with a separate objectivity over against itself. The payoff of utility's radical secularizing of the world is that agency is compelled to become political. It becomes the "universal self," the "real universal willing" (317, ¶584) in which the individuals act as the whole and the whole acts through the individuals.

Hegel's move to Absolute Freedom shows that a concept of alienation needs to include an explicit political dimension. The conditions in **A2** do

not require one's actions to go beyond the level of instrumental rationality, and do not say how we are to consider other agents beyond ascribing to them a capacity for free choice, language use, and the ability to set and pursue ends. All of this is consonant with the worldview that Hegel describes under the rubric of utility. The result of overcoming "the form of objectivity of the useful" (316, ¶582) is a substantive claim of freedom, such that alienation is overcome only in a polity governed by the general will. If one reads the conditions in **A2** in a strong enough manner, one could be led to this conclusion, for the heart of **A2** is a certain relation of mutual dependence between the agents giving reasons to one another. One could argue that reason-giving functions symmetrically only if we all depend on a general will that bars inequalities in power relations. That is, one could be led to Rousseau's attack on the bourgeois as alienated and to his proposed moral–political solution. We could then add a new condition:

I4: The question and the answer presuppose a polity in which the general will is the dominant normative principle, such that an agent's reasons refer to purposes that are the purposes of every agent.

As it stands, and as Hegel's portrayal of the logic of the Reign of Terror makes clear, this condition is much too strong. The primary problem is that **I4** takes the relationship of mutual dependence too simplistically. In Hegel's terminology, the general will works only with the categories of individuality and universality, which it attempts to get into an immediately symmetrical relation. There can be no positive action under this condition, which purchases lack of alienation only at the price of all "deeds and work of *willing freedom*" (318–319, ¶588).[30] The State and the citizen could have the abstract intention of acting according to the general will, but this objective is carried out, becomes a realized intention, only when specific means are taken to accomplish it, and the particularity of those specific means will contradict the desired purity. Can we read Hegel as advocating a different condition for overcoming alienation?

A more moderate version of overcoming dependence is suggested by Hegel's remarks on how freedom could regain embodiment (318–319, ¶588). The goal would be an institutional rationality in which particular individuals are like "branches" of the universal whole. Hegel's organic

[30] 388, ¶588. Alienation is one of the main motivating foils in the account of social freedom given by Frederick Neuhouser (2000). One of Neuhouser's most remarkable claims is that Rousseau, properly understood, offers resources consistent with Hegel's own theory of freedom.

metaphor need not be read as a top-down endorsement of an absolutist State. It could become:

I4*: The answer and the question presupposes that the individual is a citizen of a sovereign State governed by constitutional law and containing many intermediate institutions, such that an agent's reasons refer to purposes that can be nested within more and more inclusive institutional purposes.

The notion of nested purposes is a version of the issue separating **I3** and **I3***, since nesting one's actions is to tell a story connecting your specific actions to larger purposes. The point in this formulation is that such nesting relations can be embodied in institutional structures in a transparent manner. We can think of these structures as defined through overall purposes, each of which is characterized by certain patterns of inference that are themselves related to each other in various complicated ways.[31] Adding this condition to **A2**, we arrive at a final formulation of the concept of alienation with the four conditions:

A3: An individual is alienated when he fails to be able to answer satisfactorily the warranted question "Why" about his actions, where the answer and the question presuppose (1) that he affirms the reasons for action as dependent upon his own free judgment, (2) that his language expresses his commitment to the transparency of those reasons in determining the action, (3) that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent's conception of a fulfilling life and the agent can provide a story connecting his specific actions in recognized social space to those core purposes, and (4) that the individual is a citizen of a sovereign State governed by constitutional law and containing many intermediate institutions, such that an agent's reasons refer to purposes that can be nested within broader, more inclusive institutional purposes.

Hegel has thus delivered a workable general concept of alienation. The fine structure of alienation, which would give the ways in which reason-giving actually breaks down, can be worked out only within the specific contexts of action. The criteria for alienation are necessarily loose, for much of the question of failing to answer "satisfactorily" will depend upon how specific social conditions are actually experienced by the individuals acting under them.

My final condition (**I4***) suggests that some individuals, by the very fact of living under certain political conditions, will count as alienated. I think

[31] To make a long story short, I read the final stage of "Spirit," what Hegel calls "Spirit that is Certain of itself. Morality," as developing the conception of moral agency that can underwrite such an institutional structure. That is, only as agents fulfilling the concept of conscience can we sustain a political order defined by freedom and yet (unlike the failed revolutionary governments) articulated into separate and mutually reinforcing parts.

that suggestion is right, for we need some basic "external" criteria for freedom and alienation, and some objective sense of alienation that we can attribute to others. What should give us pause is that Hegel's political condition is one which encourages people to develop their own interests and views. This is the nature of modern Civil Society, the realm of rational ethical life (presented in the *Philosophy of Right*) that corresponds most closely with the *Phenomenology*'s realm of *Bildung*. Hegel did not imagine a tranquil society in which everyone agrees on what counts as a reason and as a fulfilling life. Such issues are inevitably contested in many areas, and in a pluralistic society many questions will not have a unitary answer. Does that mean that everyone fails at reason-giving, and that we are all alienated? No, the lesson is rather that a rational social order must be able to incorporate the differences between individuals and groups that make alienation an ongoing possibility. What Hegel's reconstructed historical account has established are the terms under which alienation is not a corrosive force that undermines the very principles of freedom. Rameau embodied a certain kind of failure of French aristocratic society, for his alienation reflected the basic injustice and irrationality of the economic and political institutions. The French Revolution, too, however, was a failure, namely a failure to understand that alienation is not simply an enemy to be stamped out, but rather the very background tension that maintains modern societies in their imperfect freedom. There is cause today to believe that only in a society that has stopped asking for reasons could the possibility of alienation disappear.