

Modern life's alternatives and modern life's possibilities

1. From Greek character to modern autonomy

To introduce the section on “Spirit,” the *Phenomenology* develops a story about how a group of agents has moved from a conception of impersonal reason as providing them with a fixed standard by which they evaluate all their various contingent claims to a conception of rationality as a form of reflective social practice – that is, as “spirit.”¹ Attempts at reassurance through accounts that appeal to impersonal reason or to the idea of a fixed, rational “self” have undermined themselves such that only some type of account that understands reason as a form of social practice would seem to be able to succeed. In seeking an affirmation from modern science and social practice, modern agents have found that the accounts that they must give of their practices of reason-giving and criticism have led them to the view that what they have come to count as authoritative for themselves has to do with an understanding of “the way things are done.” The apparent success of the modern world in throwing off the constraints of tradition in science and in practice (and particularly the failure of those attempts by people like Shaftesbury to revive certain ancient traditions of virtue by relying on more modern doctrines of the observation of nature) helped to reassure the moderns that their conceptions were indeed correct.² But if to be rational is to act and think according to “the way things are done” – that is, is fundamentally a feature of sociality – then the issue for the moderns had to concern what kind of account they could give of this sociality, this “substance” of their lives, within the terms that this kind of modern self-understanding had set for itself.³

But why then should an appeal purely and simply to “the way things are done” not be good enough? Even if it is not good enough for those early moderns who had set themselves the project of accounting for their activities of reason-giving in terms of rational philosophy rather than that of faith and theology, it is not at all self-evident that the early modern project is the only rational or legitimate form of life. Even if the early modern project was the result of what was necessary to make up for the historical insufficiencies of its predecessors, it is not self-evident that it does not represent an intrinsically failed development of human history, perhaps an indication of a false path that history had taken. Indeed, people like Rousseau had come to throw much of the modern project into question, doubting whether the kinds of reasons that modern life had provided for itself could in fact be legitimated in their own terms and whether a return to “Sparta” or “Athens” would not be

more in order. In particular, modern life would be an internal failure if it were to fail to satisfy those criteria that on their own terms specify what counts as fulfilling the promises of the idea of a culture based on rationality. If modern life did fail on those terms, then it would quickly become another form of the "unhappy consciousness": It would be a form of life in which people would believe that such-and-such was necessary to justify what they were doing (that is, who would take something as necessary to affirm for themselves that what they *believed* was indeed *true* and that what they *did* was indeed *right*), but who did not believe that this standard could be met by them and who could not envision any concrete alternative project for themselves.

The issue was particularly disturbing for Hegel's generation, since they faced Rousseau's critique of the inauthenticity of modern life coupled with what at least seemed to be an alternative (at least in thought) to the modern project – namely, that embodied in the form of life of the ancient Greeks (as least as they had come to understand that form of life as it had been mediated to them by the great classical figures of German literature such as Goethe and Winckelmann). In a view widely shared in Hegel's time, the ancient Greeks had, at least for a very brief period in their history, a form of life in which "the way things are done" (*Sittlichkeit*) functioned to produce a fully harmonious, non-alienated social order and self-understanding, which, since it was consistent with their having attained the highest achievements in art and philosophy, could not be faulted as being somehow inferior to the alienated form of life of the early modern Europeans. Thus, even if it is not possible for us, the moderns, actually to return to that Greek form of life, it might nonetheless stand as a rebuke to modern life, to show just how far from the ideal it had descended.

In a way, the Greek form of life is the "natural" way of understanding the nature of spirit as "social space." The most natural way in which we would form a self-conscious conception of ourselves as social and cultural beings would be to understand the basic elements of the background social and cultural order of social life as both natural and also somehow necessary. That is, it would be to understand key elements of the given social and cultural world as embodying a kind of eternal necessity to them; "the way things are done" would be seen not as a feature of human idiosyncrasy but as part of the eternal order of things.⁴ The Greeks expressed this in a rigid understanding of social roles: Men do one thing, women another; rulers do one thing, subjects another; masters do one thing, slaves another; that is just the way the world is, and, if the social world is to function correctly, it cannot be different. What one ultimately is to do is given to one by one's own social and cultural order, and that social order itself has a kind of self-certifying nature to it such that it appears immediately intelligible to its participants. One's social roles set one's ends before one, and in acting on these given ends, one also achieves the self-identity in the eyes of others that one thinks oneself to have. If one acts as a soldier, or as a son or daughter, or as a ruler is supposed to act, one finds that the meaning of one's actions and therefore one's self-

identity will be affirmed and recognized by others. The *ultimate* ends of life, just like the rules of thought, will seem given and unalterable, existing from time immemorial.⁵ They will have a kind of immediate intelligibility and justification to them such each agent fully identifies with that social order and his place within it. At least as understood by many of Hegel's contemporaries, something like this view characterizes the form of life of ancient Greece, at least as reflected in the writings of its poets and tragedians.

It is not, however, the case that the Greeks saw everything about "the way things are done" as being both natural and immutable. Indeed, one of the striking features of Greek thought was its distinction between the artificial and the natural. Much of life was understood by them to be a social feature of themselves, a "way *they* did things" that was not universal but peculiarly Greek. Nevertheless, the Greeks also saw certain ultimate aspects of "the way things are done" – in everything from family life to the treatment of prisoners of war – as being expressions of what was natural and immutable, as resting on "laws" whose legitimacy was eternal. This distinction between what was peculiarly Greek and what was immutable is expressed as the difference between human and divine law.⁶ Human law may be understood and altered, but divine law must be simply acknowledged and obeyed.

Hegel's analysis of Greek life does not challenge the widely held view in his day that the Greeks were a "happy" people who lived a "harmonious" life (although as he got older, he came less and less to share that rather buoyant view of Greek life, without, nonetheless, ever completely abandoning it). Unlike later historians, such as Jacob Burckhardt, who were to challenge this view of Greek life as historically inaccurate, Hegel took it for granted that the Greek form of life was in some sense harmonious, but he then inquired whether, given the descriptions that the Greeks gave of themselves, it could be said to be genuinely free of any deep and alienating contradictions in "social space," which many of his contemporaries (particularly his youthful friend in Tübingen, Hölderlin) took it to be. Hegel's concern therefore was not with the historical details of Greek life per se but with whether the idealized Greek life described by many of his contemporaries really could *on its own terms* be counted as a genuine alternative to modern life. Hegel's concern was therefore not with whether the Greeks violated some tenets of the kinds of self-understandings that *we*, the moderns, have but rather with whether their own form of self-understanding violated some of its own essential tenets. In other words, he was concerned with the way in which these idealized Greeks would have been "for themselves," not as they are "for us."

The Greek alternative

Hegel's treatment of Greek life occurs in two parts. In the first part, he sketches out the way in which this idealized Greek form of life could be understood to be harmonious and how it could be understood as an equally valid, if not better, alternative to the modern self-understanding. In the second part, he then tries to show that given what the Greek tragedians say

about Greek life, it cannot *on its own terms* be understood to be as harmonious as some of Hegel's contemporaries had thought, and thus it fails to be the alternative they took it to be.⁷

As he had in his treatment of "Reason," Hegel uses the term "substance" to characterize the overall background normative order of thought and action. He uses this term in order not to prejudice the issue as to how this "substance" is to be taken: metaphysically, naturalistically, or as a structure of social practice. The use of the term "substance" is also meant to suggest that it is this background order that gives a "substantiality" to people's lives in the way that it fills out what their duties are, and it gives them an understanding of what their motives should be.

For the Greeks, this "substance" defined them as a people, as a distinct community apart from other communities. There was a recognition of "the way things were done" that was fully shared and that was determinate in the way it apportioned social roles and duties. But it was more than merely a shared way of life; the institutions of Greek life also provided them with various ways by which they could reflect both as individuals and collectively on who they were. As such, there was no discontinuity between how individuals understood themselves as individuals and how they understood the society. In part, this was because individuals did not understand themselves *individualistically* in the modern sense.⁸ The Greek individual understood himself in terms of his social role; his individuality is filled out by his social role, not by any idiosyncratic and contingent features of himself.⁹ The modern idea of *morality*, as expressed in a conception of inner conscience and self-conscious reflection on one's motives, could not therefore appear in Greek life.¹⁰ The Greek individual would not therefore have any grounds, at least so it would seem, to be alienated from the social whole. He knows what is to be done, because the background order of things is determinate and clear on this point, and in acting in terms of this background order – in thinking and acting in terms of "the way things are done" – he also finds that his actions are harmonious with those of others. Unlike modern individuals, the Greek individual need not step back and reflect on whether what he is doing is really right; the alienating and self-distancing mode of reflection, which is so crucial to modern self-reflection, is absent for the idealized Greek agent, who can be fully at home in his actions.¹¹

In one sense, then, the Greek form of life is characterized by a certain type of clarity of knowledge about what is to be done and believed. The doubts that plague the reflective, self-distancing moderns are not there for these idealized Greeks. They *know* ultimately what to believe and to think because there is a clear and determinate order for them of "the way things are done." They need not ask, "what reason is there for me to do this" because the reasons embodied in their social life are reason enough. The governing of the city for them by *human law* is thus merely one more way in which their "mores" and "ethics" (their *Sitte*) are put in practice. The government is the institution in the community in which a self-conscious reflection is carried out on what is to be done in order to keep this harmony and equilibrium

intact; in its deliberations and legal enactments, the government presupposes this shared understanding of what counts as a proper goal of government, what counts as valuable, what public ends must, ought and need to be pursued, and so on.¹² It is the government's duty to preserve *justice* in the community, which in this case means apportioning benefits, honors and punishments in such a way that the harmony or equilibrium (*Gleichgewicht*) of the community is maintained. The most basic form of injustice, on this view, would be to let nature take over, that is, would be for the human community of the Greeks to cease to demonstrate to itself and to others how human law is effective in the life of the community.¹³

Self-conscious reflective life thus occurs within the context of a widely shared understanding of the "ethical life," the *Sittlichkeit*, of the community. In its political institutions, therefore, the public life of the community is always presupposing and confronting deeper assumptions that are simply taken for granted as being "the way things are done." These are understood by the community as the *divine law*, that set of very basic assumptions about the way things have to be and the way thought and action have to take place that one must simply acknowledge and to which one must simply submit, even if one cannot understand why the divine law is the way it is. Human law is constructed and intelligible; it is a proper object of rational deliberation. Divine law is given and immutable and must simply be accepted.¹⁴

Just as the government is the social institution in Greek life that embodies the kind of self-conscious reflection on what the community is to do to maintain itself as a particular and determinate people, the family is the institution in which the most basic assumptions about the natural or immediate character of the individuals in the community are realized and carried out. Whereas the government must deliberate about its policies (even though it formulates them in terms of a shared understanding of the goals of its policies), the members of the family simply know what to do. This is understood by the Greeks as being due to the family's having its basis in nature, in the natural facts of sex and reproduction. The Greeks took these natural facts (as facts about "the way things are") to specify determinate duties and social roles, "the way things are done." For the family, that is, they attached a specifically *ethical* significance to *natural* facts, and thus for them the social roles embodied in the Greek family seemed to be a feature of "the way things are done": Women have one set of roles, men have others, and this is immutable.¹⁵ The family embodies ethical life, *Sittlichkeit*, in that it appears not as a feature entirely of "social space," but as a feature of nature.¹⁶ This should, moreover, not be misunderstood as being an expression of some kind of elementary confusion on the part of the Greeks between "is" and "ought." For them, what they *ought* to do followed from the way things *are*, from the background understanding that this is "the way things are done," which for them was a *fact* about social life. By following out the determinate duties prescribed for them by their social institutions, they did what they *had* to do, and they did what they *ought* to do, all on the basis of their understanding of what *is* the case (on what is *required* of them by their social life).

Hegel's arguments about the nature of the Greek family are attempts to draw out its "logic" in terms of how it was presented in Greek art. He is not interested in doing a social history of the nature of the Greek family, for the object of his discussion in this section is Greek life in its idealized form, presented as an imaginative alternative to modern life by many of Hegel's contemporaries. Again, what is striking about Greek life taken in this way is the way in which its two basic institutions – governmental institutions and family life – together delineate how a self-sustaining *Sittlichkeit* – a form of understanding that "the way things are done" – might be concretely possible. Indeed, in Hegelian terms, Greek *Sittlichkeit*, consisting as it does of the unity of "self-consciousness" and "immediacy" (that is, in an understanding that such and such is "the way things are done" taken in a *normative* sense and a self-conscious reflection on the normativity of these principles and how to implement them) defines the general possibility of there being a form of *Sittlichkeit* at all.¹⁷

The problem for the Greek understanding of family life had to do with how it could combine this conception of family life as *natural* with a conception of it as *ethical*, as embodying a set of norms rather than just being a natural fact about people. That is, it needed to construct a set of duties that would define the family as a social institution and not simply as a natural institution, which would also be consistent with its understanding of the social roles in the family being determined by the natural differences of the sexes. The issue for the Greeks therefore would concern what would be a necessary set of actions that family members could take (and that could only be taken by family members) that would also essentially concern only the family. These would be the duties to hold the family together as a social unit. But as a *natural* unit for the propagation and rearing of children, the family is in many respects a *contingent* affair. It is, for example, purely contingent that these two parents came together and had these particular children; likewise, it is desirable but also contingent whether the parents love each other, or whether when grown the children assist the parents (or even have the opportunity to assist their parents), and so on. If the family is to be more than *just* a natural unit, it must be maintained by something other than these contingent features.

The importance of performing the proper burial rites for deceased family members plays the important role in Greek tragedy that it does because of these considerations (or at least the role that it does in Sophocles' *Antigone*, the main object of Hegel's concern in his discussion of the Greek family). Holding the family together as a social unit means holding the memory of one's ancestors present before one, remembering that the family is a determinate *social* institution constituted by the *natural* facts of lineage. Since death is obviously a natural fact and not a social fact, in performing the proper burial rites, the family members are transforming this ultimately natural fact into one charged with a determinate social meaning. The non-rationality (or irrationality) of death is given a rational significance by becoming a means by which the family maintains itself as a *social* unit (as "spirit"). One shows the

proper respect for the deceased not in terms of his natural properties but in terms of *who* he was (his being-for-self, as Hegel puts it). Moreover, by carrying out the proper burial rites, the family members protect the standing of the deceased in the public community (the *Gemeinwesen*), for they signal by this that his *self*-identity remains important, not just his natural existence. Finally, they must perform these rites in order for the divinities of the underworld to be satisfied, even if they cannot understand why this is so. Since this is the basic means by which the family maintains its social, normative status, it constitutes an absolute duty for the family members, one of those things that just *has* to be done because it is “the way things *are* done” and for which no further reason need be given.¹⁸

The duties of the family toward the deceased thus constitute the *divine law*. It is simply something that has to be done, it need not be reflected upon, and whatever unintelligibility it has about itself just has to be accepted. Moreover, the human law cannot replace or supplant this; the goals of human law are just too different. The goals of human law are to take the person out of his raw, natural state and socialize him, teach him virtue, and provide him with the intellectual and social means to lead a communal life. Human law thus takes the individual away from nature, whereas divine law is the attempt to give a sense to otherwise non-rational natural facts such as those governing sexuality, birth and death.¹⁹

Indeed, because of the necessity of socializing people so that they are fit members of the public community, human law (through the institution of government) has to exert a certain force on the members of the community so that they do not “drift back into nature,” into a more or less unsocialized form of life, and thereby disrupt the ethical harmony of the public community. One way of doing that for Greek life was the continual decision to go to war (something that the Greeks did often enough, but that the Grecophiles often tend to overlook). There is in fact a kind of logic to the fact of continual warfare in Greek life. By submitting the male members of the community to the threat of death in wartime, and by forcing them thereby to stake their natural lives for social glory, the government forced people out of their natural state into a social one, and in doing that thereby maintained the harmony of the community in which each played his part and contributed to the good of the whole, instead of falling into natural stubbornness or self-seeking.²⁰

Part of the Greek solution to maintaining both the social harmony of this form of life and their understanding of how it was held together in terms of divine and human law was to apportion social duties accordingly. Although the Greeks understood part of their form of life in terms of its being non-natural – as being a matter of human artifice and social practice and thus the object of human law – they also understood part of their form of life to be determined by the immutable facts of nature and thus to be the object of divine law. The normativity of *human* law falls completely within the domain of human decision and action; *divine* law, on the other hand, has to do with those natural facts governing basic and universal questions of self-identity

and humanity's most basic interests, namely, the facts of birth, death and sexuality. The basic *natural* difference between men and women therefore came for the Greeks to be a matter of great normative significance, even if this natural difference itself was just a given, something that need not be intelligible to be accepted. It is therefore not a completely contingent fact about the Greek form of life that it had such rigid gender roles, that it strictly saw men as destined for public life and women only for family life. Men were seen as the bearers of "spirit" and women as the bearers of "nature." The Greek *Sittlichkeit*, "the way things are done," divides itself into two parts, each to be fulfilled by one of the gender roles of Greek life. Thus, there arises the overall shared understanding of what counts in public life, and the shared understanding that there is a "way things are done" that is natural and therefore is not so much the object of *self-conscious reflection* as it is an object of *feeling*.²¹ Women were considered to hold the family as a unity of feeling together, whereas the men were to participate in the self-conscious life of public affairs. The *natural* difference of the sexes is taken as determining the *social* difference of their roles.

Greek life is thus a mixture between the natural and social, functioning such that a harmony in the social order is thereby produced that is supposedly free of the self-distancing, alienating reflective stances of modern life. For this to be case, however, this harmony has to be a more or less spontaneous harmony between *free individuals*.²² These free individuals become such free individuals through a process of mutual recognition. Each, freely and without compulsion, bestows a social status on the other, recognizing his great deeds or oratory or whatnot. This status of "free individuality" therefore is mutually conferred by citizens on each other for a certain excellence in public performance. Bound up with the ideal of "free individuality" is thus a certain *aesthetic* understanding of what the nature of such individuality is, and the idea that such recognition could only be conferred by equals, by the kinds of others whose recognition of one's great deeds counted for something.²³

The kind of "free individuality," however, that is the hallmark of this idealized Greek life could *only* be attained within the public sphere, and not, so it would seem, within the family. The relation between the husband and wife in the family is partly a natural relation of sexual desire; it becomes an "ethical" relation only in terms of the duties involved in the having and rearing of children (without children, the "ethical" bond of marriage would have little reason for being within the Greek view of things). The relation between husband and wife is thus not completely a relation between "free individualities" since it is based in part on natural sexual desires from which neither is free, and on the natural fact that both are required for procreation. The relation between parents and children, moreover, is a relation between unequals, and cannot thereby serve as a basis for fully mutual recognition. Likewise, the children have as their goal to become progressively independent of their parents; they cannot become "free individualities" except by leaving the family and making their way in the public world.

It follows that neither men nor women could achieve the status of "free individuality" within the family. Women could do this neither *as* wife, nor *as* mother, nor *as* daughter, nor could men do this *as* husband, father, or son. However, because men would have the possibility of a life outside of the family in the public realm, it would be possible for them to develop themselves as such "free individualities" in this public, political realm. Women, on the other hand, who would be confined to the family by the Greek understanding of the way things had to be between the sexes, could not have the possibility, so it would seem, to develop themselves as "free individualities" at all. Women thus seem destined not to be *individuals* at all, but only to have an understanding of themselves as somewhat "generalized" particular agents. That is, they cannot see anything about their *self* as being individual; their individuality seems to be only the natural individuality of an organism, of being a single entity in space and time, not of being a single *self*.²⁴

Within the context of the Greek understanding, therefore, the only possible relationship within which a woman could develop a sense of herself as having a *self* would be in the familial relationship of brother and sister (which is crucial for Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone*). Since women are confined to the natural realm, the domain of the family, if a woman is to be able to have a *self*, she must find some basis of recognition from someone to whom she stands in a *natural* relation but *from whom* such recognition would *count*. Brother and sister are naturally related, but they are free of desire for each other (which might not be the case were they unrelated); moreover, the brother's capability for leading a public life makes him the kind of agent who is capable of bestowing recognition. Likewise, the sister, who as a woman is someone on whom the brother could not otherwise confer any recognition, is, because she is his *sister*, the kind of person upon whom he can confer the recognition of being the bearer of the divine law. Since each can be recognized by the other, the sister can therefore stand in relation to her brother as a free individual, something she cannot do in a relation to her sister, for her sister would suffer under the same restrictions as she does. The sister is thus able to achieve selfhood in the process of mutual recognition between her and her brother, and thus the harmony of Greek life seems not to be threatened.²⁵

It would be a mistake to take the issue here to be the incompatibility of this Greek view of the possibilities for men's and women's lives with modern, egalitarian views. For the purposes of Hegel's discussion, the only issue is whether this Greek understanding is *in its own terms* rational, not whether it fails to fit *our* modes of self-understanding. As an alternative to modern life, Greek life is not required to be consistent with modern life; it is only required to be consistent with itself, and for the Grecophiles of Hegel's day, it seemed to have succeeded (not that many of them worried about the status of women in Greek life). Greek life seems harmonious and complete in its separate acknowledgments of what can be an object of self-conscious reflection and what simply has to be accepted, and it seems to have combined all these elements into a consistent, coherent whole. The issue therefore is: Is Greek life really as complete as it seems to be?

Hegel relies on Greek tragedy and specifically on Sophocles' *Antigone* in order to analyze the way in which this mode of self-understanding must develop contradictions within itself. In the play *Antigone* we are presented with the family of Oedipus: two sons (Polyneices and Eteocles) and two daughters (Antigone and Ismene). Eteocles sits on the throne of Thebes, but Polyneices, who believes the throne should be his, attacks the city and is killed in the attempt, as is Eteocles in defending it. Their maternal uncle, Creon, assumes the royal power. He orders that Eteocles' body be given the proper burial rites, but because he believes Polyneices to be a traitor, he orders that these burial rites be denied to Polyneices' body. In defiance of this edict, Antigone performs the burial rites on her dead brother, Polyneices. She is caught at this, and Creon sentences Antigone to be entombed alive, the result of which is Antigone's suicide, Creon's son's suicide (who had been betrothed to Antigone), his wife's death, and his own ruin.

What makes this *tragic* is that each (Creon and Antigone) did what each *had* to do, *and* both sides were in the right: Creon as ruler of the city had the absolute obligation to protect it from attack by traitors (and he considered Polyneices to be a traitor), whereas Antigone had the absolute duty to perform the proper burial rites on her brother. Both Creon and Antigone are *ethical* characters in that each does things according to "the way things are done," and *because* each is an "ethical character," each *has* to do the things they do. Thus, the clash between Antigone and Creon is not something that could have been negotiated away or something that might have been avoided if one of the characters had reined in their feelings. (That is, the conflict cannot be understood as one of those more familiar modern clashes of "reason versus passion," or "conflicts of rights."²⁶) It is rather a discord within Greek culture itself, between the two ethical powers that the Greek form of life recognizes as essential to itself: the divine law and the human law, embodied in the different individualities of men and women.

Since both Creon and Antigone are *ethical* individuals, each *knows* what he or she has to do, and each performs his or her duty in terms of "the way things are done." For each of them, therefore, it is the other person who is in the wrong. Antigone sees Creon as directly defying the divine law, and Creon sees Antigone as someone willfully and stubbornly violating the conditions under which the community can exist and flourish. The conflict between Antigone and Creon – in which each sees the other as being in the wrong – is really a conflict of both Antigone and Creon with the "substance," the normative basis, of Greek life. And because each is in conflict with the basis of Greek life, each is therefore guilty of having committed a crime: Antigone against the human law and Creon against the divine law. Each *knows* what he or she has to do, and each unwittingly provokes the other side into doing what the other has to do. Because neither of the two "ethical powers" of Greek life can claim to be more important than the other, both agents are at least equally guilty, with Antigone's guilt being perhaps a little greater.²⁷ (Creon acts as he does perhaps out of ignorance of the divine law or of its force; Antigone, on the other hand, seems to know that she is defying the human

law and will suffer for it, and thus her guilt is perhaps even greater.²⁸) The Greek conception of justice as preserving the harmony of the whole demands that both sides suffer, since both sides have damaged this harmony. Thus, with Antigone's destruction and Creon's ruin, it seems as if justice has been done. Since the Greeks conceived of their form of life as being *like* that of nature, which when disturbed comes to reestablish its own equilibrium, what would appear to the Greek spectators of this play would therefore be an affirmation that their understanding of what was the "essence" (was authoritative) in life was in order. Seeing justice done affirms their understanding that when the divine and human laws are violated, the system of the world (of Greek life) will be able to right itself and set itself in order again.

The Greek understanding would no doubt give a somewhat religious or metaphysical interpretation to this idea of the community's power of self-restoration by seeing the restoration of the equilibrium as the result of the divine elements themselves restoring the balance by their avenging themselves against their violation by human law. However, Hegel's point is that the real conflict here is Antigone's and Creon's clash with Greek life itself. The divine law and the human law are both essential to Greek life; the community is based in the life of the family and the way in which family life is maintained, and Greek family life requires just that kind of public community which it has. The conflict between Antigone and Creon is not just a conflict between two contingent individuals; it is an expression of a kind of essentially institutionalized clash between men and women in Greek life, which is itself an expression of a conflict between equally essential principles of Greek life. The public community (the *Gemeinwesen*) is the sphere of governmental action, that is, the sphere of *men*. Since its goal is to preserve the harmony of the whole, it maintains itself by swallowing up the familial sphere, presided over by women, and subordinating it to itself. Creon thus is ignorant of the force of the divine law. Likewise, such a public community necessarily makes its women into its enemies. As the keepers of the family and as barred from public life, women have no choice except to turn what are properly communal matters into ends that serve their familial interests, and in the extreme cases (as in *Antigone*) to actively act against the expressly stated (male) edicts of the human law. Women can become individuals only in the family, and there only in relation to their brothers, and it is the structure of Greek life that forces them into this position.²⁹

This antagonistic position that Greek life must take against its women is revelatory of the much deeper contradictions at work in the idealized Greek form of life with its seeming harmony. Given the kind of "social space" that defines Greek life, women, who are barred from developing themselves as individuals by the very structure of Greek life, can develop their *selves* only in opposition to the public life of the community from which they are barred, and, given the role they are destined to play in that form of life, are also destined to develop exactly the type of individuality that the public community is destined to suppress. What makes this particularly problematic for Greek life is the fact that it also has to recognize and develop the same

principle of individuality in its young men. The public community has to continually intervene in the lives of its members to exhort them to the public service that is necessary to hold Greek life together. It does this by its continual declarations of war against other communities, thus uprooting young men out of their "natural" state in the family and prompting them to put public glory above private enjoyment. It thus requires that its young men develop a sense of themselves as individuals at the same time that it tries to suppress the principle of individuality itself in those young men. It is a form of life that calls forth the type of agents whom, given its own self-understanding, it must also suppress.

Finally, by making its sustainability dependent on its waging wars, on its contradictory encouragement and discouragement of individuality, Greek life makes itself dependent on pure contingency, on the bravery, strength, luck, and contingent military skills of its young men. Because the Greeks (or at the least the adulated, idealized Greeks) conceived of their ethical life as quasi-natural, as something that naturally restored itself to a happy and just equilibrium, they could not come to understand that their success depended not so much on a *naturally* self-restoring form of life as on their own actions. That the equilibrium might be permanently destroyed or that it might be at odds with itself could not present itself to the Greek form of self-understanding. Underlying what looks like its happy harmony with itself is an opaqueness to itself that is similar to that opaqueness that the concluding part of the section on "Reason" in the *Phenomenology* characterizes modern life as having. Moreover, as the equilibrium of Greek life came to be more and more out of kilter, the participants in the Greek form of life would come to experience more and more a deep alienation in the activities that make up their form of life, and in its final stages, Hellenism, it would come to be characterized by what Hegel calls the "unhappy consciousness."

The idealized form of Greek life is thus not the alternative to modern life that those who venerated it believed it to be. The question is: Do any of the forms of life which historically follow it present any better alternatives? And can modern life discover the means within itself to integrate what has come before it and complete its own project?

Contingency of character and the interior self

The breakdown of the Greeks' account of themselves in terms of character as being fully constituted by the ethical life of the community, in which "the way things are done" is conceived as exhausting people's self-identities and as existing in a quasi-natural harmony, turns out to require the citizens of the ancient world to give a different account of themselves, one involving a conception of individuals as having no self-identity not contingently defined by their community. The community of late Hellenism thus turns out to be the "truth" of Greek life in that the accounts that the earlier community gave of itself turn out to require that later account in order for the later community to explain to itself how the various problems and incoherences in the earlier

account took the shape that they did. With the collapse of that older form of self-understanding, the Greeks came to believe that the only valid account they can give of themselves is that of being a community held together by mutual recognition in which the self that is recognized is insubstantial.³⁰

Individuals living in Greek ethical life took themselves to be following out the necessary ends in the life in their communities, and that this community existed in a kind of natural, self-restoring harmony with itself. They discovered, however, that those ends clashed with each other in irreconcilable ways. The breakdown of the Greek form of life thus created the "social space" in which individuals could only conceive of themselves as having basic ends determined purely contingently by a *legally* defined community. The Greek account of itself in terms of a naturally self-restoring whole thus came to be replaced by the Roman account of itself as a community held together only by custom and human law. To say that the self-identity of such a community could be determined only by human law required that the members of that community thought of themselves as having no deeper sense of self-identification with the community than the very abstract sense of belonging to this community by virtue of legally prescribed rules. Whereas in Greek life, the individual had thought that his sense of who he was flowed without rupture into his larger identification with the political community, the individual of the Roman form of life could understand his identification with the community only in the most abstract sort of way. Such a new form of life can thus only be seen as a structure of mutual recognition as *persons*, as bearers of legal rights (the human law), in which the individual's communal self-identity is fully exhausted by this legal status. The Roman citizen thus does what he does because that is "the way things are done," but this is no longer "the way things are done" in sense of being a form of *Sittlichkeit*. The "way things are done" is instead simply a form of legality, something decreed and not in any intimate way connected with the agent's subjectivity and system of desires. *He* is only accidentally identified with the activities prescribed by these legal rules, if he identifies with them at all.³¹

Whereas in earlier Greek life, the individual was *socially recognized* in terms of a network of interlocking social roles, in Roman life the individual can be given recognition only in terms of being a *legally* defined citizen and no more. Since to be a citizen of Rome was entirely an external, legal matter, and the basis of these legal rights was the possession of property, those lacking property were not really persons at all; they were therefore slaves. It is thus not accidental that *stoicism* arises in Hellenism and flourishes in Roman life. In stoicism, the content of the self is expressed in the idea that we are free in thought. In contrast to the life of the individual in Greek culture, in which the structure of mutual recognition provided a rich conception of character, the stoic conception of character has no defining end except that of indifference to everything. The empty social self that is constituted by the structure of mutual recognition as *legal persons* is mirrored in the stoic's reflective philosophy of indifference to existence. Stoicism is thereby a fitting response to the decline into Hellenism and the triumph of the Roman form of

life. The essence underlying this form of agency is the abstract structure of mutual recognition among legally defined persons that produces these empty social selves. The ends of life for the individual are contingent; there can be no necessarily defining ends outside of this very abstract end of becoming a "legal person."

In this "social space," there is only the free play of individuals who understand themselves as persons bearing legal rights. There are, of course, social roles and norms, but these are understood as being contingently imposed by the social and legal order, not as having to do with the nature of agency itself. For the Greek form of life, the social roles seemed natural to the people inhabiting them, not arbitrary roles imposed by a surrounding social order. However, since in the Roman world there is no shared understanding of any ends that are necessary for human agency, the only way of holding this kind of "social space" together is through the imposition of some arbitrary power. Yet despite its atomism, the Roman community could not have thought of itself, for example, in modern liberal terms, as a collection of mutually self-interested rational individuals interested in securing stable social arrangements, for that would require a more developed sense of *reflective individualism* as a moral and political doctrine, not just the Roman sense of empty legal personality. Moreover, the project of liberal individualism, while having its early seeds in Roman stoicism and the Roman emphasis on law and property, was not yet, nor could it have been among the conceptual alternatives available to the Roman life. The Roman life was the successor to the breakdown of the ancient Greek self-understanding; the Greek world had discovered that life is contingent, that fate deals out different destinies for individuals, and that social harmony was not the natural state of the *polis*. They had thought that they were individuals with a determinate role to play in the world that had been prescribed by eternal laws, and they thought of this as both human practice and as divine, eternal law. They thought of themselves as *individuals*, who nonetheless had determinate, set roles to play. The Roman world therefore accepted that this was who they were: individuals tossed around by fate and fortune, whose essential self-identity was exhausted in the structure of recognition among legal persons.

The Greek form of life was held together by the shared ends of that form of life, which were found to be tragically at odds with each other. Out of the collapse of a sense of shared ends emerged the conception of agency as having only the contingent ends which characterizes the Roman form of life. In that form of life, there can therefore be no other means of holding the community together except simply that of coercing individuals into submitting to a more powerful force. The inequalities that fate deals out to various individuals and groups thus becomes the basis of authority. There is no natural basis for dominion over others except that of contingent inequality. This forms an opposition at the heart of Roman life, which first appears as the struggles between patricians and plebeians and later in full form as individuals pursuing private interest against the interests of the community.³²

The harmony and stability of this community was therefore intrinsically a

problem. Why should individuals adhere to such a community? Since the modern liberal answer, that it is in the mutual benefit of all that we cooperate, could not have been on the list of available alternatives because of who the Romans were, the structure could have only been understood as being held together by powerful individuals and families. The person holding all of this together is therefore the emperor, the “lord of the world,” as Hegel calls him. The content to agency that is supplied by this type of mutual recognition is the arbitrary content supplied by the ruler – that is, the emperor. But, again, there is no natural harmony between the ruler and the ruled, so there is constant antagonism and the possibility of conflict. The ends of life pursued by these individuals vary, and there is no ultimate reason for pursuing one end as opposed to another. However, the resulting clashes between individuals were mirrored in the polytheistic religion of the Romans; they were seen as clashes of various elemental powers and fates fighting each other. There were no ends of life with which the individual as constituted in this “social space” could identify, and they thus remained profoundly alienated from each other and the community.³³

Thus, these people discover that even their status as legal persons (as citizens of the Roman empire) is contingent, that is, that there is nothing essential to their social self-identity except the fact that they are recognized as being citizens, legal persons, and that if they failed to possess property, they will lack all social recognition and thus not be *persons* at all. Reflection on this pure contingency of their social self-identity leads, as we saw, to stoicism and skepticism, to the recognition that their social personality really is in essence empty, that only in their individual self-conscious reflections are they essentially anything at all. Stoicism, skepticism (and Hegel was later to include epicureanism) are the *accounts* that Roman life gives of itself. Earlier in the *Phenomenology*, those accounts were seen to be succeeded by the “unhappy consciousness,” taken as an expression of a form of life in which the personal and universal points of view are at odds with each other such that the accounts that a form of life has given itself – the reasons it has come to accept as authoritative for itself – no longer have any hold on them, but in which there does not seem to be any acceptable or justifiable alternative set of practices or accounts. The conceptual formation of the “unhappy consciousness” is instanced in the development of the structure of mutual recognition that constitutes the “legal person.” The self-consciousness of the “legal person,” with its awareness of the contingency of social selfhood, thus leads out of the “unhappy consciousness” to the idea that its essence lies only in its self-conscious reflection on its own thoughts. The dialectic of master and slave showed that self-mastery had eluded both participants; it was thus succeeded by stoicism. Likewise, the Roman legal person finds that the only form of self-mastery available to him is the stoic retreat into oneself.³⁴

This retreat into the self marks the appearance of what in his later lectures on the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history Hegel calls interiority (*Innerlichkeit*).³⁵ The agent acquires the possibility of reflection on his own inner life, his own motivations and passions. The idea of this form of

subjective reflection had been articulated by Socrates in Athenian life, but the Greek form of life was such that the Socratic account could neither fit into the way it had understood itself, nor could its form of self-reflection be sustained by the institutional structures of Greek life since such self-reflection was inimical to the supposedly natural harmony of the Greek form of life itself. The Roman form of life created the institutional background for this to become a real possibility. Nonetheless, interiority for them necessarily has no essential content. The question now becomes for these agents what determinate content this new form of self-reflection, as reflection on their "inner lives," could have.

The Roman form of life thus creates the possibility for a new form of character in which the ends of life are set not by nature but by our own activity in terms of ends with which the individual can identify as a rational agent. By creating this "social space" for interiority, the Roman form of life thus created the possibility of the modern world.³⁶ (This comes out more clearly in the chapter on religion at the end of the *Phenomenology*.) The unhappy consciousness that marks the end of the Roman form of life thus marks a genuine turning point in the philosophical history of spirit in that it is the beginning point at which character as destiny is on the road to merging with character as *self-determination*.³⁷

Early modern life: civilization and the loss of grounds

Out of the chaos of the collapsing economy in the West and the disintegration of many social institutions, the post-Roman European world gradually managed to institutionalize itself in a variety of ways that involved the creation of an estate of nobles. The early barbarian raiders and the necessity for providing common protection for communities, along with the heritage of Roman thought preserved in the culture, created a group of people who took themselves to be those who defended the ecclesiasticals and the ordinary people of their communities. These warriors took themselves not to be simply Roman *persons* having certain legal rights but spiritual descendants of the Roman patricians, *aristocrats* who had the duty to fashion themselves along the lines of what counted as a "noble" way of living. The social standards of nobility came to give these agents a new self-consciousness (a "self-image") both of what they *were* and what they *ought* to be. In this new account of self-consciousness, the Roman conception of the essentially contingent self was retained, but it came to be understood that this contingent self was capable of fashioning itself according to certain socially set standards of what counts as a valid form of noble life. Hegel's thesis is that what emerged as the historical insufficiency of the European nobility's form of self-understanding prepared the way for the fully modern conception of social life as based on a principle of freedom as self-determination.

Hegel argues that the post-Roman European understanding of nobility thus develops out of the ways in which Roman life had come to take the accounts offered by stoicism and skepticism as authoritative for itself. The

stoical and skeptical accounts had led to a conception of the agent as free in his self-reflections, in his detaching himself from the surrounding social world.³⁸ In the post-Roman European world, this conception of freedom as detaching oneself from one's surroundings is transformed into an account of the agent as free to fashion himself according to externally set standards of aristocratic behavior. In the Roman conception, the person was only a legal entity, a bearer of rights determined by Roman law, who could be a Roman, a Teuton, or a Gaul. In the account that the Romans gave of themselves as to what counted in being a Roman, the agent's own particular character, taken from his own tradition and culture, was to be left unchallenged by Roman law. For these post-Roman agents, however, the particularities of character themselves are to be refashioned according to the external standards of what is to count as a noble. These standards are external in that they are not taken to be set by the individual agents themselves; they are simply *found* in the institutional structure of the world in which he lives. The issue, then, for such individuals has to do with how they understand these external standards (what Hegel calls the "universal") to be authoritative for them, to be standards to which they have good reasons to measure up. Everything that is particular to an agent (his "natural self" as Hegel calls it) is to be suppressed in favor of these externally (socially) set standards; the subjective point of view of the agent is to be brought in line by the agent himself to the objective (universal) point of view by his fashioning himself into an aristocrat. The agent thus becomes who he *ought* to be by suppressing what is particular to him in favor of becoming a certain *type* of person. To be a noble was to be a "type," to have cultivated oneself into measuring up to the standards of what counted as nobility.³⁹ To remain in the state of one's "natural self" was to be "base"; to become an aristocrat was therefore to *alienate* oneself into becoming that *type* of person who is "truly" noble.

Aristocracy and the ethic of honor. This process of becoming a type of person involves forming and cultivating oneself (*Bildung*).⁴⁰ The reasons that count as authoritative, therefore, have to do with what is necessary to become a cultivated individual, which for the Europeans of the late medieval and early modern periods had to do with a certain conception of nobility. Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* does not concern itself with an account of the various contingent social forces that led to the European nobility's assuming the shape that it did. Rather, the project concerns the accounts (in the form of plays, poems, and philosophy) that European life gave of itself to reassure itself that the formation of an estate of nobles that was distinct from all other estates was "in order," that its reasons for belief and action were indeed good reasons. Hegel's point in doing so is to trace out the ways in which those accounts generated out of themselves a certain skepticism about the claims they were making, and how this account of nobility paved the way for what came to be called the Enlightenment.

One of the basic features of that account of nobility had to do with the way in which an aristocrat becomes and maintains himself as an aristocrat by becoming a *type* of person (a person who typically does such and such), and

the ways in which in becoming such a type, he also thereby becomes a "true" individual, someone distinguished from the mass of others. By suppressing all aspects of his particular character and forming himself according to the socially accepted standards of what counts as nobility, he is thereby to become an individual distinct from and superior to others. The account is complicated in that it is the particular features of the agent himself – his bravery, his talents in battle, his willingness to face death – that enable him to measure up to the standards set by the social ideals of nobility. The individual is thus self-fashioning in a particular way: He utilizes his talents and character (something simply given to him by nature or "breeding") to perform the types of deeds and cultivate the types of emotions that are necessary for being a member of the nobility. Out of this demand to become a *type* of person and to feel and act only in the terms appropriate to such types emerges the outlines of an aristocratic ethics. What therefore counts as "good" is living nobly, which an aristocrat does by alienating his particular self in favor of living up to the standards of the "type" (nobility in general); what counts as "bad" is what is "base," living by the standards of commoners.⁴¹

The issue, then, has to do with how the nobles could reconcile these two aspects of their accounts of themselves. On the one hand, a noble is to sacrifice his *individual* desires by cultivating and fashioning himself into conforming to those external standards that determine what counts as a noble life; on the other hand, in doing so, he is to distinguish himself *as an individual*, to set himself off from the crowd of others through his pursuit and achievement of glory, which consists of acquiring honor in the eyes of others or defending his (inborn) honor before others. A noble is thus required to sacrifice his *particular* characteristics to make himself a *type* of person (who is such a type *only* in being recognized by others) and in doing so thereby making himself into an *individual*.⁴² In practice, European nobles did this through the exercise of warfare. Risking death for glory, the late medieval knights, many of whom claimed to trace their ancestry to those who fought with Charlemagne, warred with each other, and often laid waste to the countryside in their pursuit of such glory. Glory was attained in gaining territory and status for oneself and one's family. In this way, the use of violence came to be idealized by the nobility, and the main objects of noble ambition thus came to be war and politics (which itself was generally taken as a means of enhancing their status by territorial and other gains). Moreover, the great civil wars in Europe in the 1600s had led to the renewal of the cult of aristocracy with its emphasis on glory and violence, despite the fact that by this time the various knights had long since learned the art of raising mercenary armies and no longer fit the chivalric descriptions they gave of themselves.⁴³

The aristocrat who understands himself according to the chivalric code takes himself to be defending his honor (which is always honor in the eyes of others) by defending the honor of his lord (the noble who is above him). This constitutes politics, and the aristocrat takes himself to be who he is by virtue of his attachment to *state power*.⁴⁴ To be truly noble is to act for the interest

of the "state" (or the authoritative political body or person). By the chivalric account that such people give to themselves, the man of true honor subordinates his own well-being to the good of the state (embodied in his ties to his feudal lord) and acts only out of that sense of honor. The *right* (that is, the *ethical*) thing to do is that which is required in order to defend one's honor, and that dictates that one selflessly serve the state by being willing to fight for it. (The medieval division of society into the estates of ecclesiastics, nobles, and commoners had as its rationale the idea of a division of social functions: "I pray for you, I fight for you, I work for you.") But this so-called selfless service to the state is, like all pursuits of honor, a pursuit of something that *only* counts in the eyes of others. Honor unrecognized is not honor. The pursuit of honor in the eyes of others is thus a particular end, something that the individual may be expected to pursue out of concern for his own personal standing. Yet, peculiarly, so Hegel argues, the noble is supposed to take himself as pursuing this *self-interested* goal *selflessly*.

This constitutes the aristocratic "ethic of honor," one realization of which would be the ethos displayed by the seventeenth-century English cavaliers and their relation to Charles. For these nobles, there is nothing more important than duty to the king or queen, and the highest virtue for them is that of *honor*. Honor, especially for the cavaliers, was a matter of pure artifice. In making oneself a man of honor, one became a person who in his clothing, deportment and manner of life exhibited a lack of concern for the so-called petty details of individual life (thus separating himself off from the commoner-bourgeois). This aristocratic "ethic of honor" required great self-restraint and an overarching concern for one's reputation in the eyes of others. It required, that is, that this self-forming individual appear to act from an impersonal, detached point of view, while at the same time exhibiting a controlled passion in doing so. The cavalier both feigns indifference to normal things and claims passionate attachment to others; he claims to act from an impersonal code of honor, and he claims that this impersonal code is his deepest personal end. (This kind of ethic is nicely and concisely expressed by Richard Lovelace's well known lines, "I could not love thee, Deare, so much/ Lov'd I not honour more", as he explains to Lucasta that he must go to battle: "True; a new Mistressse now I chase/The first Foe in the Field; And with a stronger Faith embrace/A Sword, a Horse, a Shield."⁴⁵) His bearing is expressed in his willingness to die in warfare for his king, for his honor. Thus, by the account that the cavalier gives to himself and to others, the cavalier has a set of ends, which include the attitude of nonchalance vis-à-vis all things, the necessity of self-restraint and avoidance of excessive or deep emotion, and the overwhelming duty to the king. Achievement of these ends is necessary for him to maintain his status as being a man of artifice.

In return for his services to his lord, the noble also thereby acquires *wealth*, which is a mark of his status and prestige, but which under the terms of the aristocratic ethic may not count as the end or motive for which he acts (which is to be honor itself). Nonetheless, honor requires wealth in that without having wealth (in the forms of lands or offices) bestowed on one, one

has not acquired honor. Of course, there are those (for example, the merchants, who, along with the peasants, count as commoners) who pursue not honor but simply wealth itself, and who as a result may indeed be wealthier than the nobles.⁴⁶ However, they cannot be men of honor, for they do not act in the service of the state, and thus they cannot be truly noble. Since neither way of being (knight or merchant) is natural to anybody, the agent is free to choose which of these ends he shall pursue in the sense that there is no natural or external ground on which to make the choice. The individual must simply make the independent judgment himself. The noble, to be noble, must choose to subordinate his will to the will of the state (to his feudal lord); the merchant must choose to pursue his own self-interest and acquire wealth. Each must therefore choose the ends of service to the state or the pursuit of wealth on the basis of which one appears to them to be the proper (the good) choice and one that appears to be the inappropriate (the bad) the choice.⁴⁷ In the eyes of the merchant, the noble will be seen to be foolishly sacrificing himself for some chimerical idea, and the noble will see the merchant as acting only on the base motives of private gain. But since there can be no independent or natural basis of making that choice, the agent must therefore simply *opt* for pursuing one or the other, and whatever judgment the agent makes will also involve choosing at the same time the criteria that will make the other's choice appear to be the wrong one. Each has to make a *criterionless* choice – that is, a choice that involves choosing the criteria that then in turn justifies the choice itself. Because in making the judgment about which life he is to pursue, each also thereby necessarily chooses the criteria for making the choice itself, each will *necessarily* see the other's choice as bad, as the “negative,” as not conforming to the “true” set of values.⁴⁸ What the spirit of this social world will seem to be – that is, what seems to be the only good account that this social world can give to itself of what counts as authoritative reasons for belief or action – will itself be constituted in the choices and judgments that these two types of agents make.

Each of these judgments does more than simply condemn the other's choice as bad. From the standpoint of each, the other judgment seems to be internally incoherent *on its own terms* in a way that validates the standpoint of the agent making the judgment. From the standpoint of the agent who only pursues wealth, for example, the noble's choice seems flatly contradictory. On the one hand, the aristocrat is free to choose the life of nobility. Indeed, it is his free choice, to lay everything on the line for the sake of that honor that supposedly gives him his noble character. Honor, however, is duty in the service of state power, which for a medieval knight is identical with fealty to his sovereign prince. This makes him an aristocrat, who in the scheme of things in the hierarchical social order of medieval and early modern European life thereby elevates himself above the “commoner,” and especially the bourgeois, who act only for the sake of acquiring wealth: He “fights” whereas the bourgeois only “works” for him and the other aristocrats. However, in pursuing his honor, his own personal ends are completely subordinated to those of the lord above him in the feudal hierarchy. As subordinate to the lord above

him in the hierarchy, he is thus formally no different from the bourgeois who is lower than him in the hierarchy. To be sure, his personal reward – the riches conferred on him that in turn enable him to live the extravagant life typical of an aristocrat – give free rein to his personal desires (those that do not involve honor but simply his own idiosyncratic wishes and wants). However, seen from the standpoint of the bourgeois-commoner, this only reinforces the similarity between the aristocrat and the bourgeois-commoner (in particular, with the bourgeois-commoner who apes the manners and styles of the aristocracy and who, to boot, has more wealth with which to do it). Indeed, as far as serving the state goes, the bourgeois-commoner can argue that what he does – produce wealth – is in fact of better service to the state, since it produces in turn more wealth for all, whereas the knightly aristocrat simply squanders wealth in the pursuit of glory and military conquest.

On the other hand, from the aristocrat's point of view, the merchant's judgment is equally incoherent. The merchant cannot look at things from anything other than his own subjective ("base") point of view, whereas the whole order of things – including the stability of the towns in which the merchant carries on his business – demands that the state keep that order with its laws and commands, which is impossible without the deeds of the aristocratic knights who subordinate their personal point of view to the objective point of view of state power from which honor and distinction flow. What counts in life is to cultivate oneself so that one may be distinguished in the eyes of others, and to concentrate only on wealth is to abandon oneself to what is only transitory in life, to cut oneself off from the possibility of establishing one's honor and glory in the eyes of others. The bourgeois-commoner effectively prevents himself from ever acting for the honor of things, since he is too imprisoned in the pursuit of his own satisfactions.⁴⁹

The truth of the matter, though, is that both ways of making their judgments contain each other's principles, although this is hidden to each. Each takes his activity to be justified in terms of its serving the general good of state power – the bourgeois increases its wealth, the aristocrat achieves and defends its glory – and each takes his own personal satisfaction to be justified in terms of his serving this end. The bourgeois's self-seeking is justified (so he can claim) by his producing and increasing the wealth of the state; and the aristocrat's so-called selflessness (as he can understand it) is justified because of the way he thereby extends the glory of state power.⁵⁰ The aristocrat thereby identifies his ends with those of state power and despises the bourgeois, the man without honor; the aristocrat enjoys his wealth because it is a sign of his service to the state or to the lord, a reward that he takes himself fully to deserve because of his honor and his selfless devotion. The bourgeois, on the other hand, sees state power only in terms of the way it (to him) unjustifiably interferes with his own private pursuits, even when he understands his own private pursuits to be increasing the wealth of the state. In terms of the aristocratic ethics that constitutes this form of "spirit," the bourgeois will therefore experience himself as alienated from the state, since what counts in this form of life is honor, and the bourgeois by his own way of

life and the virtues he espouses (for example, his industry, frugality and his attention to business) is excluded from ever acquiring such honor. The aristocratic ethos as the ethos of this form of life seems to make the aristocrat fully identify with his activities in the service of the state, and to compel the bourgeois to be fully alienated in his activities of seeking wealth.⁵¹

At this point, then, the bourgeois-commoner understands himself in the terms set by the aristocratic ethos. Only the internal inadequacy of that ethos, so Hegel will argue, will lead the bourgeois in modern life to a different, more affirmative, and non-alienated understanding of himself. In terms of the aristocratic ethos, though, it is assumed that self-worth (or inner respect, *innere Achtung*, as Hegel calls it⁵²) is something that can only be bestowed by the opinion of others; although depending on the performance of certain deeds, honor or glory nonetheless only exists in others *taking one to be* possessed of honor or glory. In this way, the aristocrat can take himself to possess honor, since he can be recognized as having it, whereas the commoner-bourgeois must take himself to be necessarily lacking it. Each therefore is fully *alienated* in that each takes his self-identity to be dependent on that which is outside himself, the opinions of others. On its own, the self is empty; it is, as Hegel puts it, "pure consciousness," having no self-identity outside of that which it acquires in the recognition by others. The freedom that each acquires can therefore only be an alienated and not a fully realized form of freedom.

The feudal aristocrat thus takes himself to be the man of true *virtue*, which he identifies as his willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of honor and as that strength of character that enables a truly noble character to triumph over others. This virtue is something to which the commoner-bourgeois cannot aspire, mired as he is in the pursuit of private ends. In terms of the accounts that this form of life gives to itself, he embodies, as Hegel says, the "heroism of *service*" to the "higher" callings, indeed, to honor itself.⁵³ In *cultivating* himself to display his loyalty to his overlord or to his political community, he rises above self-seeking concerns and achieves honor in the eyes of others and therefore for himself. (Honor is the "universal," that which is taken as authoritative from a detached, impersonal point of view) By taking this detached view toward himself, the aristocrat integrates his *self* into communal opinion, into a more objective point of view, and he produces thereby the social and political order that in turn affirms his sense of who he is. He exists for honor, for the service of the state; the commoner-bourgeois, on the other hand, exists only for his own ends, not the "higher" ends of service, honor, and glory. According to the story that the aristocrat tells himself, he does not think of his own good but only that of the good of others (thus, the popular tales of noblemen coming to the aid of women, commoners, and the meek). By this account, therefore, the noble is ideally suited for political life in a way that the commoner-bourgeois cannot be, for the latter seeks only his own ends and not the common good, whereas the knightly aristocrat puts aside his own private ends for the good of the state and for the honor of serving the community.

Hegel argues that the logic of this aristocratic self-conception leads to a conception of the legitimacy of a conception of absolutist monarchy. In making that claim, Hegel is again not asserting anything about the complex social causes that led from the loose associations of medieval feudalism to the absolutist monarchies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He is instead making a claim about the logic of the accounts that these forms of life gave of themselves in terms of how they tried to reassure themselves that the kinds of reasons that they had come to *take* as authoritative for themselves “really were” good reasons. The accounts that the nobles give of themselves – as men willing to risk death for the sake of honor and glory, who act not out of personal ends but out of their chivalric duties to the overlord or to others who need their help – served this purpose, and in turn generated its own kind of skepticism about itself. The aristocrats claim that they are suited for politics in ways that commoners (and especially the bourgeoisie) are not because the aristocrat is not concerned for his own private ends but for the public ends of the “state.” However, the aristocrats who form the early versions of the “state of the estates” (the *Ständestaat*) of early modern Europe in fact disagree vehemently among themselves as to what that public interest is in ways that undermine their claims to be acting only out of selfless interests. Each aristocrat gives his own counsel to the lord concerning how the state is to be run, and the counsel of different aristocrats conflicts with the counsels given by others. Indeed, in the “state of estates,” it seems as if there is no real structure of government per se to mediate among the conflicting pieces of advice and counsel; instead, there seems to be only a loose collection of aristocrats each haughtily asserting his “privileges” against the others.⁵⁴ Yet to the extent that one noble asserts *his* “privileges” against another, he begins to appear more like the commoner-bourgeois than he is supposed to be, at least given the terms of the aristocratic ethic. To the extent that the nobles begin to appear to each other as agents simply asserting their own interests (in the form of their “privileges”) against each other, they begin to doubt that the accounts they give of themselves – men who put honor and service above their own particular ends – can be correct.

Aristocracy and absolute monarchy. Since honor counts as honor only in the eyes of others, who must themselves be peers (for only a peer, a man of honor himself, can suitably bestow honor on another), it follows that if these aristocrats are to reassure themselves that their accounts of themselves are in order, they must therefore all be subordinate to some *one* aristocrat who is above all of them and on whom all honor depends. Honor consists in the “heroism of service,” of acting for the good of the “state” and *being seen by one’s peers* to be acting for the sake of such honor. However, if the “state” in question is only a collection of nobles, each asserting that he acts only for the good of the state while at the same time asserting his own “privileges” against the others, then each will fail to have honor even as he asserts it against others. The conflicts among the nobles thus require that the state, the political community, be embodied in a peer, who at the same time is above all the others, such that *his* interests simply *are* the state’s interests. The absolute

monarchy of Louis XIV, the "sun king," thus completes the logic of the self-understandings of the early modern European nobility, and serves to affirm the nobles' understanding of themselves.⁵⁵

Hegel argues that this move to absolute monarchy, however, brings to the forefront what the aristocratic ethic actually entailed. Historically, this was accomplished by Louis XIV's undoing the nobility's traditional power in order to secure his own. The *Fronde*, a revolt against the king in the 1640s in which various elements of the nobility played key roles, occurred when Louis was about five years old, and it had left him with the conviction that he had to keep the nobles under control if he himself was to survive. The nobility, which had been a fractious and capricious element of French society, believed that it would cooperate with the king only if he would recognize their "privileges" and status. (Indeed, just what constituted nobility was itself a matter of great dispute in the French society of the seventeenth century, since the older nobility wished to draw distinctions between themselves and the newly ennobled.) For political reasons, Louis XIV moved his royal court out of Paris and into the new quarters of Versailles, and he required the chief nobility to take up residence there, more or less so that he could keep an eye on them. In place of the former cult of violence and glory, which had taken center stage for the Valois kings, the aristocrats under the reign of the Bourbon king, Louis XIV, were therefore to find honor by virtue of their *being* at the court and participating in the highly elaborate court rituals that centered around the king himself. (As has often been noted, the aristocratic ideal thus ceased to be that of glory through violent conquest and became instead that of glory in being allowed to hold Louis's coat as he dressed.) By gathering all the chief aristocrats around him at Versailles, Louis XIV was thereby able to defuse any potential rebellion on the part of the aristocracy. The artists of the day provided the requisite account of this new form of aristocracy. In particular, Pierre Corneille in his plays managed to transfer the old aristocratic ethos of violence, honor and glory to the stage, leaving the actual aristocrats to establish their honor through court intrigue and the fostering of the arts. The older aristocratic ethos of attaining glory and honor by triumphing over others in violent ways (for example, through warfare and duels) had no place at the court at Versailles. Hence, as the aristocratic images of violent and glorious triumph over others became displaced to the stage, the aristocrats in the court came to attempt their triumph over others by besting them in wordplay and wit.⁵⁶ The duels between aristocrats for the sake of honor thus came to be carried out with words, not with swords. Eventually, the style of court life at Versailles extended itself to the nobility living apart from Versailles, who began to gather at salons in order to display their own cultivation in "conversational warfare."

The project of the *Phenomenology* does not have to do with the social causes and conditions of Louis XIV's ability to consolidate power in himself alone but in the way in which the set of contingent events that eventuated in the mores and ethos of royal court life in Versailles had to be redescribed in the aristocracy's account of itself and the way in which the logic of that

account (its attempts to reassure itself about the authority of the ground-rules it had come to accept) necessitated something like the kind of absolute monarchy that Louis XIV came to embody. Hegel's argument therefore does not have to do with the contingent reasons and social forces that are necessary to explain how the individual, Louis XIV, managed to amass all power to himself and to calm the aristocracy into obeying him; it is that the accounts that the European nobility had given of themselves dialectically required *something like* the social role of "absolute monarch" that Louis XIV stepped into and transformed in his own image.

Given the necessity to acquire honor in the eyes of others and thereby to be distinct from the commoner-bourgeois, the aristocrats needed some "peer" who was capable of bestowing such honor on them. The old aristocratic ethic of acquiring honor by triumphing over others in combat could not sustain itself, for it threatened to make the nobles into the same kind of person as the commoner-bourgeois – men in pursuit only of their own private ends. In practical terms, the pursuit of the old aristocratic ethos threatened to do away with the nobility itself, given the losses noble families inevitably suffered in the continual violence and struggles for supremacy and the conditions of modern warfare with its dependence on mercenary armies. In conceptual terms, it called into question the whole legitimacy of the reasons that the nobility had given as to why it was different from others and why this difference gave it alone the right to participate in political life.

The aristocrat who alienates himself by taking his self-identity to lie outside of him in the recognition of his aristocratic honor by others therefore needs some criterion of what is to count as honor in the eyes of others. At the royal court, it is the ability to act in terms of courtly behavior and to distinguish oneself in the eyes of others. Instead of being something demonstrated by "sword and shield," this must become primarily a *linguistic* activity, so Hegel argues, because only in that kind of activity of besting others through the brandishing of a sophisticated wit and the wielding of the sneering *bon mot* can an aristocrat display his *cultivated* manner as something that is not available to the commoner-bourgeois who must live outside the life of the royal court and who accordingly can never acquire the kind of cultivated manners of those who move within the royal orbit. The ability to dominate others through witty, barbed repartee thus becomes the standard by which honor comes to be measured. This form of self-presentation is particularly important for the nobles to be able to distinguish themselves from the commoner-bourgeoisie, since the latter can always acquire the proper clothes, hairstyles, and the like so that from the outside they may appear to be nobility. But, so the account goes, they will always be exposed as soon as they begin to speak. (Corneille's comedies, for example, often have to do with the way in which bourgeois pretenders to nobility give themselves away by their mannerisms or their cowardice.) This manner of self-presentation is a logical expression of the alienated self, which must always be reflecting on itself and foregoing other personal ends in order to become the "type" of person who is truly noble. What distinguishes the truly noble type of person is the way in

which he can carry on conversation in the proper, witty, and ultimately triumphant manner. This new form of the aristocratic ethos requires not only the great amount of self-control that was needed for the earlier forms of the aristocratic ethos; it also requires a sophisticated kind of self-reflection about one's behavior in the face of others.

The aristocratic ethos thus comes to require that the agent distance himself from himself and observe himself carefully to insure that he live up to the ideals of nobility. The norms that structure the practices that inform the social institution of nobility consequently lead to a conception of the self as the "pure self," which both evaluates itself as to whether it measures up to the behavior and passions that are required of noble characters and that is distinct from and prior to any ends it may choose. In Hegel's terms, this self is "reflected out of" its practices and goals "into itself." It thereby constitutes itself as a kind of formal "point" from which the practices of criticism and evaluation are carried out.⁵⁷

What holds these aristocrats together are the accounts that each accepts as authoritative for himself, the "spirit" of the Bourbon aristocracy. The social practice of dueling with words in the context of maintaining one's honor within the structures of court life – of displaying oneself to others as being a cultivated (*gebildete*) person *au courant* with the arts – creates a structure of mutual recognition in which the alienation of each party is manifest to the others, and in which such alienation is understood to be a condition of being a proper "type" of person. In these conversational duels and intrigues to see who has the upper hand in court life, each recognizes the other as a man or woman of honor, even as each seeks verbally to subdue the other; this recognition is mediated by the structure not merely of reasons that each has come to take as authoritative but in terms of the mutually acknowledged accounts that each gives. Thus, in the court of Louis XIV, life and theater began to merge. The nobles found out how they were to behave and feel, for example, by seeing the plays of Corneille, which also served to give them an account of why the reasons for belief and action that they accepted (that which distinguishes them as true nobility, *gentilhommes*) were in fact good reasons, and to give them the models of nobility which they were to imitate.⁵⁸ (In Corneille's plays, such as *Le Cid*, the action serves to affirm the idea that such truly noble people were indeed above the codes of ordinary morality, indeed, were different from all "ordinary" people in the nature of their passions and designs.⁵⁹)

The aristocrat as courtier. Corresponding to the purification of the conception of the self as being distinct from and prior to all its ends is an equally abstract conception of state power. The noble who understands himself as pursuing only honor makes a criterionless choice, and it is the nature of this type of choice that constitutes him as a pure self. There are no standards that exist prior to the choice of whether he is to be "noble" or "base" – that is, there is no natural hierarchy that determines whether he is to live the "base" life of a bourgeois or to pursue honor. The choice is groundless, and therefore *can* only be made by a "pure" self. But since honor can only be bestowed by others, the aristocrats require some *person* to bestow that honor. Since all

honor therefore emanates from that person, the aristocrat has a duty as an aristocrat to serve him. In deferring to the absolute monarch, the noble constitutes the monarch as an absolute monarch. A non-absolute monarch is limited by the "privileges" of the estates, particularly the nobility; but by sacrificing all his "privileges" to the "state" – which in reality means sacrificing his "privileges" to another aristocrat – the noble constitutes that other person as unlimited in his authority. Independently of its social causes, the transformation of the Valois knights into the fawning courtiers of the Bourbon royal court of Louis XIV realized a certain logic of the self-understanding of the French nobility: "The heroism of silent service becomes the *heroism of flattery*."⁶⁰ In sacrificing everything of his *self* to the state as personified in the absolute monarch, the aristocrat-courtier constitutes the state itself as that which bestows honor upon him. Whereas previously he would have held a title and independence on his own (as the Duke of such-and-such), he now has his title as the Duke of such-and-such only when his having that title is recognized by the monarch. (Hegel's discussion of this obviously alludes to the development of French court life in which the titles of the nobility came to be seen as dependent on Louis's recognition of them; although this was historically false as an account of the origin and legitimacy of titles, in claiming this privilege Louis nonetheless portrayed himself to be doing only that which French kings had always done.⁶¹) By ceding the monarch this "privilege," the nobility constitutes him as the absolute monarch which the monarch claims to be.

The outlines of the master/slave dialectic are thereby repeated for the relationship between the king and his aristocrat-courtiers. The king gets his own point of view to be determinative for the point of view of others; for the aristocrat-courtiers, the king's ends are their ends, and they make him into the absolute monarch (the "master" of all) in their *accepting* the king's ends as their own. State power, which until then had been only an abstract conception of "that to which a chivalric man of honor was loyal," now becomes *sovereignty*, an authority from which all lesser authorities derive. A sovereign is the person or institution whose power cannot be limited by anything else. For the older nobility, state power was an ideal (in Hegel's terms, an "abstraction"), which they as chivalric men of honor both defended and "heroically seized" for themselves. However, as being constituted by them as that which bestows honor upon them, absolutist state power becomes something that constitutes them as the aristocrats they claim to be. Formerly, each noble was independent and claimed his traditional "privileges"; but in collectively ceding their claims to honor to the king, they lose that independence and in effect those "privileges" (although they continue to account for themselves in those terms).

Hegel, again, is offering this *not* as an explanation of the social forces that led to the loss of independence by the nobility under the reign of Louis XIV but as a dialectical reconstruction of the accounts that this form of life gave of itself (in other words, as a dialectical account of their "spirit" in terms of its being a "formation of consciousness"). Given their conceptions of themselves

as men of honor and the skepticism about that status that the accounts generate, the nobility are led to give an account of themselves in terms of court life and the bestowal of honor upon them by the king. The set of "ancient laws" that had bestowed their "privileges" upon them thus becomes "reflected into itself" in becoming identified with the personal will of the monarch. The monarch becomes the absolute monarch not in subduing the other nobles by force but in having them alienate themselves and constitute him as the absolute monarch in their flattery of him, the sovereign "point" (the "empty name," as Hegel calls it) from which all "true honor" is dispensed.⁶² The dialectical logic of this move is similar to other dialectical moves having to do with "spirit": An account is given of why certain reasons that had come to be taken as authoritative really are authoritative, a skeptical response is engendered out of those accounts, an attempt at reassurance and affirmation is pursued, and its failure necessitates a new set of authoritative reasons.

No longer Valois knight-aristocrats but now Bourbon aristocrat-courtiers, the nobles come to see their wealth not as a reward for service but as something they can manage to capture for themselves by shrewd maneuvering and wise investment. The aristocrat-courtiers thus become sharp-eyed men of commerce. (This parallels the way in which much of the traditional nobility that did not live at court became gradually impoverished; relying only on their traditional rents, they were unable to keep up with those astute urban investors residing at Versailles.) They become, that is, like the commoner-bourgeoisie from whom they had previously distinguished themselves in that they become pursuers of their own private ends. In the accounts of aristocratic life, the flattery of the monarch and the careful ballet of court life thereby becomes only a formality surrounding what *in its own terms* must be taken as a "base" pursuit – not the attainment of honor but the acquisition of personal wealth. This too follows out the logic of the accounts the nobility gives of itself. Honor is bestowed through the eyes of others; although all honor ultimately comes from the king, there must be intrigue to see who can persuade the king to bestow such honor and recognition. Each finds therefore that his honor is dependent on the whims of others and on their recognition of him as a man of honor. Deprived of any self-identity except that conferred by recognition at court, each realizes himself as therefore dependent on the others for recognition, and each therefore finds his self-identity to be "outside himself," to exist only in the view of others. Like the slave of the master/slave dialectic, the aristocrat-courtier finds that there is no natural hierarchy of ends that recommends itself to him; everything that he had taken to be true turns out to be a matter of contingency, and, as a "pure self" he finds himself living therefore in a groundless world in which the lack of criteria to choose ends becomes evident – that is, in which the criterionless judgments come to appear as they are: *criterionless*, without external supporting grounds.⁶³ Having thus constituted himself as a "pure self" (a self whose self-identity is completely external to him), the aristocrat-courtier finds that he can no longer identify with the ends of state power, for those ends can only be contingently his own ends. The reassurance that his transformation from a

Valois knight-aristocrat into a Bourbon courtier-aristocrat had provided in turn generates a self-undermining skepticism. His reflections on himself come to possess an internal contradictoriness in that what he takes to be defining for what is authoritative for himself (being a noble of the royal court and therefore having the "honor" and "privileges" of that nobility) turns out to be self-undermining: Life at the court is not spent in determining what is best for the community but in fawning over the king and engaging in verbal courtly intrigue with other courtiers as a way of marking one's "distinction," and it is *profitably* spent in making lucrative urban investments (which is to say, in pursuing ends incommensurate with the ideal of "honor"). For the aristocrat-courtier to take himself to be an aristocrat (and not merely a commoner-bourgeois) within the terms of the account he gives himself, he must therefore develop some new practice through which he can distinguish himself from the commoner-bourgeoisie. This necessity was realized in the aristocrat-courtier's becoming a *patron* of the arts (particularly of bourgeois artists), which was to affirm for him that he was indeed a noble, a man of honor who pursued the common good rather than his own private ends.

This is, of course, simply more groundless action, since there can be no natural hierarchy of ends that supports this self-conception. However, within the account that the noble has come to give of himself as a man of cultivation (*Bildung*), the practices involved in playing the role of "patron of the arts" has as its goal the affirmation for the nobles that they remain free and independent "masters" since their clients (the bourgeois artists and writers) are indeed dependent on them for sustenance. But there can be no real criteria for what would count as the kind of art that should be supported, since the traditional criteria have been fully called into question by the kinds of skepticism that the nobility's accounts of themselves have occasioned. Thus, the bourgeois client of the aristocrat-patron is aware of his dependence on the patron, while at the same time the aristocrat becomes aware of his dependence on the client to legitimate his claims to being a man of "honor" and "cultivation."

As the noble comes to understand himself as a dependent patron, a sycophant and (like the commoner-bourgeois) a person who pursues the private end of accumulating wealth, the "groundlessness" of this life becomes more apparent in the accounts that this form of life gives of itself. In its earlier accounts of what was authoritative for it, this form of life had accepted that there was a natural hierarchy of ends, and that these ends were "natural" to some personalities and not to others. Thus, the aristocrat would understand that his passion for "honor" and his flouting of conventional morality was a "natural" part of his self-identity, which he was both expressing and defending.⁶⁴ But with the logical development of the nobility's accounts of who it takes itself to be, any appeal to any "natural" self or to the "natural order" ceases to be authoritative.

The "groundless" self. Hegel takes Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* to be the most accurate portrayal of the logical conclusion to which this form of life leads. *Rameau's Nephew* is written in the form of a dialogue: An "I" (a

philosophe) has a conversation with a "he" in the gardens of the *Palais Royale* about the way in which the "he" makes his living. The "he" is the supposed nephew of the popular composer Rameau; the nephew makes his living as a client of various wealthy families, supposedly teaching the members of the family musical skills, and during the dialogue he displays a wild oscillation from buffoonery to profundity as he explains how a man like himself makes a living in the houses of the rich and the aristocratic. *Rameau's Nephew* critically assesses one of the great conceits of the day – the idea that the "true" men and women of cultivation – the artists and writers – formed a kind of community that was independent of the prevarications of the nobles. The inhabitants of this community were not, however, the independent, free-spirited men and women of cultivation that they had taken themselves to be; they were just as much part of the patronage system and its culture of groundless selfhood as were anybody else. As Diderot constructs the character of Rameau's nephew, he is the man without substance, the cosmopolitan who attempts to live without any mediating institutions and to rely only on the force of his own talents or creativity in a world where the practices have to do with wealthy patrons dispensing various favors. Far from being an independent man, he is actually the highest form of servant. By detaching his *self* from everything, the nephew has sought to identify completely with whatever task he took on, and the result is a debased person who is fully conscious of his debasement and in fact both identifies with it and revels in it. The "I" of the dialogue – who represents at once the voice of "common sense" and of the character type of the eighteenth-century *philosophe* – is shocked by the nephew's self-conscious debasement and tries to offer him a series of arguments to show that it contravenes some basic or natural object of life. However, as the dialogue progresses, it becomes evident that the nephew is simply presenting to his noble and well-off employers only a mirror of the alienated, "pure selves" that they themselves are. He says that he appears to others as they wish him to appear: If it is better to appear virtuous, then he appears virtuous; if it is better to appear buffoonish, then he appears buffoonish. In short, the nephew is the bourgeois equivalent of an aristocrat at the royal court. The commonsensical "I" in the dialogue asserts, generally in short sentences or phrases, the accepted judgments about what is good and bad, virtuous and wicked, but he is almost always thwarted by the nephew who either gets him to admit that what the nephew says is true or at least leaves him without a reply.⁶⁵ The "I" insists that the nephew is leading a dishonorable life in so shamelessly degrading himself before others; but he cannot come up with a better account than the nephew has given as to why he should change. The "I" in the dialogue shares the "social space" of the nephew but deceives himself as to where the accounts that he gives of what is authoritative for both of them lead.⁶⁶

The dialogue between the buffoonish musician and the "I" in *Rameau's Nephew* reveals that the musician is the character who speaks the truth about where the accounts of the culture of the aristocrat-courtiers (and its non-noble entourage of writers, thinkers, artists, and wealthy bourgeois-

commoners) ultimately leads. There is no way to resolve the difficulties of this account within its own terms, for it has completed itself in its account of itself as internally self-undermining. The “pure self” that emerges out of the development of the culture of “cultivation” must therefore understand its surrounding social world as simply vanity, as a pretense in which each participates in order to pursue his own personal ends, all the while avowing only to be concerned for “higher things” or for “honor” itself. This “pure self” is distinct from and prior to all determinate ends. From the standpoint of this “pure self”, all statements about hierarchies of ends (about some things being inherently better than other things) must be simply vanity embodied; such assertions could only really be the preferences and ends of one person or group disguised as the preferences and ends of “mankind” (or something like that) – that is, they can only be one person’s or group’s attempts to manipulate others for their own advantage by giving their actions a counterfeit patina of disinterestedness. Even the agent’s own statements of ends have to be seen by the agent himself as vanity, as something to which he is not really committed. Not only is the “pure self” alienated from ends of others; he is also necessarily alienated from his own ends. Diderot’s portrayal of the nephew, so Hegel argues, perfectly represents this alienated type of character.

The account that this form of life thus gives for itself logically develops from the account of aristocratic men and women of “honor” seeking only the “higher things” into an account of the vanity of all ends, including one’s own. The only “grounds” that can count as authoritative are those that pertain to this “pure self” detached from its particular aims and its particular social world. This, of course, does not mean that these alienated agents cease to pursue the ends of power and wealth; it simply means that they can no longer see these as grounded in any particularly good account of themselves and their world. All that counts is the detached self itself that stands above all these ends.

For this kind of alienated agent to maintain any kind of coherent self-identity, therefore, he requires an account of what could be an authoritative reason that does not take as “given” any inherited or natural end. In order to be able to develop such an account, these agents must be able to discover within the self that is prior to all ends a set of ends that is somehow appropriate to that self. The groundless self that is the result of the development of European aristocracy thus must find its grounds, somehow, within itself.⁶⁷

Modern life as Enlightenment and as faith

The aristocratic ethos that had provided a basis for European thought and action led to the collapse of that ethos in a kind of “groundlessness.” The logic of the accounts that the aristocratic form of life gave of itself led to a complete skepticism toward the older assertions about there being a natural, discoverable hierarchy of ends that could provide an authoritative “ground” for belief and action. The “groundlessness” of European life that thus appeared seemed to require therefore that some account be given such that the newly “ground-

less" self could produce its own grounds. Unless the experience of "groundlessness" was to lead to nihilism (which, as the culture of "vanity," the aristocratic account threatened to do), it had to be able to give an account of itself that showed how self-distancing individuals could discover or invent such grounds within the practices of "detached reflection" itself.

The rejection of tradition and authority. Two different movements emerged out of this experience of "groundlessness": the movement known as the "Enlightenment," with its characteristic emphasis on unbiased thought and observation and on a kind of "passionate naturalism," and a parallel set of emotionalist religious movements – Pietism in Germany, Jansenism and Quietism in France, Wesleyanism in Great Britain – that Hegel generically refers to as "faith." Both movements are characterized by the assumptions that (1) for an agent to know something is to submit it to certain authoritative grounds that are not themselves dependent on any transcendent source for their own authentication (although these authoritative grounds may themselves serve to authenticate belief in something transcendent); and that (2) for an agent to know something is to be in possession of "grounds of belief" that hold universally for all individuals. Each reacted to the "groundlessness" of European life brought on by the self-undermining nature of the aristocratic ethos by seeking universal "grounds" that would therefore not be dependent on the idiosyncrasies of particular cultures.

Although the two movements shared this conception of what are the authentic ground rules of knowledge and action, they nonetheless understood themselves to be unalterable opponents of each other's position. For example, whereas many Enlightenment figures disagreed among themselves about what would be the best or most rational social order, there was widespread agreement among the "republic of letters" and the *philosophes* that whatever form the better social order was to take, it would certainly not contain the past Christian religion in any clearly recognizable form, since that religion represented to them all that was superstitious and backward – in short, represented every practice that looked to discredited transcendent grounds to authenticate knowledge and action. Thus, the Enlightenment *philosophes'* main object of attack was religion in general and Christianity in particular, rather than many other aspects of the social order. Hegel argues that this attack on religion was in a deep sense a matter of self-deception on the part of the Enlightenment, since both the *philosophes* and the objects of their attacks shared a common conception of what it meant to know something, and thus shared a deeper self-identity than either of the antagonists in the dispute could admit to themselves.

Nor, so Hegel further argues, is it accidental that the main object of Enlightenment attack was Christian religion. Enlightenment thought is primarily "negative" in that it raises skeptical attacks on various accounts which European life had given of itself in the modern period. However, the Enlightenment did not raise these skeptical attacks with the purpose of undermining the project of modern life in any way (and returning, for example, to a pre-modern, medieval past) but rather for the purpose of cleansing modern life of

what it took to be beliefs and practices extraneous to its project – namely, those that could not be supported by impartial, unbiased scrutiny (that is, “pure insight”). It thereby hoped to refashion modern life’s project into a form more consistent with itself. For this purpose, there was little reason for the *philosophes* to concentrate their attacks on the vanity of court culture, for that culture itself and its chroniclers had already done a good job of exposing itself for what it was. Having become quite conscious to itself about its foibles, court life required no further assistance from the Enlightenment to become even more aware of its own “groundlessness,” vanity, and self-undermining nature.⁶⁸ Instead, the proponents of the Enlightenment focused on what seemed to them to be their true opponent – namely, that which represented the appeal to spurious transcendent grounds and was therefore the true fount of all superstition: established Christian religion.

As a social movement, the Enlightenment thus understands itself as freeing itself from all authority and tradition and assuming thereby a detached viewpoint on all social practice for the purpose of seeing what could and could not be legitimated by an unbiased look at things. Hegel calls this the standpoint of “pure consciousness” – that is, a standpoint with regard to what counts as knowledge that is free from tradition, authority, fashion, indeed, from all social practice itself. As understanding itself in this way, the Enlightenment thereby *requires* opponents in order to have anything to say at all, since it begins with no content to its beliefs other than that of being unbiased by freeing itself from uncritical, inherited falsity and superstition. The Enlightenment therefore at first emerges as simply aimed at *exposing* the irrational prejudices of authority, tradition, and current practice for what they are.

Although the revival of religious orthodoxy at the end of the seventeenth century had provided many eighteenth-century Enlightenment figures with apt objects for their attacks, the emotionalist religious revival that was unfolding during the period contemporary with the Enlightenment offered them what seemed to be an even better target. This emotionalist movement in religion took its strength partly in opposition to the rationalism of the seventeenth century, and partly in opposition to the stultifying effects of inherited religious orthodoxy itself, but as it began to work itself out it began to take its strength perhaps most powerfully from its opposition to the growing Enlightenment movement itself. By taking emotion to be a “ground” of knowledge, this form of religion was also a form of “pure consciousness” since it held that one can truly know God *only* in an immediate manner (not mediated, for example, by priests or by any sophisticated theological doctrine). It is this set of practices that Hegel calls “faith.” Like the Enlightenment, it too understood itself to be free from authority, tradition, fashion, and social practice. Logically enough, both sides understood the other to be the enemy. The Enlightenment, with its stress on “observing reason” as the ground of knowledge, had to understand itself as the complete opposite of “faith,” just as the pietist “faith” had to understand itself as the complete opposite of Enlightenment.

Each (“faith” and Enlightenment) therefore contends with the other as to

what kind of evidence can count for the *modern* individuals that emerged out of the historical insufficiencies of aristocratic culture. It is in its unremitting opposition to "faith" that the Enlightenment, so Hegel argues, is logically led to develop its own account of what counts for it as authoritative – namely, the principle of utility as a standard of moral action and of knowledge.⁶⁹ This point, however, can only be demonstrated by developing the dialectic between "faith" and the Enlightenment as a dispute over what can count as a "ground" of belief for such "groundless" modern individuals.

The proponents of Enlightenment (as "pure insight") understand that the only adequate ground of knowledge is a detached, unbiased view of things and oneself (often but not always identified with reason itself), and that this unbiased viewpoint is universally available to all men and women at all times. The first task for the Enlightenment therefore must be to give an account of why, if "faith" really is the embodiment of irrational superstition, so many people who have to be counted as at least *potentially* rational subscribe to it. Either reason is not universal (in which case the Enlightenment's program would have to come to a halt), or the otherwise inexplicable dimwittedness of the proponents of faith must be explained in terms of some *deception* that has been practiced on them. Echoing the curé Jean Meslier's charge against the church, the enlightened *philosophes* therefore at first could see "faith" *only* as the result of some kind of deception on the part of a lying priesthood in collusion with a corrupt, despotic, and cynical ruling elite that used this apparatus of superstition as a means for maintaining its unfounded despotic rule and for perpetuating the insidious idea that only the aristocrats are "fit" to play a role in political life.⁷⁰ The Enlightenment must therefore both attack what it sees as the irrational supporting beliefs of religion and focus on awakening the self-consciousness of those who have been so deceived by getting them to come to see those irrationalities for what they are.⁷¹ This is also held to be possible for such deluded people, since a "pure insight" – the detached, unbiased observation of things or the exercise of the faculty of reason itself – is something within the capabilities of any self-conscious agent, provided only, as Kant puts it in his essay, "What is Enlightenment?", that he obey the injunction, "Have the courage to use your own reason," which means to take himself out of his "self-incurred tutelage."⁷²

For both Enlightenment criticism and emotionalist "faith," what counts as a "ground" of knowledge is something available to any individual willing to assume a viewpoint detached from existing social practice, authority and tradition. For the Enlightenment, the possibility of determining what is authoritative for people lies in every individual's ability to assume an unbiased, detached viewpoint on things; for "faith," it lies in the individual's ability to detach himself from the sully effects of (for example) orthodox theology, to look within his own heart and in the intense emotions encountered there to witness the presence of God himself. Both are contending for the allegiances of modern, "groundless" individuals in that both are offering replacements for inherited tradition and appealing to no grounds that individuals cannot discover within themselves. Therefore, as soon as the Enlight-

enment begins criticizing the standpoint of "faith," it logically finds its criticisms taken up by the proponents of "faith" since they recognize themselves in them.⁷³

Faith" is of course no real match for Enlightenment criticism, since although they share the same general standpoint, the Enlightenment has the advantage in that it self-consciously seeks to *articulate* and to *state* its grounds, whereas "faith" is content simply to *accept* them. From the standpoint of the Enlightenment, therefore, it clearly seems that they have the upper hand. However, for the proponents of "faith," it is their *philosophie* opponents who so clearly seem to be the *real* deceivers that they accuse the proponents of "faith" of being. To them, the Enlightenment must appear as just more ill-founded dogmatism, since it seems that they have simply presupposed or assumed without any good grounds that their "pure insight" gives them better access to authoritative grounds than do the emotions of the faithful.

The development of the Enlightenment helps to support this charge, in that as "pure insight" begins, turns its critical instruments toward itself, it also begins to undermine the certainty of its own claims. Thus, in the unfolding of the Enlightenment, what had been a self-confident reliance on the authoritative nature of reason and unbiased observation became gradually undone and threatened by the arguments and observations of Enlightenment figures themselves, most notably, Diderot and Hume, who alternately pointed out the limits of detached observation and reason within the terms that the Enlightenment thinkers had set for themselves. Nonetheless, although this kind of self-criticism on the part of the Enlightenment helped to underwrite "faith's" claims that the Enlightenment criticism was itself just another dogmatism, even Diderot and Hume, the two great ironists of the Enlightenment movement, still understood themselves to be part of a movement whose unity was based on the idea of (in Hegel's terms) a "pure insight," on the idea that *only* a detached, unbiased approach to things – whether from the standpoint of detached, universalistic rationality, or from the more ironically detached personal standpoints of Hume or Diderot themselves – could provide the authoritative grounds for belief and action.⁷⁴ However little solace "faith" could ultimately find in the investigations of Diderot and Hume, their self-skeptical inquiries served to point out that the confidence in "pure insight" is merely the *project* of the Enlightenment, a matter of conviction (a "faith" of sorts, or perhaps just a "taste" for the non-dogmatic) that this way of proceeding will eventuate in knowledge and reform of society.

Indeed, because both the Enlightenment and "faith" share a conception of what certifies something's claim to be knowledge, many of the Enlightenment's criticisms of "faith" can with some logic be rejected by the proponents of "faith." For example, if the Enlightenment says that the object of belief for "faith" is only something that each believer finds in his own consciousness – with the Enlightenment meaning that it is therefore some kind of fanciful projection on his part – the men of "faith" will of course agree, since they have always claimed that they find the object of their belief (God) in the imme-

diacy and intensity of their personal religious feelings. If the Enlightenment charges that they are just mired in their own subjective experiences, and that they need to transcend that merely personal point of view and submit their claims to an impartial test, the proponents of "faith" will point out that only in the immediacy of such religious experience could anyone manage to get at the "truth," to transcend their own limited point of view and arrive at the more universal point of view that God gives them. Both the Enlightenment and "faith" are committed to the idea that grounds of belief cannot be transcendent to the consciousness of the believer and that therefore the believer must be able to find the evidence for his belief within his own consciousness detached from all tradition and accepted social practice.⁷⁵

Just as the Enlightenment does not understand that what makes "faith" seem valid to its proponents is roughly the same model as the Enlightenment's as to what counts as an authoritative "ground" of belief, "faith" too does not realize that it shares that conception with the Enlightenment. Likewise, just as the Enlightenment uses that model to reject the claims of "faith," "faith" uses that model to reject the Enlightenment's charges. The proponents of the Enlightenment argue that they achieve a non-dogmatic point of view in that they submit their claims to a detached, ironical standpoint or to the standards of impartial, universalistic rationality, and they accuse "faith" of only fabricating the purported object of their belief. The proponents of "faith" retort that the immediacy and intensity of their religious experience (which for them evidences the presence and certainty of God in their hearts) is not something they simply concoct: they do not, so they say, "produce" God in their hearts, they only *open* their hearts to him. On their view, *only* through the practices of a religious community that assists in bringing these feelings forth – for example, Count von Zinzendorf's Herrnhut Moravian Brethren, which seem to be the object of Hegel's remarks – can God become present to the hearts of the faithful.⁷⁶ For a pietist proponent of "faith," it is essential that the community perform its sacraments and bring forth the appropriate emotions in order for God to appear in the hearts of the faithful – that is the internal evidence of God's being in one's heart. But this appeal to immediate internal evidence cannot force a pietist, for example, to take that as evidence that God is therefore "only" a figment of his feelings. For the pietist, God (as transcendent, *external* to one's consciousness) produces an *internal* state of one's consciousness, but one has the *evidence* fully internally to one's consciousness itself that this state (the particular intense emotions) is indicative of the presence of God himself.⁷⁷ The pietist is, moreover, unconcerned with how his accounts of this form of emotional evidence conform to other "scientific" or "empiricist" accounts, since on his own account of what can count as authoritative, these other accounts employ criteria that are fully extrinsic to the real matter at hand, namely, the presence (or absence) of God in the hearts of the faithful.

The Enlightenment's initial charge, therefore, that the trappings and sacraments of religion are a deception foisted on an incredulous populace by a corrupt clergy and unscrupulous nobility is, within what the faithful take as

authoritative in determining what counts as knowledge, a silly or maybe even a monstrous idea: Something that is evident, that fits the ground rules of what a community has come to take as authoritative cannot be the result of a *deception* of a group of people by another. What counts as a reason for belief is a function of the “social space,” the basic vocabulary, in terms of which these beliefs are formed; the “social space” itself, however, is not a matter of individual *beliefs* in that it cannot be asked for its “grounds” in the same way that we can ask for the “grounds” of a particular belief. One can be deceived by the rulers about various facts – Hegel’s example: battles won and lost – but it makes no sense to talk about being *deceived* about the grounds that one has come to take as authoritative for belief and action. One can later turn out to be mistaken, in that what one has come to take as authoritative turns out to be insupportable, but it makes little sense to think that somebody has tricked an entire form of life into accepting that account of itself.⁷⁸

The charge made by some Enlightenment figures that the proponents of “faith” simply anthropomorphize certain feelings and call them “God” (that is, that they are only projecting certain anxieties into a fanciful notion of a deity) can also easily be rejected from within the “spirit” of the proponents of “faith.” Some proponents of “pure insight” (for example, Voltaire) hold that all that exists is what can be perceived by the senses, since on the basis of what they take to count as evidence, this is all that there can be said to exist; they thus mistakenly charge the proponents of “faith” with investing statues of Mary or whatever with metaphysical properties. But of course the proponents of “faith” simply reject that as an account of what they experience in their emotionalist rituals when they claim to experience God’s love, and they reject it because, once again, they reject it in the same general terms as the proponents of Enlightenment. The statues, the incense, and so on are ways in which the appropriate emotions are called forth, and those emotions bear within them the evidence that God is (or is not) present in the hearts of the believers. In that way, for the proponents of “faith,” the Enlightenment is simply an *alternative* (something merely *different* from themselves) and not a genuine *challenge* to their point of view.

Of course, many of the things that proponents of “faith” said played into the hands of the Enlightenment. Those divines who tried to show that “faith” was based on scripture interpreted as an accurate report of past events only opened the door for the Enlightenment charge that since the scriptures are completely flawed, their mythologized accounts of past events cannot provide any grounds for “faith” at all. But, so Hegel argues, this is just a mistake on the part of some divines and does not go to the heart of the issue dividing “faith” from Enlightenment. Indeed, to the extent that the proponents of “faith” try to defend themselves by arguing that the scriptures are an accurate report of what happened (or that belief in miracles would be warranted on the basis of such and such “scientific” evidence, such as a “proof” that the Red Sea had historically actually parted), they are in fact actually abandoning what they have come to take as authoritative and coming to play the game strictly by the Enlightenment’s rules (in which case they are also bound to

lose). But the argument about the historical reliability of scripture misses the point, since (particularly) the pietist community's practices are based on the idea that such so-called scriptural evidence *cannot* count as underwriting religious practice: What *counts* is what one *feels* in one's heart, not what is written down in either scripture or (especially) in the learned books of theology.⁷⁹

The Enlightenment's premature triumph. These kinds of disputes between the two camps simply obscured that deeper, shared sense of what each had come to take as authoritative – namely, a sense that the individual and the impartial points of view had to be fused into *one* viewpoint, that *individuals* had to be able to find grounds for belief within themselves that would be both authoritative for them as individuals and would be beliefs that they could hold as agents detached from tradition, history and accepted social practice. The aristocratic ethos's collapse and the consequent experience of "groundlessness" – that following the collapse of the traditional conceptions of discoverable natural and external hierarchies of ends – requires that *individuals* construct or find the "grounds" of belief somehow within themselves. The dispute between "faith" and the Enlightenment was thus over what *could* count as uniting these two points of view. For example, various religious communities renounced certain pleasures and forms of property in order to "purify their souls" and make themselves less dependent on the contingencies of their particular desires, and Enlightenment figures claimed that such a renunciation was absurd, arguing as they did that a *genuinely* unbiased approach to life would lead not to religiously based renunciation of earthly pleasures but instead to a "passionate naturalism." However, this so-called unbiased approach ("pure insight") is likewise a practice by which agents could reassure themselves that what they took as authoritative for themselves was not something contingent and idiosyncratic but something that was justifiable in terms of the standards of an ahistorical, detached, universalistic rationality. Each tried to shed what they took to be contingent, idiosyncratic elements that could prevent an individual from assessing the evidence present to him. Thus, from a formal point of view, both "faith" and the Enlightenment seemed to be after the same thing.⁸⁰

In claiming to know God in the immediacy of feeling and emotion, "faith" could only take the trappings of ritual and sacrament to be auxiliaries to what it took to be the true knowledge of God. In claiming that whatever cannot be vouchsafed by "pure insight" is only auxiliary to true knowledge, the Enlightenment does something very similar. The Enlightenment appeals to the self-evidence of certain *thoughts*, whereas "faith" appeals to the self-evidence of certain *emotions*. But because it does this, the Enlightenment, unlike "faith," *must* become self-critical and come to require "enlightened" *theories* about itself. It is thus forced to ask itself how it can within its own general outlook underwrite its comprehensive appeals to "pure insight." The logical way to do this is to take "faith" on its own terms and show that one need not resort to "faith's" reassurance about itself – that the immediacy of feeling is the way in which God produces evidence of his presence in the heart of the believer – in

order to speak of the way in which a transcendent deity can underwrite our claims to knowledge and social practices. Thus, to the extent that the Enlightenment attempted to offer any replacement for "faith" at all – and not just move directly to atheism, as did Diderot, D'Holbach, and Hume – it had to advance something like the doctrine of deism. The deist conception of God consists, roughly, in the idea that God created the world to behave in accordance with natural laws (and, correspondingly, also created a set of laws for human nature), and that there was little more to him than that. (Thus, the familiar deist metaphor of God as a clockmaker, creating and winding the universe up, then stepping back and letting it tick-tock on its own. Some Enlightenment figures went further, claiming that the deist God, being by nature beneficent, had thereby also created a beneficent natural order.) Moreover, as the architect of the order we perceive in the universe, God was really *only* knowable through reason and not through "faith." He could therefore be revered as the creator of the universe, as the source of order in the world, or as the wise architect of a beneficent natural order, but there was little point to any fully fledged religious observance having the forms of traditional ritual in order to honor him. There was also no need for any elaborate set of theological doctrines needed to explain or account for the mysteries of the divine since outside of his "watchmaking" functions, there was little more to him; indeed, the scientific study of the laws of his creation through reason and observation were a more fitting tribute to the grand clockmaker-demiurge than were the rituals and teachings of "faith." As the general creator of the universe, the deist God was understood as what was the general object of all religious belief – Christian, Confucian, Buddhist – once one abstracted away from the various external trappings of that object – that is, the various *representations* (*Vorstellungen*) attendant to those religions. Thus, in the wonderfully vacuous title that the Enlightenment gave to him, God is only the "supreme being."⁸¹ Correspondingly, the so-called external trappings of religion – for example, the sacraments, the emphasis on revelation, or the cult of the saints – had to be regarded as superstition, contrary to reason and therefore something to be discarded.⁸²

The Enlightenment's conception of authoritative reasons as those that form part of an unbiased, detached observation of things thereby led it to that conception of knowledge that Hegel had called "sense-certainty" in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*. The dialectically historical account of how the Enlightenment came to hold this conception of what counts as authoritative reasons for belief explains the basis for what the first chapter of the *Phenomenology* is really about; it gives the social basis (the basis in "spirit") for what simply appears as self-sufficient, detached knowledge in the first chapters. On the Enlightenment conception of reasons for belief, we observe individual things whose features are independent of our observing them, and we "get it right" when we unbiasedly report on those things as they really are (as they are "in themselves"). Hegel thus takes himself to have shown how the Enlightenment's conception of "sense-certainty" would necessarily arise as the kind of account that those agents who have emerged from the world of cultivation

would have to give of what kinds of reasons they must take as authoritative for themselves. (It is thus distinct from the way in which it is treated in the opening chapter of the section, "Consciousness," in which "sense-certainty" was taken as what appears to be "obvious," something simply taken for granted – without any consideration as to *how* it has come to be taken for granted – by the post-Enlightenment audience of Hegel's own day as constituting "immediate" knowledge.) For the participants in the Enlightenment, this appeal to "sense-certainty" is legitimated by its general claim to rectify the insufficiencies of earlier accounts of what could count as an authoritative reason, and in particular in its remedying the insufficiencies of the accounts supplied by "faith."⁸³ For the Enlightenment, what is thought to be real comes to be taken as what can be perceived by the senses and then brought into the orbit of rational thought.

What is to count as an authoritative reason for action must fulfill the same criteria as what counts as an authoritative reason for belief: It must be available to "pure insight" – that is, be independent of any kind of special religious revelation and not depend for its validity on any appeal to tradition. The moral order must therefore be discovered from within a "moral science," which itself would be constructed out of an unbiased "observing reason," and whose goal would be to determine which passions actually move people, which can be altered by education and environment, and which kinds of satisfactions are "natural" to people. Detached, unbiased "observing reason" (supposedly) establishes that people are naturally disposed to pursue their own happiness, and even to benefit (or at least display sympathy towards) others. By establishing through its observations what passions and forces actually move people to act, a moral science will thereby also set up what *really* count as authoritative reasons for action (which, of course, will be strongly contrasted with the ascetic, life-denying reasons given by traditional religion).

"Observing reason" moreover also (supposedly) establishes that the natural order is an interlocking system in which various parts have roles to play in maintaining the other parts.⁸⁴ The basic order of the world established by "observing reason," therefore, seems to be that of interlocking *utilities*, of the ways in which parts of the natural order are of use to other parts. Human agents have a special place in this interlocking system since their faculty of reason allows them to self-consciously order things for their own utility, which is itself a demonstration that they clearly are the "apex" of the natural world. Since the basic law of the natural order seems to be that each creature acts according to its own utility, and since it also seems to be that the natural order itself is so constructed such that it is a system of interlocking utilities, such that in acting in terms of its utility each creature also contributes to the utility of others, it will therefore seem that to the extent that an agent is to act naturally, he must therefore act in terms of what is of *utility* to him and to others. To do this, he must use his faculty of reason to insure that he acts "naturally" and not under the perverting influence of tradition and superstition (which have obscured the natural passions within each individual). Not

surprisingly, a deist conception of a beneficent God creating such an order of interlocking utilities helps to underwrite such a view. An authoritative reason for action therefore must be that of making oneself useful for others and having others be of use for oneself. For the *philosophes*, a reformed religion, which would otherwise be damaging to human welfare, could perhaps be justified in terms of its utility toward leading people to better and happier lives.⁸⁵

The conception of utility allows the type of character embodied by the *philosophe* to appear therefore as an authoritative ideal. The *philosophe* replaces the earlier European figures of the aristocratic knights of medieval lore (with their cult of honor); the witty, vain courtiers that these knights became in the pre-Enlightenment courts of the Bourbon kings; and the slightly later figure of the “gentleman” (or in France, the *honnête homme*), the well-behaved man, neither ostentatious nor vain, who, faced with the “groundlessness” of aristocratic life, is content to take society more or less as it is without himself ever valuing independent thought or trying to bring what he values from his subjective point of view in line with what he takes as authoritative from the objective point of view. The *philosophe* – to be distinguished from the academic “philosopher” – is the man or woman of reason, who organizes his or her life along the lines of unbiased, detached free thought, and who by virtue of exercising reason to keep himself within the bounds of a sensible yet passionate life is a voluptuary without being a debauchee.⁸⁶ (It is also, not incidentally, a modern character ideal that includes women as potential participants, in a way that, for example, the ideal of the “gentleman” obviously could not.)

The proponents of “faith” of course found this whole package to be beyond the Pale: The *philosophe* as an ideal of character, his alliance with the deist conception of God (or, worse, with atheism) and his disdainful attitude to both established and emotionalist religion – all this seemed to deny the full emotional significance of life’s relation to the deity, to lose all that was real and immediate in the empty abstraction of a “supreme being” who is actually little more than the “Great Clockmaker.” However, whatever horror the Enlightenment may have inspired in “faith,” the Enlightenment’s deist conception of the supreme being was actually only the mirror image of “faith’s” conception of God, for “faith’s” own conception of God as known only immediately in emotion is an equally abstract conception of the divine. In the dispute between “faith” and the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment is really drawing the logical consequences from “faith’s” own practices, pointing out the difference between what the men of “faith” *take* themselves to believe and what they *really* believe (that is, what *follows* from their other beliefs). “Faith” thus finds itself caught up short in that the Enlightenment has only drawn the logical conclusions from what “faith” says, and thus mirrors back to “faith” the kinds of beliefs to which it has, perhaps unwittingly, committed itself. In Hegel’s terms, the Enlightenment shows up the “negativity” of “faith” in that it shows how faith’s account of what is authoritative on its own terms generates a series of skeptical antagonisms oriented against “faith”

itself. Moreover, by eschewing critical thought and relying only on claims about the self-evidence of certain emotions, "faith" finds itself powerless to reply to the Enlightenment criticism of its views.⁸⁷

Hegel charges, however, that although it demonstrated the "negativity" of "faith" by examining it in what it took to be "faith's" own terms, the Enlightenment failed to draw the conclusions of *its own* set of beliefs. The Enlightenment project is (at least at first) primarily negative in that it draws out the way in other practices are blinded by tradition and authority. It thus demonstrates to "faith" that something like a deist conception of God is the kind of belief to which the kind of modern agent who takes as authoritative only those reasons that are legitimated independently of the demands of either tradition or authority would be led. The men of "faith," by throwing off all the claims of orthodoxy and insisting that only the individual believer can know God in his own heart, are committed to the legitimacy of those *types* of accounts that are detached from tradition and authority that the Enlightenment itself gives. However, that the Enlightenment *shares* this conception of what counts as authoritative with "faith" is not a consequence that the Enlightenment, for understandable reasons, itself wishes to draw, since it regards "faith" as its complete "other," as the kind of practice which it wishes to "expose" as thoroughly unenlightened. The Enlightenment instead simply puts its trust in a hypostatized "rationality" or in some commitment to "pure insight," to the idea that a detached, unbiased agent can get to the truth of things. The Enlightenment, that is, ultimately fails to understand its own activity as historical social practice, as a way in which its reason-giving activity has developed out of the insufficiencies of the past as an answer to the crises and complications that past accounts of reason-giving had developed within their own accounts.⁸⁸ It instead sees itself simply as "pure insight," the unbiased, detached look at the world as it is; it thus takes itself to be an unbiased discarding of superstition, a paring down to what is "truly legitimate," and as a form of knowing that has freed itself from the obfuscations of irrational authority and illogical tradition.

Both the deists and the proponents of "faith" nonetheless posit a metaphysical entity as lying outside of consciousness (the "supreme being" of the deists, the "God of the heart" of the pietists), and they both accept that it is only in the ways that a detached agent takes himself to be related to this supersensible entity that any really authoritative reasons for belief can be certified. Each simply takes the other's *particular* reasons as faulty, while each accepts the *overall* picture of the *kind* of ground that can count as authoritative for them.⁸⁹ Indeed, each sees that only in this kind of modern, detached manner in which agents construct grounds for themselves can individuals find in their reason-giving practices a unity between the personal and the impersonal points of view. The men of "faith" find themselves as individuals affirmed by what they take to be God's presence in their hearts; their sense of themselves as individuals is affirmed by the intense emotional life they find in their religion. The *philosophes* find that the best life is that led in accordance with the kind of detached irony and attention to reason – the

exemplary embodiments of which are Diderot and Hume – that allows them to stand outside tradition and to allow the natural passions and impulses in their lives to have their “proper,” “rational” fulfillment. Each therefore *takes* his personal, natural life (the emotionality of the pietists and the passionate naturalism of the *philosophes*) to be integrated with the detached, impersonal point of view (that of God for the pietists, of unbiased free thought for the *philosophes*). The proponents of “faith,” however, find that they are fighting a losing battle with the *philosophes*, for the kinds of reasons that underwrite their kind of “faith” are equally supported by the ideal character of the “philosophical” life, and they are unable to give an account of why what they *take* to be authoritative for them *really* is authoritative, such that the *philosophes* themselves could come to be convinced.⁹⁰

Both, moreover, take the agent to be related to the world through the *representations* that he forms of that world. The proponents of “faith” take their feelings to be those “inner representations” that put them into an immediate contact with God. This allows the proponents of Enlightenment to argue convincingly that such feelings can be no guarantor that the putative object of the feelings exists, or that such feelings were in fact the way in which a detached agent could actually “get in touch” with the world. But because the Enlightenment shares with “faith” the picture of the agent representing the world to himself, the Enlightenment faces the same kind of problems that it accuses “faith” of having. It finds that it has the same kind of “negativity” (susceptibility to self-generated skepticism) as did “faith.” On the one hand, it can deal with its self-generated skepticism about itself by just ironically continuing to believe that its approach is in order even if it must accept large parts of it, as it were, on faith. (One thinks of Hume’s ironic skepticism in this regard.) For those for whom such an ironic stance of taking things “on faith” is not satisfactory, the Enlightenment must underwrite its claims to knowledge by positing some metaphysical support for itself – by positing some kind of metaphysical reassurance that its representations really match up with the world, that its authoritative reasons really are authoritative.⁹¹

The proponents of Enlightenment split over what the nature of this transcendent metaphysical support was supposed to be. On the one side were, for example, D’Alembert and Voltaire, arguing for a deist conception of God as the necessary metaphysical support; on the other side were, for example, Diderot, D’Holbach, and Helvetius, arguing for a conception of the underlying structure as consisting of (a rather metaphysically construed) matter. (The great ironist of the Enlightenment, Hume, is a special case and much harder to classify.) The materialists and the deists both have a structurally similar set of conceptions: Each posits something outside that set of representations of empirical reality (of “sensuous being,” as Hegel calls it) as underwriting the adequacy of those representations. The deist conception of God is no more than the vacuous idea of a “supreme being” (a “pure abstraction,” as Hegel calls it); but the conception of “matter” held by, for example, D’Holbach, is an equally vacuous idea (another “pure abstraction”) endowed with various powers of producing thought within itself and so on. (Straddling

the two is the conception of Nature as a beneficent order, a frequently held view in the Enlightenment, according to which the natural tendencies of things if left to their own devices produce the greatest good; this is either seen as something constructed by a beneficent demiurge-deity, or it is simply a way of attributing to "matter" all the features of a beneficent deist God.) Since neither of the metaphysical groundworks that each advances for itself has any sensuous, empirical properties, both conceptions (matter and God-the-Clockmaker) are empty conceptions, posits made by agents trying to account for how their representations match up with things in themselves.⁹²

The impasse between the deists and the materialists stems from the attempts by each to underwrite the authority of the *representationalist* view of the relation of agents to the world (the idea that the relation between agents and the world is to be understood in terms of a model of a subject, a representation, and a world-in-itself). The insufficiencies within both views drive the Enlightenment to extend the concept of *utility* beyond being only a criterion of moral *action*; it also becomes a criterion for evaluating *beliefs* – that is, a way of legitimating what the Enlightenment takes to be the ground rules of its critical practices.⁹³ This use of the concept of utility as a standard for evaluating beliefs allows the proponents of the Enlightenment thereby to jettison the search for a metaphysical validation of the authoritativeness of reason in favor of a "this-worldly" conception of accepting only those reasons that contribute to an increase in overall human utility (taken as pleasure or happiness). Since it is the agents themselves as unbiased, free agents (as participants in "pure insight") that posit these abstractions in the first place, they must ask themselves whether this kind of theoretical activity itself serves any purpose that is intrinsic to the kinds of purposes that a *philosophe* could find to be authoritative for himself. Since the purpose of a *philosophe's* life is to use his reason to think for himself and to indulge his "natural" passions and tastes, it makes sense to ask whether such in a view need be underwritten at all by such conceptions as "Matter" or "God-the-Clockmaker." The idea of "the underlying support for all there is" itself is little more than the idea of the "being" of everything, that human agents determine (or that they categorially "cut up") as they please for their own purposes. The *philosophe*, so it would seem, could fully lead a life of reason and natural passion without having to appeal to any such conception. To the extent that the this-worldly idea of utility is what is basic to this scheme of understanding, the further idea of a metaphysical support for such utility therefore need play no essential role in the life of a *philosophe*; it is apparently not required for the support of the practices that come to be definitive of the *philosophe* as an ideal of character that lays claim supplanting the character-ideals of the heroic knight, the courtier and the "gentleman." (Not surprisingly, the *philosophes* of the late Enlightenment came to see Voltaire, the hero of the earlier generation of *philosophes*, as being somewhat out of touch in his insistence on the necessity of some form of deism, and Voltaire himself also began to change his mind on those issues.)

The observing, enlightened subjects have, however, a particular place in

this scheme: On the one hand, they understand themselves to be only parts of nature, of the overall interlocking nature of things, while on the other hand they are the determining power whose “utilities” determine the structure of that order.⁹⁴ As a precept for knowledge, the principle of utility holds that we have authoritative reasons for belief only to the extent that the beliefs that are generated out of them contribute to overall human happiness; this itself presupposes that things in themselves are such that following this principle yields knowledge of them. This faith in the knowability of things in themselves by appeal to various claims that are themselves based on utility is, moreover, buttressed by the success of modern Baconian science; modern agents have shown that by constructing theories of the world that answer to their own interests (to control nature in order to satisfy human interests), they are capable of knowing the world as it is (or at least those parts of the world that concern us). For the *philosophe*, the man or woman who lives a free, unbiased life based on a reasonable outlook on the world, this must seem like a reasonable assumption, even if it must remain for him only an assumption (or, perhaps, a postulate).⁹⁵ Still, it seems to have no self-defeating “negativity” within it, and, as Hegel puts it, it seems as if the certainty attached to that project that is the “rational self” (self-certainty, as Hegel calls it) and what really is authoritative (“truth”) have coincided – that is, that the *philosophe*’s project of constructing a form of self-identity centered around the ideals of “passionate naturalism,” unbiased thought and free reason is based on an account of himself about whose authoritativeness he is fully capable of reassuring himself. Freed from the weight of the past and of history, the “new person” of “free reason” can look at things in a detached, unbiased manner and put the world into a rational order. Moreover, the Enlightenment seems to culminate in a kind of affirmative humanism: Humans as parts of nature nonetheless seem to have a dignity that transcends being “merely” a part of nature since it is their utilities that count. The Enlightenment project thus *seems* to be complete.

From groundlessness to self-grounding: Absolute freedom and social revolution

The authenticity of desire. The men who come to give an account of their practices in terms of the principle of utility have thereby transformed their account of what underwrites their practices away from both the Enlightenment’s very abstract conception of a ground of belief that is the object of a “pure insight” (a detached, unbiased look at things), and “faith’s” equally abstract conception of emotions as immediately disclosing God within the hearts of the faithful. Their account of what constitutes an authoritative reason for them instead has to do with what kinds of things satisfactorily satisfy their desires and needs, and there is thus no requirement to posit any kind of metaphysical essence to vouchsafe the rationality of their practices. In the doctrine of utility, modern agents seem to have a criterion that is both impersonal and well suited to them as rational, *desirous* agents, and that

transcends any particular practice without apparently involving the postulation of any transcendent "essence" or hypostatized "reason."⁹⁶

The criterion of utility therefore seems to be something that these enlightened agents can affirm for themselves by their own powers of rationality. In the appeal to utility, the "groundlessness" that had seemed to be the legacy of the collapse of the aristocratic ethos is taken to be satisfactorily replaced by a doctrine of "natural" grounds that dictates that agents are to pursue their own happiness and the happiness of others, and that this general end itself is the principle for establishing any hierarchy of ends and is also the highest end in any hierarchy of ends. The principle of utility ("maximize happiness") thus only requires that we determine which desires and which order of desires require satisfaction.

This conception ran up against Rousseau's charge that there can be no straightforwardly natural way to order our desires. If the principle of utility requires us to maximize happiness, and happiness is the satisfaction of desire, then there must be some criterion for evaluating which desires need to be satisfied, since some desires quite obviously conflict with other desires. Moreover, in order to make that evaluation, we need something more than simply the intensity of the desires themselves since equally intense desires can equally conflict with each other. Even if we form "desires about desires" (what are nowadays called "second-order desires"), we still need some criterion for determining which of those "second-order" desires should be satisfied. Either this criterion itself is an ungrounded, immediately known desire, a kind of third-order desire that certain second-order desires be satisfied, or it is not grounded at all but is only the expression of a "groundless" self, a self that orders his desires in terms of how well they express his own "groundless" hierarchy of ends. Since the former conception of an immediately known desire has been discredited, it thus seems that the self that chooses the principle of utility remains a self that is separate from and prior to the ends that the principle of utility claims to establish, however "natural" these ends (such as happiness) seem to be. The detached self is thus completely free – in the sense that it is not limited by any natural hierarchy of ends – to choose this or that ordering of desires, and the problem of "groundlessness" turns out therefore not to have been resolved by the principle of utility at all.⁹⁷

Rousseau (the Enlightenment's great critic from within) saw that the problem for "groundless" agents in such an institutional setting had to be that of determining the way in which the self could be said to *freely* desire something. In his *Confessions*, his doctrine seemed to require a doctrine of the "true self" and the "corrupting influences" of society that distorted that "true self." In that work, Rousseau's description of himself as being in his own heart a truly natural and therefore good self (and also being a "sincere self") provided the basis for an account of how there might be some way in which the self could appeal to some "inner voice," some given, "true self" hidden beneath the socially constructed "false self" that would provide a set of hierarchical ends grounded in "nature." From the standpoint of the *Confessions*, Rousseau's problem was how he, with his desires and his self-proclaimed

inability to be hypocritical, could satisfactorily live in a corrupt society. (Rousseau's answer was of course that he could not.) This suggested that the problem therefore was how to bring society in line with the desires of the given, "true self." However, in the chapter on "Reason," Hegel takes himself to have shown that the idea of there being a "fixed self" against which individuals can measure their projects and acts undermines itself as an account of the self; the supposedly "fixed" self turns out not to be so settled since what the meaning of what he *does* turns out to depend on the larger social context of which he is a part. The "gentleman's" account of himself in terms of his own "sincerity" and "fixed character" therefore turns out to require an account of social recognition; the self turns out not to be a settled and fixed thing amidst the world of contingent actions but is itself a project, something that the agent develops as part of his sociality, that is, within the context of "spirit." And the development of spirit – of the accounts that the European community has given to itself to legitimate to itself what it has come to take as authoritative – has led itself to the experience of "groundlessness." The "groundlessness" of the modern self cannot therefore be resolved by any appeal to a "natural" self that supposedly lies behind social appearances.

In *On the Social Contract*, Rousseau advances another idea: The groundless self can only be free in having all its desires structured by a social order that may legitimately be seen by individual agents to be the result of that agent's own free, unconditioned *will*, a faculty that is capable of initiating actions in a way that is radically undetermined by natural or social circumstances. To think of himself as being self-determining in terms of *willing* absolutely freely, therefore, such an agent will necessarily have to purge himself of all those desires that are *merely* given to him by others (for example, in the competition for "honor") in favor of a hierarchy of desires that can be said to have been elected for him by himself. Any social order creates a set of desires within individuals, and it was Rousseau's complaint in his *Confessions* that the corrupt social order had instilled desires in him that were not truly "his own." However, a social order established by such a *will* would shape the individual's desires and establish a socially sanctioned hierarchy of such desires in a way that would be compatible with the individual's coming to see that socially established hierarchy of desires as "his own." The hierarchy of desires would be "conventional" in the sense that it would be given to the individuals by the social order in which they lived and thus might at first seem as if it were imposed on them; but as coming from a social order established by a "groundless" will identical with their own will, it would be compatible with the hierarchy of desires that these individuals would choose for themselves. The central issue for these agents therefore becomes not how the agent best satisfies his *desires*, but the issue of which desires are really independently *his* – that is, which are the result of *his* will. These modern, "groundless" individuals' accounts of what would be authoritative reasons for acting thus move from that of determining what would be of greatest *utility* to that of what it means to be a *self-determining*, independent agent in a fashion that is compatible with all others being self-determining, indepen-

dent agents, which requires that the agent have his desires formed by a social order that is as much his own will as it is the will of others.⁹⁸

The project of self-determination. In this way, the early modern problem of *groundlessness* created by the self-undermining of the aristocratic ethos becomes transformed into the modern project of individual and collective *self-grounding*; and *modern life* truly begins with this project of self-grounding taken at first as a problem of *absolute freedom* – that is, freedom unconstrained by nature or any unreconstructed, merely inherited social roles. In “absolute freedom” the basic ends of life are instead to be set entirely by the agent himself in a way that is compatible with other agents similarly setting their own ends.⁹⁹ What had been for the Greek form of life freedom in terms of “the way things are done” becomes understood by these modern agents to be a completely open question of freedom, since there is no “way things *are* done” that could put any prior constraints on what for “absolutely free” agents is *to be* done. Neither the constraints simply of legal citizenship (as in the Roman form of life) nor the terms of honor in the eyes of others (as in the aristocratic ethos) can put any constraints on “absolute freedom.” For these fully modern agents whose conception of the self has to do with a conception of it in terms of “absolute freedom,” an adequate account of authoritative reasons for belief and action must involve agents determining for themselves what is to be done, unconstrained by “nature,” social roles, or history. This is, moreover, not a Faustian account, for the agent at least has a conception, however abstract it might be, of what the object of his willing is supposed to be – namely, willing its own freedom, affirming for himself his own independence – with the individual agent understanding that this willing is to be done from a union of the personal and the impersonal points of view – that is, as being *his own* (personal) willing that is equally an impersonally viewed willing by *others*.

The necessity of unifying the impersonal and the personal point of view (the project of both the “Enlightenment” and “faith”) emerges from these general considerations. For a particular agent to be “absolutely free,” he would have to legislate fully for himself what desires and directives are to count for him. However, since the particular will of any individual person is always a socialized will, that will cannot, so it seems, ever be “absolutely free.” All individuals are socialized, and even the idea of a noble savage apart from society is only the idea of a person trapped in ignorance. Therefore, as Rousseau saw, if there is any true self-determination, then it can only come from a form of *socialization* that itself is (or can be legitimately viewed by the agent as) the result of *self-legislation*. Fully unconstrained willing can therefore only come about in a situation where the socialization of the individual by others is exactly that which the individual wills (or *would* will) for himself. A fully socialized will conceived as continuous with the groundless free will of each individual would be the “general will.” “Absolute freedom” can therefore only come about by willing according to such a “general will.”

The issue therefore is how the *individual* will is to relate to the *general* will – that is, how the personal and universal points of view with regard to

unconditional free willing relate to each other within one agent in terms of the agent's having an integrated view of himself. The older solutions to resolving the split between the impersonal and the personal points of view cannot be satisfactory for these agents. For example, one of the classic functions of the estates, as corporate bodies with "privileges" (the nobles, the ecclesiastics, and the commoners) was to provide ready-made, given roles for people; but in understanding themselves to be agents embodying "absolute freedom," these modern agents cannot accept any place for the estates in their individual and collective lives. The individuals who take the dictates of "absolute freedom" as authoritative for themselves are supposed to write their *own* scripts for their lives, not to fit themselves into predetermined scripts. They could not in principle be "at home" in any such predetermined scripts, for they could not identify themselves with some role that they had not determined for themselves. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau complains that one of the reasons for his inability to live a non-alienated life in his society was the way in which there was no place for him to be "at home" in such a world; the already determined social roles did not "fit" him, and he was determined therefore to create his own, uniquely individual role. But for the Rousseau of the *Social Contract*, the solution to the problem in terms of the idea of a "true self" is not available, since a conception of "absolute freedom" can presume no such "fixed self" as a benchmark by which to judge such roles. The "groundless self" thus stands apart from such predetermined roles and can identify only with what it can claim to have made on its own.¹⁰⁰

By understanding themselves as absolutely free – that is, willing according to a "general will" – such agents would seem to be therefore necessarily alienated from any and all ends given to them by particular institutions, except for those cases in which they can see the structure of the institutions as having been determined by their own willing. What is problematic in this conception is what it means to say that the general will actually "does" anything, for it seems to boil down to the claim simply that particular individuals do things *in the name of* the general will. Each of these agents who take themselves to be "absolutely free" can therefore feel "at home" in an action taken by another individual (either purely as an individual or as the representative of some institution) only if each can see the willing of that other agent as fundamentally continuous with *his own* will – that is, see the willing of another as essentially only a manifestation of the general will and therefore continuous with his own willing. But what can count as evidence for such an identity of wills? When a multiplicity of wills in fact contingently coincides on a set of objects, this cannot be, by this account, authoritative evidence for there being an essential continuity between those wills; it can only be evidence that at this time, on this point, the different wills have just happened to coincide, not that they really are "identical" wills. To be able to see the willing of another as essentially continuous with one's own willing requires there to be some mediation between one's will and the other's will such that the agents can see themselves as essentially willing the same thing and not just as accidentally willing the same thing. To the extent, therefore, that the ends as-

signed to people by given institutions cannot be seen by the individuals as issuing from the general will (that is, the essential continuity between their self-grounding will and the self-grounding wills of others), then it can only be a matter of pure contingency for one agent actually to see the willing of another agent as a willing of the "general will," since whatever the second agent does and whatever ends the second agent pursues can only contingently be continuous with the ends set by the first agent.

To the extent that any given institution claims to be the result of the general will, and it cannot be seen by an individual or group of individuals as continuous with their own self-grounding wills, it must seem to them therefore to represent only the will of the particular group in power or of the majority in the community. Moreover, it seems actually impossible that any such institution could actually embody the general will, even contingently. For example, under the institution of absolute monarchy, it could be claimed that the *person* of the monarch (the actual flesh and blood king) represents everyone, since the country only has a unity by being united under the king; without a king, there would be only the non-unified assortment of the various estates. However, the logic that supported absolute monarchy collapses with the breakdown of the aristocratic ethos and the experience of "groundlessness." Moreover, the successor to the aristocratic ethos – the account of reasons for action in terms of "absolute freedom" – *cannot in principle* accept the king as giving unity to the community, for the "general will" *necessarily* cannot be continuous with the will of *any particular* person (such as the king).

The Revolution and the institutionalization of freedom. As the logic of this position is followed out, it becomes evident that if no *particular* person, such as the king, can represent the country, neither can a particular *group* of people represent the country. As Rousseau saw, only the society *taken as a whole* as the "sovereign person" could possibly represent the country as a whole. Society taken as a whole would therefore be the proper embodiment of the general will, and individual wills would only be "parts" of that "whole."¹⁰¹ But that entails that in principle no particular *institution* can represent the community as a whole; it must always be the representation of only a section of the community.¹⁰² For an institution to represent *the whole* community, it must represent it *as a whole*. (For this reason, the traditional Estates General in France, as a body consisting of representatives from each of the estates and limited in their representative powers to the mandate from their estates, was an unacceptable institutionalization of "absolute freedom"; in the Revolution, the logic of that situation led it in 1789 to dissolve itself and transform itself into the National Assembly with a claim thereby to represent the country as a whole.)

This conception of the general will is necessarily abstract, since it is conceived as the will of everyone but of nobody in particular. Abstractions, however, do not act; to be effective, they must be embodied in the actions of individual agents. This abstract general will must therefore be articulated into discrete social institutions in order for any of its directives to be carried

out. That is, the agents who wish to carry out the general will must form a *government*.¹⁰³ (In his discussion of this, Hegel is making a historical reference to the formation within the French Revolution of the Jacobin government with Robespierre as its central figure.) In theory, the individual agent ought to be able to reconcile himself to any action taken by the government as “really” being the product of his own will, but any institutionalization of “absolute freedom” makes that impossible since there *cannot* be any criterion for what counts as *genuinely* willing from the standpoint of the general will – the individual agent can consult neither his own given nature (for there is none) nor any set of inherited public criteria. No particular government can therefore ever claim a fully rational assent to its policies; it will always appear to those who dissent from it as only a victorious *faction*, as in fact the various governments formed during the Revolution began to seem to their opponents.¹⁰⁴

The logic of the revolutionary terror is not hard to decipher. Individuals are only *parts* of the whole that is the general will (society “as a whole”). A whole must excise those parts that threaten the integrity of the whole, and those threats will come from dissenters who oppose the general will. Therefore, some dissenters may be simply “deceived” about what they really will (that is, what the general will requires) and may therefore be cured by reeducation. Other dissenters, however, actively oppose the general will in that they call out for radically different policies; individually they will something at odds with the general will. However, as being part of the general will (as being a member of society “as a whole”), they have therefore freely and without constraint willed that people such as themselves require punishment to reinforce what the general will itself requires and to maintain the integrity of the “whole” against its “parts.” If one augments that idea of freely willed punishment with a utilitarian principle that would justify the sacrifice of some for the greater good of all, then the logical step from there to the guillotine is short. The guillotine of revolutionary justice, Hegel says, is “the coldest and stalest of deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.”¹⁰⁵

The general will thus turns out to be something different from what it was originally taken to be. The *groundlessness* that faced the early modern individual was to be overcome by a project of *self-grounding* for the fully modern agent. The general will is that conception of a social order whose institutions instill desires in its members that they will be able legitimately to understand as the kinds of desires they themselves would will to have; it will instill desires that they can legitimately see as “their own.” By assuming the impersonal, *detached* standpoint of the general will, the modern self, as independent of and prior to all its particular ends, can therefore will ends that are identical with the particular ends it wills from its *subjective*, personal point of view. However, the institutionalization of the general will turns out to lead to an opposite account than that originally proposed for it. The general will becomes represented as a kind of higher-order particular person, who stands over and against the particular personalities of its members, and who them-

selves come to be seen as "parts" of this "whole" rather than being the *independent citizens* that they had taken themselves to be. The requirements of the general will, that is, must be taken by each of these agents as something *imposed* on them, except for those cases in which for contingent reasons the individual agent happens to identify with the agents doing the directing. In trying to understand the independence of their particular activities in terms of the general will, these agents find that this abstraction has in fact fully alienated them from its requirements, since the content of the general will is simply fleshed out by whatever faction happens to be in control.

The attempt by that form of life that attempts to account for itself in terms of the abstract conception of a "general will" as the realization of the idea of "absolute freedom" generates out of the logic of its own terms a destructive attack on itself in the form of revolutionary terror. The attempt at repudiating a set of established practices as historically insufficient in light of the criterion of "absolute freedom" shows the insufficiencies of the idea of the "general will" as a realization of "absolute freedom." In coming to doubt the satisfactoriness of the conception of a "general will" as the realization of "absolute freedom," the post-revolutionary agents thereby seek reassurance for themselves in clothing the idea of "absolute freedom" in the institutional trappings of what had come earlier – namely, in establishing a new set of practices which have the semblance of the roles and duties of the older, pre-revolutionary institutions.¹⁰⁶ With the experience of the Terror before it, the logic of this self-conception thereby leads to a reinstitutionalization of itself; it realizes that self-understanding in more stable institutional forms in which individuals play particular roles and have determinate duties according to those roles.

Although Hegel does not mention it explicitly, it is clear that he is talking about the consolidation of the Revolution under Napoleon. When Napoleon finally crowned himself emperor, it might have looked as if in fact the Revolution had regressed into what had come before it: aristocratic court life with its ethic of honor and its culture of artificiality. However, the historical experience of the Revolution and the rise of Napoleon himself had made such a return impossible. As the revolutionary French armies with their rational, meritocratic structure of personal advancement through the ranks swept away many of the old regimes of Europe, and as French institutions such as the Napoleonic civil code came to be adopted, modern life's self-understanding as *self-grounding* began to assume concrete, institutional form. Napoleon, the "little corporal," had shown that it was possible for a simple man of ambition and talent to make the hereditary nobles of European life tremble and to change the course of history. The historical role and the "glory" that had previously been reserved for aristocrats was now a possibility for anybody.¹⁰⁷ The possibility of "distinction" and becoming a "true individual" that had previously been thought to be reserved for the aristocracy (for people of "cultivated character") was now seen as a possibility for any ordinary citizen. As the consolidator of the Revolution, Napoleon solidified the institutions of

the new bourgeois world even as he, as “Napoleon the emperor,” took on the external trappings of the ancient aristocracy.

The form of self-understanding that relied on the distinction between the individual and the general will had been driven to conceive of self-determination as submitting to that which others (the “faction”) contingently will. Its failure to provide an institutional setting commensurate with its conception of itself as “absolute freedom” created, however, the possibility of a form of self-understanding that took a willing of things *for oneself* as being equivalent to willing according to a detached, impersonal standard that transcended merely what others *contingently* happened to will. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic aftermath had put Rousseau’s thought into practice and had almost completed it institutionally. But, so Hegel argues, it was German idealism that gave this form of self-understanding its full conceptual expression when Kant transformed Rousseau’s account of the *volonté générale* into his own conception of the *rational autonomous will*. Kant saw that the abstract conception of a general will needed content, which had to be supplied by some kind of account of self-grounding rationality. In Kant’s view, the general will construed as a *rational will* necessarily elects, absolutely freely, certain criteria for itself that in turn put necessary constraints on what it *may* will and which give it certain objects which it *must* will. It seemed, therefore, that the *practice* of the French Revolution as augmented by the *theories* of the German idealists would thereby enable absolute freedom to institutionalize itself in a way that would allow the participants in this new form of life to understand themselves as self-determining agents whose self-determination would consist in their *rationally* willing things. Kantian and post-Kantian idealist philosophy thus provides the outlines of how in the post-Napoleonic world, individuals can become truly self-determining only by incorporating into their conception of themselves the idea of a *rational, reflective morality*, the successor to the historical insufficiencies of the aristocratic ethos and the early stages of the attempt to institutionalize “absolute freedom.”

2. Freedom and modern life

The political revolution in France (together with the more or less contemporaneous Industrial Revolution in England) had produced a very different world from the one in which people had previously lived; bringing the early modern world to fulfillment, it created the conditions for the realization of the fully modern world. The revolutions had created a world in which freedom had become a real possibility for all, but it also had created a world of social institutions in which people did not feel immediately “at home,” and thereby experienced freedom as a possibility rather than as something already established. However, the new understanding of freedom had also created a new set of possibilities for individuals to make themselves a “new home” in and through their own acts of self-determination and thereby to realize freedom in their own lives.

Through the conception of "absolute freedom," which was put into practice by the French Revolution, individuals came to see themselves not merely as "enlightened" and therefore as unconstrained by nature or history in what they could do for themselves, but also as "absolutely free" in their thought and practices, in fashioning their social institutions, and, in the case of Napoleon, even in making history itself. The Revolution had thus ushered in a new form of self-understanding in terms of which individuals could self-consciously take themselves to be determining what *for them* would count as authoritative reasons for belief and action. In the Greek form of life, the agent had simply *found* himself in a world already "given" to him and in which he was already immediately "at home" and therefore free. The Greeks had a *grounded* form of life; each knew what counted as good reasons for belief and action because of the way in which the grounds of belief and action were embedded in the social practices and institutions that made up Greek life. The *groundlessness* of the early modern world had appeared therefore in stark contrast against the background of the *groundedness* of Greek life. This groundlessness of the early modern world had alienated the agents from their world; there was nothing in that world with which the agents could identify themselves, since it seemed to be contingent and subject to the whims of others. However, in the post-Revolutionary *modern* world, agents understand themselves as having the possibility individually and collectively of determining for themselves the new grounds of that world.

Modern life as *self-grounding* promises therefore to provide a non-alienated surrounding for these agents that will recapture what was appealing in the Greek spirit without succumbing to its failures.¹⁰⁸ The Greek conception of freedom, which for them was possible only within their form of *Sittlichkeit* (in their social sense that such and such is the "way things are done"), thus seems realizable in the modern world in an individualistic fashion, without the "givenness" that Greek *Sittlichkeit* demanded and allowing for the kind of detached reflectiveness that "absolute freedom" seems to demand. The Greek conception of freedom embodied three items: The individual was free because (1) he knew *what* it was he was doing (his actions were thus immediately intelligible to him), (2) he knew *why* he was doing it (he could cite the socially sanctioned reasons for the action), and (3) he *identified* himself with those actions (since he found his self-identity fully constituted by the social roles that he played). The post-revolutionary modern world seeks to realize this Greek conception of freedom in an individualistic form that dispenses with the Greek understanding of freedom as residing in the acceptance of given social roles. "Absolutely free" individuals are to determine *for themselves* what they ought to do, and in doing so fashion a rational world for themselves in which they can once again find themselves "at home." Greek freedom can thus be combined with the self-grounding post-revolutionary project; instead of simply discovering their grounds in the social world around them, modern post-revolutionary individuals must determine their grounds for themselves. It is this demand that leads the early stages of

modern life to try to substitute modern reflective *morality* for what seems to be the all too narrow and insufficient sense of Greek *Sittlichkeit*.

German idealism and the Revolution

The issue then for the post-revolutionary world was in many ways similar to the three issues that Rousseau had raised for the immediately pre-revolutionary world: (1) what is it to be a self-determining agent?, (2) how can self-determining agents live together in a manner compatible with the self-determination of each and in which each recognizes the other as self-determining?, (3) what does it mean to say that an agent sets his own ends or that a people's social and political life is to be set by those people as freely binding themselves together, as taking upon themselves only what they freely elect to take upon themselves? Or, to put it more succinctly: what would it mean to *realize* the principle of freedom in the post-revolutionary world? The French Revolution had brought about the social conditions for the modern form of self-understanding as "absolute freedom," but it had been unable to provide the requisite account of itself that would enable it to understand what it was doing. Because of this failure to provide an adequate account of itself, it could not affirm for itself whether it was indeed a genuine alternative in history, a repeat of the past, or simply a mistake. German idealism took up this task and self-consciously endeavored to provide in *thought* what the French Revolution was to have done in *practice*: (1) to provide an account of what it would mean to realize freedom in the modern world by showing what it meant to be the kind of self-determining agent that had begun to take shape in that world, and (2) in doing that to show that the French Revolution was the necessary social movement to develop the institutions that would provide answers to the "groundlessness" of modern life.

This was neither an idle, foolish, nor arrogant task for the German idealists to assume for themselves.¹⁰⁹ Many contemporaries doubted whether the French Revolution's understanding of the possibilities for humanity were in fact defensible. (Edmund Burke's famous criticism of it as failing to understand the "organic" nature of social institutions and the way in which its idea of self-determination was really a chimera if not an evil is only the most prominent example.) Moreover, the forces of reaction, which were temporarily to triumph in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna, had already begun formulating attacks on the very ideas of "freedom" for which the Revolution had been a catalyst. The idealists therefore saw themselves as providing the necessary account of the revolutionary ideas of freedom and social life that would not only legitimate the Revolution but would also provide the tools for a valid criticism of its excesses.

Morality and modern life

The new form of self-understanding that the idealists articulated as completing the Revolution was that of *morality*, the idea that individuals sponta-

neously set their own ends both personally and collectively (to distinguish it from *Sittlichkeit*, ethical life, the "way things are done"). The idea of modern "morality" is bound up with the modern conception of what is authoritative for belief: that nothing can count as a good reason for belief unless we collectively or individually *come to take it* as counting and determine for ourselves what criteria are authoritative in adopting such reasons. In the Greek form of life with its "grounds" in "the way things are done," the agent simply acted in terms of a shared set of social self-understandings that he found present before him and into which he fit himself; in "morality," however, the agent is *spontaneously* to set his own ends and *spontaneously* to determine what is to count for him as an authoritative reason for belief. "Morality" therefore also claims to be the practical realization of the task implicit in the early modern conception of "Reason": to provide a self-justifying, autonomous account of itself that can legitimately claim to complete the development of the kinds of accounts that the various "formations" of modern self-consciousness have given of what can be authoritative for them.

The development of German idealism in this direction is bound up with the other German reaction to the Revolution – namely, the religious movements associated with the historical development of German national consciousness in light of what were seen as various historical denigrations by the French. The pietist movement – the earlier German religious movement based on a view of the immediacy of feelings of faith and opposition to established orthodoxy – played a role in shaping this reaction to the French. With its stress on the necessity of turning inward and living a pure and authentic Christian life, Pietism became a focus for this nationalist sentiment against French culture. German clergymen and theologians began arguing that the Germans should eschew the temptations of French cultural and intellectual life in favor of being true Christians – that is, of keeping their German hearts and minds pure.¹¹⁰ In Hegel's eyes, what Kant clearly saw was that the emphasis on duty in Pietism (with Pietism's rejection of authority and tradition and its very modern emphasis therefore on the individual's assumption for himself of his duties) could only be adequately understood if it were to be linked up with the secular modern accounts of the subject as "absolutely free." (In Hegel's eyes, Kantianism amounts to the attempt to coherently combine Rousseau's conception of the absolutely free subject with the pietist conception of self-resolved duty – that is, it was the attempt to combine two different accounts that modern life had come to accept because of the historical insufficiencies of earlier accounts.) The Kantian explanation of what Hegel calls the "moral worldview" takes up those ideas of duty and obligation that had come to play such a central role in German thought, and gives a better account of them by appealing to a form of "absolute freedom" than they could have given on their own. Kant's account thereby transformed those ideas from being remnants of a pre-modern past into authentic expressions of a modern life.¹¹¹ It also seems to be Hegel's point that the defects of Kantian ethical thought, whatever its brilliance, are precisely the defects of

the post-revolutionary "moral worldview" as such. (Whereas Hegel earlier treated Pietism as the mirror opposite of Enlightenment – as "faith" – he takes it now in terms of the ways in which it embodies and structures the post-revolutionary "moral worldview."¹¹²)

The modern agent understands himself as determining for himself his own hierarchy of ends instead of understanding that hierarchy to have been set for him by nature. For this to be possible, the agent's *self* must therefore be free from any outside determination that he himself does not freely elect to count as a determination *for him*. Nothing can count for him as a good reason for belief unless he *takes it* as counting *for him*; nothing is to count for him as a good reason for acting (as constituting a duty for him) unless he *takes it* to be a duty. Moreover, the criteria for this taking something to be a good reason must come from "within" him, be spontaneously generated by himself. According to this view, it would seem to follow that such a *moral* agent could therefore be spontaneous only in *opposition* to purely "natural" determination. If the agent is to be self-determining, to be setting his own ends, he must somehow be subject not to a *natural* law (which would come from outside himself) but to a *self-imposed* law.

Kant claimed that it was the nature of the representations (*Vorstellungen*) that such a moral agent formed "within" himself that was the key to the proper account of the "moral worldview." Kant argued that something can be a representation only if it conforms to the conditions under which any representation can be *for* an agent, which, as Kant claims, is the spontaneous accompaniment of the "I think" with all one's representations. For representations to be *my* representations – to be the representations that *I* think – *I* must *take* them as mine. Taking these representations as mine is equivalent to ascribing them to one consciousness, a single "I," to me. This act of ascribing all my representations to myself is, however, "original" (as Kant calls it) – that is, "groundless" – in that no evidence external to the I's own self-ascribing activity is possible for determining what counts as the same "I." For natural objects of experience, there clearly can be such independent evidence: To know if the dog in the window is the same dog that I saw yesterday, I require some independent evidence for testing the claim. In the case of the "I," however, there is nowhere else to turn except to the "I's" activity of self-ascription itself. To put it another way: There can be no independent knowledge of the "I" as the *subject* of experience except the activity by which the "I" *makes itself* a subject. The "I" constitutes itself into being the subject of experience in its act of taking itself as the same "I" that is aware of different representations. It "synthesizes" itself, as Kant puts it, in taking itself to be the same "I" that is aware of X and is aware of Y – it is the "synthetic unity of apperception."

This "synthetic unity of apperception" is, moreover, a necessary condition of all experience. For there to be a *single* complex thought or a single complex intuition – that is, not just separate thoughts or intuitions of X and Y and Z but a single complex thought of (XYZ) or a single complex intuition of (XYZ) – there must be a *single* subject. If there were a non-unitary subject,

there would only be different thoughts or different intuitions (for example, Johann would experience X, Paul would experience Y, and Georg would experience Z). This single subject is possible, however, only if the subject identifies itself as the *same* subject that has *different* experiences – that is, identifies the subject that experiences X as being the same subject that experiences Y. This identification of the subject that experiences X as being the *same subject* that experiences Y is *synthetic* in that it is not a matter of pure logic (that is, it is not an “analytic truth”). As necessary and as having no further grounds outside of itself, this self-identification of itself as the same subject is *self-grounding*. Or, to put it another way, there can be *no independent evidence* that the subject who experiences X is the same subject that experiences Y outside of the “synthetic” activities of that subject itself. The “synthetic unity of apperception” is therefore the necessary, self-grounding condition of all experience.

Something can therefore count as a representation for me only if it conforms to the conditions under which I can ascribe all these representations to one consciousness (that is, the conditions under which I can identify myself as the same subject of different experiences). Kant argues that these conditions are the “categories of the pure understanding,” which he takes to be the rules of the logical form of judgments. The justification of the categories’ claim to being necessary to any possible experience is that they express the necessary, rational rules for combining representations into the kinds of unities that can count as the representations belonging to *one* subject, to the synthetic unity of apperception. The categories, that is, are the principles that enable a self-conscious subject to ascribe its representations to itself.

These considerations about the subject as the “self-grounding ground” of knowledge also apply to the subject as the “self-grounding ground” of practices. Just as an agent spontaneously (groundlessly) takes given representations to be his own according to the self-generated rules of combination in logic, he spontaneously elects to have certain representations count for him as being sufficient motivations for action according to the self-generated rules of logic. The agent constitutes himself as a free agent by acting on his own *representation* of law, by electing for himself which representations of a rule of action are to count for him as the determining motives of his actions. The rational self is therefore self-constituting in both its claims to knowledge (although in knowledge it is also restricted to combining what can be given to it in sensuous intuition) and its claims to what counts as definitive reasons for action. Since an agent acts by directing himself towards certain ends, a self-determining agent must set his own ends and not have them set for him either by his social conditions (by tradition or authority) or by “nature.” As self-constituting, the practical agent therefore sets his own ends and elects for himself what is to count as a rational hierarchy of ends.

This might make it seem as if there would therefore be two selves within each agent: a rational self that sets its own ends and a natural self that has its ends set for it by nature. But the natural self and the rational self do not inhabit two *worlds*, separate from each other; they are united in *one self*, and

thus are only different *aspects* of the same self; they represent the same self described in two different ways – as a rational moral agent and as a natural organism.¹¹³ To put it differently: the rational self and the natural self are two ways in which the agent takes himself to be. This unity of the natural self and the self-constituted self cannot therefore be itself a natural given but must be itself generated out of the rational self's own activity. The rational self combines its *self-given* determinations (the categories of knowledge, the pure imperatives of action) with its *externally given* determinations (intuitive sensibility in knowledge, various desires and impulses in action) into *one unity*, the unity of the embodied, thinking, acting agent himself. The agent as sensuous and the agent as self-synthesizing are *one* agent, and the identity of this agent is constituted by the activities of the rational agent himself. Nonetheless, these aspects of the unified self – the realm of rational, self-determining human agency and nature – are “indifferent” to each other in that the determinateness of one does not play a role in establishing the determinateness of the other.¹¹⁴ Sensibility *cannot* play a role in the self-generated determinations of thought nor in the self-generated duties of action, and the self-generated determinations of the subject *cannot* play a role in the determinateness of the given elements of experience and desire.

If the post-revolutionary world is best articulated in the “moral worldview,” that worldview itself is best articulated in the terms of some conception of *transcendental, subjective idealism*, of a view that the determining ground of appearance is “rational subjectivity,” which itself is beyond appearance, posited in order to account for the determinateness which appearance is taken to have. That is, “absolutely free” subjects constitute a “world” for themselves by combining their representations in certain rule-guided ways; they thus occupy a special place in the world, since they are “points” outside of that world whose activities constitute the world into the shape it has. As such, they have a status and a worth (a “dignity” but no “price”) that no other entity in the world can have. Given the way in which the post-revolutionary agents had come to understand themselves, subjective idealism therefore seems like the necessary explanation and articulation of who they had come to be. An idealist agent is “absolutely free” and can generate laws for his own actions. Each agent determines for himself what he is to do, but his determinations will essentially coincide with the determinations of others, since each is imposing the same rules of logic and rationality on themselves. The transcendental idealist account thus reassures us that the French revolutionaries who took history into their own hands were not deceived about what they were doing but were actually realizing in practice what the transcendental idealists took humanity to have always been about: the realization of freedom.

3. Rational autonomy: the moral worldview

Morality and nature

The moral worldview, whether in the form of Pietism or Kantianism, takes self-determined or self-resolved *duty* as its central conception. Duty is to be

contrasted with all other motives that an agent might have, and an agent is to know his duty and to do his duty by consulting something within himself. No appeal to authority (especially theological authority) or tradition can legitimate this duty; the agent must elect it for himself on grounds that he finds "within" himself. For pietists this is done by consulting one's "heart"; it is something immediately known. For Kantians, one cannot immediately justify a rule as constituting a duty (that is, by consulting one's heart); one must rationally universalize one's maxims (the rules one gives to oneself that govern one's actions) to see if they are suitable for all rational beings. For both, the genuinely "moral" agent acts only out of a motive of duty, not for the sake of personal happiness; each seeks not necessarily to *be* happy but to make himself *worthy* of happiness. Without this moment of willing for oneself, of having one's *freedom* consist in determining for oneself both what one's duty is and what will be sufficient to move one to act, there can be no *morality* (in this modern, post-revolutionary sense) at all.¹¹⁵ In the aristocratic ethos, the agent's duty is determined by externally set standards of honor, and he fulfills his duty only when he has honor in the eyes of others. However, in morality the agent wills his duty on the basis of a ground that he himself authenticates for himself, and he fulfills his duty in terms of criteria that he sets for himself. In the aristocratic ethos, the agent alienates himself to conform to the standards of honor in the eyes of others; he takes others' point of view as determinative for the kinds of reasons that are to count for him, and his personal freedom is thereby given over to others. In morality, on the other hand, the individual takes himself to be doing only that which he as an individual can authenticate for himself, and his freedom consists in this kind of self-authentication. Where he is correct in his assessment of his duty, his individual point of view is at one with the impersonal point of view so that what he chooses for himself is also universal. Thus, the moral agent is free only in his abstracting away from all particularistic aspects of himself.¹¹⁶

Although one can determine one's will to conform to one's duty, one obviously cannot determine one's natural constitution. Whether an individual is happy depends on his natural constitution (that is, it depends on what things contingently happen to give him satisfaction), and the individual's natural constitution is not something for which he can be responsible. Since the moral agent can only be responsible for those ends that he sets for himself, he cannot be responsible for those ends set by his natural constitution. Therefore, whether he achieves happiness because of what he does cannot lie within his power, and, within the conditions of the account given by the "moral worldview," the individual cannot therefore expect to find happiness in recognizing and doing his duty.

By the very terms of this account, though, it would seem that the individual would actually find satisfaction and happiness in doing his duty because the agent would find his self-conception affirmed in doing his duty. In doing his duty, he would be putting his conception of himself as a "moral agent" into practice; in Hegel's terms, he would be "actualizing" his self-conception. Moreover, since it is only as being willed *by him as an individual* that his

duty can count as a duty (both for the Kantian and for the pietist), it should also be the case that his individual dispositions and sentiments (part of his “natural” makeup) would be involved in his willing to do his duty.

While this at first seems consistent with the “moral worldview,” it also clearly seems to clash with that part of the moral worldview that holds that the “natural” aspects of the agent are indifferent, if not antagonistic, to his recognizing and doing his duty. In the account that the “moral worldview” at first gives of itself, it requires that the individual perform his moral duty *anonymously*, that he put aside his own idiosyncratic “natural” desires in favor of what the more generally valid duty demands of him, even though the grounds of that duty are to be discovered or constructed from “within” oneself. To claim something as one’s duty cannot therefore involve an appeal to anything like the “natural passions tempered by reason,” as some Enlightenment thinkers would have had it. It must involve knowing and doing one’s duty *independently* of one’s personal passions and natural dispositions. Yet to the extent that it is the *individual* who is to be the arbiter of what his duty is, the individual will find his self-conception and particular dispositions at work in the determining and carrying out of his duties. The “moral worldview” thus seems to have an antinomy located within its conception of itself.

This incorporation of the “natural individuality” of the agent into his moral willing exhibits the initial “negativity” of the “moral worldview” in that it shows how the “moral worldview” produces out of its own account of itself a set of skeptical doubts about itself. On the one hand, the genuinely moral agent does his duty independently of any inclinations or natural desires (which would otherwise compromise his freedom and which in any event can have nothing to do with establishing his duties). On the other hand, it is also a requirement of the way in which the “moral worldview” has accounted for itself that in acting morally the individual moral agent acts on reasons that he as an individual legitimates for himself. However, since individuality is inseparable from one’s natural characteristics, and happiness is the satisfaction of those desires that have been elected by an individual in terms of his self-conception (which itself is groundless), an individual performing his duties and thereby finding his self-conception as a moral agent affirmed in doing so will also find his happiness in performing his duties.¹¹⁷ Whereas in the “moral worldview,” happiness is supposed to pull us in one direction, and morality is supposed to pull us in another direction, it would nonetheless seem that a truly moral agent *thinking of himself* as a truly moral agent would be pulled by his duties in the direction of happiness. Yet the “moral worldview” holds that nature is indifferent to morality, which is only a matter of the individual’s recognizing and doing his duty independently of whether “indifferent nature” arranges for him to be happy in doing so.

Consequently, in terms of the account that the “moral worldview” gives of itself, nature is taken as *necessarily* being indifferent to morality and is conceived in a way that implies that it cannot *actually* be indifferent. Thus, Hegel claims, the “moral worldview” must *postulate* that happiness and morality are in harmony with each other in order to sidestep skepticism about its

account of reasons for action.¹¹⁸ The references to moral postulates in the *Phenomenology*, of course, has overtones of Kantian ethical theory and might suggest that in making those references, Hegel is alluding to some very specific Kantian texts. Kant, for example, notoriously claims that we must postulate the existence of God in order to account for how happiness could be disbursed to the virtuous. However, this specifically Kantian postulate (along with some others) is something that Hegel simply ignores in these passages, since he is not concerned with explicating Kantian texts at all but only with articulating what he takes to be the "moral worldview" for which he understands Kant to have been trying to give an account. Hegel's own postulate indeed ignores Kant's idea that we must postulate the existence of God to account for how happiness and morality could be in harmony. Furthermore, Hegel goes beyond Kant's idea that we have a duty to *strive* to achieve the highest good (the union of virtue and happiness) and instead argues that Kant did not go far enough: The "moral worldview" must postulate a harmony between nature and morality not as an end toward which we must strive but as an end already presupposed in the idea of the "moral worldview" as such.¹¹⁹ The "moral worldview" is such that it both *denies* that there can be anything other than a purely contingent harmony between morality and happiness, and at the same time its account of moral action *requires* there to be something like a union of morality and natural happiness. The various techniques that Kant (or, for that matter, Schiller) uses to try to reconcile these claims are, for Hegel, doomed from the outset, because they can only be attempts to forestall the "negativity" of the moral worldview itself, to falteringly reassure the agents who hold to this account that the reasons they take to be authoritative really are in order. To do this, it must "postulate" all kinds of things as existing in order to make the account even passably work. Nor is he concerned about whether a more charitable reading of Kant could eliminate some of these problems in the Kantian texts (that is, whether a carefully articulated revisionist Kantianism could sidestep some of these charges against it). His point is not that there is no way in which to read more charitable doctrines concerning virtue and happiness into Kantian theory, but that any suitable modification of Kant will take Kant away from *Kantianism* and more in the direction of *Hegelianism*, a result that Hegel himself would of course find completely satisfactory. Whether one still calls it "Kantianism" would be irrelevant; in any event, it would no longer embody the "moral worldview."¹²⁰

Nature appears again as a problem for the "moral worldview" in terms of the internal constitution of the agent himself, that is, in terms of the relation between his sensuous makeup and his rational character. The problem is roughly the following. For the "moral worldview," the moral agent must act out of duty, out of "pure" motives; yet this view must also hold that the agent has other than pure motives – namely, sensuous motives. Therefore, no matter how it is formulated, the "moral worldview" will always be burdened with the problem of accounting for how one set of motives (the pure motives of duty) override another set (the sensuous motives), given that it will seem

that the agent always has two competing sets of motives. This is the problem of how the “universal,” the impersonal point of view, which is taken as determining the “pure” duty, is to be reconciled with the individual, the personal point of view, in an account of what any given agent can reflectively and rationally take to be an authoritative reason for acting.

The “moral worldview” will thus be driven to something like the following account. It will identify the “non-pure” motives with the sensuous motives, and the “pure” motives with those that abstract away from the concrete ends of the non-pure motives (such as Kant’s idea of the motive of respect for the moral law being sufficient to determine one’s action). The sensuous aspect of the agent takes the form of various natural inclinations and drives that set their own “natural” ends and that may well conflict with the ends set by reason (whatever they turn out to be). The moral agent cannot take his duties from his passions; he must derive his duties purely, by recognizing them as God’s law within his consciousness, or by recognizing them as universalizable maxims.

However, the two ends (the “natural” ends of the passions and the “pure” ends of reason) are each representations in *one* consciousness, as Kant’s arguments about the synthetic unity of apperception establish. Moreover, this *one* consciousness is itself self-grounding; it is the “pure” aspect of consciousness (“thought” or, as Kant would put it, “the understanding”) that unifies the pure and sensuous representations into one consciousness.¹²¹ Morality consists in willing and acting according to those pure representations and in having the ends of action be determined by the pure representations rather than the natural representations. Indeed, the moral agent is precisely that agent who manages to have his actions determined by one kind of representation rather than another; indeed, what characterizes him as *moral* is that his duties (determined by the pure representations of law) prevail over his inclinations. (As Kant puts it, respect for the moral law alone is supposed to be a sufficient incentive to act.) To have his actions determined by something other than *pure* representations would mean that the agent would not be free and self-determining as the “moral worldview” holds that he must be. Thus, just as the thinking self *becomes* – or, in Hegel’s language, as the self “actualizes” itself as – a thinking self by bringing the various representations into the unity of consciousness, the moral self becomes a moral self only by unifying its pure ends in a consciousness that both “rises above” and stands in opposition to those ends set by our natural impulses and inclinations.¹²² If the agent acts out of “mixed motives” (acts out of desire for a natural end *and* out of a sense of duty), then the agent will not be moral; to be moral is to act solely out of a sense of duty. Yet all motives must be “mixed” since the agent is a natural individual and a dutiful (or, for Kantians, rational) self.

Since the empirical (sensuous) motives can conflict with the pure motives, the pure self must therefore not only elect as his motive the “pure” law of duty; he must apparently *eliminate* the other motives that have to do with sensuous ends so that only the “pure” motive can be determining for action. Since all actions on the account given by the “moral worldview” seem to have

two motives – the pure and the sensuous – it would seem to follow therefore that for the agent to will something solely out of the motive of duty, the sensuous motives would have to be completely set aside.

However, the agent *cannot* simply set aside the sensuous motives; they are representations from his “natural” self that must be unified with the “pure” representations within *one* consciousness. To eliminate the sensuous motives from one’s consciousness might make one into an angel, but it cannot make one into a moral agent because *moral* agents must always have the opposition of duty and desire present before them. Indeed, that opposition between universal duty and personal inclination is what makes them *moral* agents in the first place, since the *freedom* of the moral agent consists in determining for himself independently of any natural impulse what principles are to guide his maxims, and something counts as moral only to the extent that it is a realization of freedom for him. For other types of agents, this of course would not be a problem. For a Greek, *ethical* agent – an agent in *Sittlichkeit*, the social state where duties are a function of “the way things are done” – desires and duties coincide, and he finds his duties in the social roles with which he immediately identifies. Moreover, the Greek individual finds himself to be free in performing his duties since he both understands what he is doing and he identifies with it. In the aristocratic ethic, one’s duties come from what is necessary to achieve honor in the eyes of others, and this is compatible with letting oneself be guided by the suitable “aristocratic” passions. The *moral* agent, however, must determine his duties for himself, and these duties cannot come from his passions, his social roles, or be motivated by the recognition that he gets from others. Instead, the moral agent (within the terms set by the “moral worldview”) must have the right motives to be a *free*, *moral* agent at all.

Duties and motives

If all empirical actions have empirical motives (that is, sensuous motives), then there will always be potentially two different accounts of the same action. Moreover, the two types of motives are supposed to be in opposition to one another such that following one motive realizes freedom whereas following the other motive does not. Yet, as oppositions within *one* consciousness, they must be such that the account of the agent’s empirical motives cannot make the account of the agent’s pure motives impossible (for that would entail the agent could not be free). The “moral worldview” must therefore also postulate that sensuous motives in an individual *conform* to his pure motives such that they do not override the pure motives, or such that they do not make the dual account impossible. Since both types of motives are always present, and they are taken to be in opposition to one another, it would therefore seem that the moral agent has the always unfinished moral task of shaping his natural self so that his sensuous motives are brought into line with his pure duties. But if the agent is to act morally at all in the first place, it would also seem that he must be constituted so that his sensuous

drives and his pure motives are already in line with each other; otherwise, the account of his action would be skewed since he would always have to give two competing accounts of what he was doing. Thus, the "moral worldview" must hold that the pure and the sensuous motives are in opposition to each other, and that the agent has the *task* of bringing them into conformity with each other; and that the sensuous motives and the pure motives are *already* in sufficient conformity with each other so that the agent can act in terms of the pure motives in the first place.

The general problem of the pure duties versus the non-pure sensuous duties reappears in the issue of how one derives specific determinate duties from the more general duty. There are cases involving trust, loyalty, deception, bravery, justice, duties to friends, duties to the state, professional duties, and so on.¹²³ In contrast with the universal "pure" duty (whether it simply be the duty to do that which is right or the more sophisticated Kantian injunction to act according to those maxims that can at the same time and always be willed as universal law), the specific duties are diverse and complex and have to do with various circumstances that are difficult to elaborate outside of the particularities of the case. Thus, the certainty with which an agent can approach one of these particular duties cannot be at the same level of the certainty with which he approaches his pure duty. What nonetheless counts as making a specific maxim or claim into a duty is that it be a *specification* of the more general, "pure" duty; it cannot be a duty that is simply more specific in its content and indifferent to the general duty (however the general "pure" duty is conceived). That is, it cannot be another duty *contrasted* with the pure duty; rather, it must be distinguished only by having more specific content than the universal, "pure" duty.¹²⁴

The moral agent must see the specific duties and the general, "pure" duty in different ways. To him as a *moral agent*, the pure duty is absolute, not relative to anything else, and it is known with certainty. (The "pure" duty is taken, in Hegel's words, as something "in and for itself," not relative to anything else.) But to him *as an individual* with limited knowledge, any specific duty cannot carry with it the same certainty, since, given his limited knowledge, what *seems* to be his duty may in fact not be his duty, and thus it cannot be as certain. (A particular agent can, for example, simply be mistaken in his belief that he has a specific duty of loyalty to a particular person.) Yet *whatever* his specific duty is, he knows that it is in fact not relative but just as binding on him as the "pure" general duty.¹²⁵

The issue for the moral agent is then how he reconciles what he takes to be the certainty, obligatoriness and even sacredness of a specific duty with what *to him* must appear as its relativity and uncertainty. This is all the more difficult if the "pure" duty is conceived formally, as Kant does in insisting that the categorical imperative must abstract away from all determinate ends. But however it is conceived, the "pure duty" has a different relation to the individual agent than the more specific duties. The individual can only view those duties from what to him must count as his *personal* point of view, no matter how detached he may be from the particularities of his situation.

To conceive of duties that are absolutely valid "in and for themselves" but which cannot be known to be valid from any finite individual's point of view is, however, to assume that there is an impersonal point of view from which these duties could be known. This idealized impersonal point of view is thus another necessary postulate of the "moral worldview."¹²⁶ Kant, for example, notoriously posited God as the divine legislator, and later proponents of the "moral worldview" postulated hypothetical "sympathetic observers." Indeed, given the *complexities* involved in going from the general pure duty (such as the categorical imperative) to the specific duty, it would seem that only a divine agent could possibly be in the position to manage those complexities well enough to be able to infer from the general, pure duty to the specific duty.

Hegel's point is that these incoherences and paradoxes are not accidental features of these types of accounts, since they are the kind of things to which they are inevitably led by virtue of the kind of account they must give of what counts as an authoritative reason within the "moral worldview." For example, in Kant's case, the posit of a divine legislator seems to be at odds with Kant's own stress on autonomy; if only those laws that have been autonomously willed by an agent count for that agent, then a law commanded by God is not a law that has been willed by that agent, and hence cannot count for him.¹²⁷ Kant is, however, led to this view because he has such difficulty deriving specific content from his formal categorical imperative, and he must hold that the specific duties are obligatory even if they are uncertain. Indeed, the need for Kant to posit God as the holy lawgiver is the same need for Kant to posit God as that which will bring together virtue and happiness; it is part of the self-undermining (in Hegel's terms, self-negating) structure of the general "moral worldview" which pushed Kant in those directions.¹²⁸ (Again, Hegel's point would also be that any attempt to rectify this through a revisionist description of Kantian philosophy will inevitably lead Kantianism away from the "moral worldview" toward something more like Hegelianism.)

The *idealized* point of view that would know all these duties with equal certainty is thus that formed by imagining the unity of the impersonal and the personal points of view. The conception of this idealized point of view involves the conception of knowing things in a detached, impersonal manner that would also be perfectly compatible with the kind of personal knowledge of the intricacies and complexities of life that seems to be available only to embodied, socially situated agents.¹²⁹ But it is very questionable whether this idealized subjective/objective point of view, within the terms set by the "moral worldview," could be available to actual agents. On the one hand, it would seem that it is not. An actual agent has to act, and one cannot act generally; all action is specific. The actual agent must therefore act without knowing with any certainty that what he does is his duty, while believing that there is a strict duty governing what he is to do. What *really* counts as his (specific) duty thus seems to be something that is determined *externally* to his own willing and consciousness. It is, however, difficult for the agent to accept this account of what counts as a good reason while adhering to the "moral world-

view," for it means that the evidence for what counts as a duty is not something that falls "within" the individual's own consciousness. The agent thus cannot be free in doing his duty since he cannot understand what he is doing, and, yet, the "moral worldview" took its authority from its claim to be a realization of freedom. Nonetheless, this paradoxical view that the agent is radically free in performing actions in which he cannot be free is the account to which the "moral worldview" seems to lead.¹³⁰

The "moral" agent must therefore take himself only to be able *contingently* to will the right thing, which means that he may not be acting in terms of his real, objective duty but only in terms of what he subjectively *takes* as his duty (and about which he therefore might be wrong). Since the agent cannot know with certainty what his specific duty is, he cannot be in control of whether he actually does his real, objective duty. Whether the agent is worthy of happiness is thus not up to him; it can only come to him at best as an act of grace by a beneficent deity who rewards him for trying. This too seems to be the kind of conclusion to which the "moral worldview" is led, yet it also seems to run contrary to the "moral worldview's" account of reasons for moral action, according to which it must be within the individual's powers at least to *know* his duty and to make himself worthy of happiness. It is not a matter, as it is with the aristocratic ethic, of luck in achieving honor. In the aristocratic ethic, only others can bestow honor on a person, and thus whether he has successfully done his duty is both dependent on the recognition by others and a variety of other contingent factors (his own strength, the turn of events, the available opportunities, his limited knowledge, and so on). For the "moral worldview," on the contrary, others can have no say in whether an agent is worthy of happiness, since that depends entirely on his virtue, which itself depends entirely on the willings of the agent himself. But the "moral worldview's" account of itself leads to the idea that the worthiness of happiness cannot depend solely on the agent's willings, and hence in this way the account also tends to undermine itself.

To sidestep this kind of negativity, the "moral worldview" can postulate something like a divine order that allots happiness in proportion to desert, with desert being determined in terms of purity of heart and of attempts in good faith to do the right thing. If there were such a divine order, then moral individuals would not need to know with any certainty what their duties are; those who sincerely try to will the right thing would be rewarded. In such a divine order, the discrepancies between willing for the sake of duty and willing for the sake of happiness would vanish, since the individual who tries to will the right thing will be rewarded with the happiness proportionate to his virtue. The individual who forswears his happiness for the sake of duty could thus be reconciled to such a state of affairs in that he would know his happiness would be forthcoming.¹³¹

Even such a positing of a divine order, however, would fail to sidestep the complete "negativity" of the "moral worldview," which comes from the way it seeks to realize the modern principle of freedom through its idea of a unity between the subjective and the impersonal points of view and its equal insis-

tence on the sharp separation of the two. This itself, Hegel says, comes from taking a representationalist stance toward knowledge, of looking for something "within" the individual that is to match up with what is "outside" the individual; once that move is made, then there will always be questions about whether the evidence for something is present (internal) to the subject's consciousness or outside the subject. This will be particularly striking in moral issues, since the agent must possess some type of representation that *he* generates (or recognizes for himself within *his own* consciousness) that is nonetheless valid for *all* agents. (The "negativities" of the "moral worldview" thus operate around the way in which this type of account relies on oppositions and unities of "universal and particular" and "internal-to-the-subject" or "external-to-the-subject.")¹³²

The paradoxes of the "moral worldview"

Indeed, because of these "negativities," the "moral worldview" becomes antinomial in that it generates within its own terms a set of mutually exclusive propositions for which there is equally good evidence. For example, in terms of the kind of description of moral agents given by the "moral worldview," we could conclude that there cannot be any *actual* moral agents, since any human agent would have to have a purity of willing that is impossible for him to have: To conform solely to duty would be to eliminate one's sensuous motives, and that would be impossible for any flesh and blood agent to do. Moreover, given the terms of the "moral worldview," it would seem to be impossible for anyone to actually achieve the kind of moral perfection (of acting solely out of a sense of duty) that would be necessary for him to be a genuinely *moral* agent. Yet on the other hand, since this consciousness, which is aware of its pure duty, *represents* it as an ideal, it knows it as something to which it can aspire but never reach. Thus, given the terms of the "moral worldview," one can show that there actually *are* actual moral agents who abstractly know what duty is and who *try* to achieve the highest goods of morality (of doing their duty, of trying to make themselves worthy of happiness by bringing their inclinations into line with duty so that they will only have virtuous inclinations that deserve reward).¹³³ Thus, the "moral worldview" tends to fall apart into two camps: those who believe that we actually can perform our duties and are at fault when we do not fully accomplish what is morally required of us, and those who believe that we cannot completely accomplish what is morally required of us, but we must always *try* to satisfy our moral duties.

The "negativity" of the "moral worldview" lies in the way it incorporates the subjective and the objective points of view within itself. On the one hand, it is intrinsic to the "moral worldview's" account of its reasons that authoritative reasons for action be found *within* the subject's consciousness, be internal to his own consciousness. In Kantian terms, the subject must be autonomous, self-legislating, giving itself its own laws. Thus, it would seem that what counts as an authoritative reason for action would be something intrinsic

sic to the individual subject, to his own subjective point of view. On the other hand, what is taken to count as a good reason is to be a good reason for everyone – or for all rational beings, in Kant's formulation of the principle – and thus is something that is valid from the objective point of view. In making morality thus dependent on the objective point of view, however, the moral worldview takes away what originally prompted it – namely, the idea that what counts as an authoritative reason has to do with what an individual agent finds within his own consciousness. The various “ins and outs” of the ways in which the “moral worldview” can be formulated have to do with the need to reconcile the claims that what counts is what is posited from a subjective point of view and what counts is what is valid from an objective point of view. “Morality” is objective and valid for all agents; it is also something for the sake of which an individual is to put aside his own particularistic interests; yet moral reasons are supposed to be posited by the individual from his own subjective point of view. The “negativity” of the “moral worldview” results from trying to combine these opposing claims.

The “moral worldview” thus takes authoritative reasons both as transcending the individual and as not transcending the individual.¹³⁴ (Or, to put it differently, the “moral worldview” generates these opposing intuitions in those who participate in this worldview.) If there is no way within the terms set by the “moral worldview” to reconcile these kinds of opposing claims, then, in order to accommodate himself to this opposition, an agent participating in this worldview must dissemble about the point of view from which he is speaking and shift back and forth between the two points of view. That is, in giving an account of how he takes his representation (*Vorstellung*) “within” himself to be certified by himself as authoritative – that is, as being a representation of a moral law that transcends him and is valid independently of whether he *subjectively takes it* to be valid – the “moral agent” is led to shift and dissemble (*Verstellen*) in his accounts of just what it is that makes his moral reasons authoritative for him and others.¹³⁵ Hegel takes this as evidence that the “moral worldview” cannot be serious about its own account of itself, and is in fact pointing toward, if not actually already relying on, another account of itself that would not require such shifting and dissembling.

This shifting and dissembling is illustrated in the way in which the “moral worldview” tries to bolster its accounts through various kinds of postulates. The postulated harmony of morality and nature is such that the moral agent must take the actual world confronting him as not being in harmony with morality, as being in fact indifferent to it, since moral requirements have nothing to do with individual impulses and drives, and what counts as a moral reason transcends those impulses and drives. But nature is what gives human agents the impulses and drives that they have. Their impulses and drives can, so it seems, only contingently match up with what duty requires them to do. Thus, morality (as what duty requires) and nature are indifferent to each other. It therefore follows that happiness – the satisfaction of desire – cannot have anything to do with morality, since our desires come from nature. Yet in successfully acting out of a sense of duty, the individual moral

agent actualizes a moral end. For example, if the individual assists another because he believes it is his duty to do so, he actualizes the moral end of beneficence. For any action to count as a realization of freedom – and the authority of the “moral worldview” comes from its claim to be *the* only adequate realization of freedom – the agent must *know* what he is doing. Therefore, such an agent must be *self-consciously* doing his duty for it to count as a moral act; otherwise, he would only be acting in conformity with duty (doing something without knowing what he is doing) rather than acting out of duty (acting because he knows that such and such is his duty).

A self-conscious agent necessarily has a certain self-conception; these moral agents have a self-conception as agents who wish to do the right thing. That is, they have a desire to *be* such moral agents. In giving himself a sufficient incentive to do the right thing, therefore, this agent will find his self-conception as a moral agent affirmed and actualized, and in doing so the individual satisfies those desires that follow from his image of himself as a moral agent. But since all desires are natural, it follows that nature and morality are in harmony for this agent, at least in all cases where the agent self-consciously does the right thing. Moreover, since happiness is the satisfaction of desire, the agent will also therefore find a certain happiness in doing his duty since it fulfills his desire to be a certain type of person. Thus, the “moral worldview” can maintain itself only by shifting between the objective standpoint of what is required by duty and the subjective standpoint of the acting individual. In the “moral worldview’s” account of itself, nature and morality are opposed; a moral agent who accepts this account, however, acts in a way that presupposes that they are not opposed. In taking the objective point of view, the moral agent opposes nature to morality in that he can see himself as free only in acting in opposition to his natural impulses; in taking the subjective point of view and acting, however, he presupposes them as being in harmony.¹³⁶

In the dialectical to and fro involved in the “moral worldview’s” attempts to reassure itself that what it takes as authoritative for itself is satisfactory, it might seem as if all that is at issue is that the agent *practically* (subjectively, for himself) has to take nature and morality as being in harmony even though he cannot *theoretically* (objectively) satisfy himself that they are in harmony. But this subjective way of taking things is sabotaged by the account he gives himself of the value of what he is doing. In acting, he seeks to accomplish certain ends; however, the only end morally worth accomplishing is what (objective) reason can certify as being a fully justified end. Since his own actions are carried out from his subjective point of view, they cannot be counted by his own objective evaluations of his actions as essentially fulfilling this end. Yet he can subjectively view his own actions as arising out of the incentive of respect for the law (or some appropriate feeling of duty), and thus those actions do count for him as fitting the standards of moral action.¹³⁷ The agent must shift into the objective point of view in order to see his actions as only *contingently* measuring up to the claims of morality and then

shift back to the subjective point of view to see his actions as *essentially* measuring up to his conception of what counts in morality.

The agent can also view a “highest good” as a union of virtue and happiness (that is, of morality and nature) and see it as an ideal, something for which the agent is supposed to strive. However, to the extent that the “moral worldview” understands morality to be a set of imperatives that finite agents impose on themselves, then it must see this idea of a “highest good” as implying that morality *per se* is no longer an issue. If virtue and happiness were to be united, then by this account morality would not be experienced as an imperative since there would be nothing “commanding” about it. An agent who always *wanted* to do the right thing could not experience moral norms as *imperatives*. The idea of a highest good, therefore, as a union of virtue and happiness, would be the idea of the abolition of *morality* as a distinct domain for human life and would be a substitution of something else – perhaps something resembling a form of Greek *Sittlichkeit* – in its stead. Thus, the duty to strive for the highest good would be the duty to strive for a state in which morality in this modern sense is no longer present. From the subjective point of view, the highest good seems like an ideal to work toward – that is, the ideal of bringing one’s subjective life into conformity with what the objective point of view demands. From the objective point of view, though, the highest good represents a state of affairs in which modern morality *per se* plays no essential role.¹³⁸ The highest good, therefore, as an objective ideal represents not the fulfillment of the practice of modern morality but its abolition; as a subjective ideal, it represents a benchmark against which current attempts may be measured.

The question is whether this even makes sense as an ideal. At first, the ideal was of an agent who acts only out of duty and is thereby absolutely free; yet the so-called highest good has him acting also for the sake of happiness, which on the “moral worldview’s” account makes him unfree. This is maintained as an ideal for the individual agent only by shifting and dissembling between the subjective and objective points of view. The conception embodied in the “moral worldview” of both the relation between duty and happiness and the opposition of *pure*, general duties to particular inclinations and impulses is further subverted by other accounts the “moral worldview” is forced to give of itself. That account must hold that something like “respect for the law” can be a sufficient incentive to action. Thus, for the “moral worldview” to be possible, it must be the case that even when there are opposing inclinations, this respect for the law is sufficient to override these opposing inclinations. But for a flesh and blood agent to act, he must act in terms of his empirical features. It is his natural, “sensuous” existence that puts his “pure consciousness” of duty into practice. For the agent to act, his “pure consciousness” of duty must supply a motivation for the agent to act. However, the pure motivations (the “pure consciousness,” as Hegel calls it) must be translated into the real motivations of a self-conscious agent in order to result in an action.¹³⁹ The pure “respect for the law” therefore produces real actions only

if it can be translated into the motivations that actually move a real agent; it must become an impulse to act for that flesh and blood agent. It would seem then that the "moral worldview" would have to hold one of two things: A non-empirical motivation is capable of directly motivating empirical action; or a "pure" motivation is an impulse to get other empirical impulses going (a kind of pure motivation for empirical motivations). The latter view certainly involves all kinds of oddities. It is intrinsic to the "moral worldview" that empirical motivations have their own set of laws that at best are only contingently related to the laws of morality. If that were not the case, then the whole account of *morality* in terms of freely doing one's duty even when it conflicts with one's desires and inclinations would be undermined, for if we were naturally inclined to do what duty requires, then this account of morality would have little point. But if that is the case, then for the pure motives to influence the sensuous non-pure motives (to be the motive of the motive), these non-pure motives would have to conform to the nature of the pure motives so that the pure motives could actually prompt the non-pure motives into motivating the action. Such a baroque idea (of motives having motives within them in order to be actual motives) seems to be required by the "moral worldview" if it is to hold to its central conception of "duty versus inclination." The "moral worldview" can reassure itself about its rather convoluted account of motivation only through a metaphysical doctrine like Kantian transcendental idealism (with its non-empirical noumenal self initiating actions in the empirical world) or through simply postulating that the domains of pure and non-pure motivation are "really" in conformity with each other (something that conflicts with its own account of what the experience of morality is supposed to be like.)¹⁴⁰

Indeed, the moral worldview cannot be so concerned about its moral perfection as it claims it should be. If moral perfection involves not only always *doing* one's duty but also actually *wanting* to do one's duty, and one is obligated to *try* to achieve the "highest good" – that is, moral perfection (the union of virtue and happiness in which doing one's duty is also what makes one happy), then the issue arises as to why one would be morally obligated to desire happiness at all. It might be that the obligation to pursue one's happiness is only an *instrumental* obligation to insure that one will do one's duty; in linking personal happiness to moral duty, one would be insuring that one would have no competing inclinations threatening to take one in a different direction from duty's call. But an agent who always did his duty even in the face of competing inclinations would be as morally perfect as an agent who did them without competing inclinations; it would be odd, therefore, to call the union of virtue and happiness a "highest good," since the object of morality is doing one's duty – that is, attempting to realize the moral good, not achieving happiness. If the highest good is that which one should always seek to achieve at the expense of lesser goods, and the moral good is that which one should always attempt to achieve above all other goods (if the only thing, for example, that is good in itself is the good will), then the moral good is the highest good. How then can there be a highest good (the union of virtue and

happiness) that is higher than the highest good? If the agent knows, moreover, that he cannot *achieve* the highest good (since it is an ideal), and he believes (as Kant seemed to) that God's apportioning of happiness to the deserving (that is, the virtuous) is part of the idea of the highest good, and he (the agent) moreover believes that being the frail, finite creature he is, he cannot be said to *deserve* it because of what he has *actually* willed but only for his sincerely *trying* to be virtuous (and that it therefore must come to him as an act of "grace"), then it follows that he is also shifting and dissembling about matters, since happiness and not duty would really be the direct object of his willing. That is, he knows he cannot do his duty, but he tries to do it because he believes that God will reward him for trying; he wants happiness and does his duty in order to achieve it. But if that is the case, then we are not making happiness instrumental to duty; doing (or trying to do) one's duty becomes *instrumental* to attaining happiness. (Indeed, Hegel suggests that this idea of the union of virtue and happiness is really based on the envy of those who are less happy of those who are more happy; it is really nothing more than the complaint that things have not gone as well for oneself and one's friends – the "truly deserving" – as one thinks they should. All the talk about happiness going to the less deserving is just a convenient psychological crutch for those who are envious of others.¹⁴¹)

The "moral worldview," therefore, is burdened with a contradictory outlook from the outset. (Hegel accuses it of "syncretism."¹⁴²) Worse, these contradictions seem intrinsic to it; they do not appear to be mere mistakes in its formulations that could be eliminated by a more thorough execution of the program. The "moral worldview," as embodied in modern religious movements and explicated brilliantly in the Kantian philosophy, therefore gradually undermines its claim to be *the* realization of freedom in the modern world, and the modern world therefore requires therefore some new account of what can be authoritative for itself in the realization of freedom. That account was to come from the movement that took itself to be reacting to the "moral worldview" – namely, Romanticism – and it is in the union of the two – Kantianism and Romanticism – that the key to an adequate account of the realization of freedom in the modern world is to be found.

4. Personal autonomy: Romanticism, authenticity, and beautiful souls

The philosophers of the post-revolutionary period had self-consciously formulated the principle of the modern world as being a principle of self-determination. For this to be possible, the modern world should have two parts. First, they had seen that it should constitute itself as a rational, self-justifying form of life, dependent for its justification on nothing other than the accounts that it generates for itself; and, second, they had seen that this self-justifying form of life required each agent to constitute himself as "self-justifying subjectivity." Both these were necessary if the successes of the French Revolution were to be solidified, and if its failures (particularly the

Terror) were not to be repeated. For the modern world to hold good to its promise, it required not some very abstract conception of "absolute freedom" – which logically led to a form of practice in which a *faction* simply imposed its own views – but a conception of how people could be bound together in a free manner that both preserved a sense of the individual's own freedom and autonomy and established the actuality of a self-justifying form of life. The "moral worldview," most brilliantly worked out in Kant's writings, was the first post-revolutionary attempt at such a formulation.

Romanticism

Hegel takes *romanticism*, a movement contemporaneous with Hegel's own life (and with which Hegel's philosophy has often been mistakenly identified) to be the attempt to preserve the idea of self-determination while overcoming the difficulties in the "moral worldview's" account of what it would mean to realize freedom. In Hegel's eyes, romanticism partially completes the development of subjective idealism and the post-revolutionary world in that it both renders the contradictions of that world fully apparent and creates the "social space" in which the possibility of a resolution of those contradictions finally appears, even though romanticism itself does not offer that resolution on its own. Romanticism offers an account of the self-grounding self of modern life, an account that then undermines itself in its own terms and thereby opens up the possibility for a more adequate account of what modern institutions and life are about. Hegel's attitude toward romanticism is thus complex; on the one hand, he holds it to be a completion of a certain line of historical-conceptual development; on the other hand, he holds it to be deeply flawed, and often has difficulty concealing his disdain for what he regarded as its more extravagant expressions.

Hegel takes the romantic self-understanding to be an attempt to carry out the forms of the new post-revolutionary self-understanding articulated in the German idealist movement without that movement's assumption of the way in which *representations* mediated between the agent and "nature."¹⁴³ Hegel's argument is not to the effect that this is in fact the cause of romanticism, nor is he arguing that this is the way in which all romantics saw themselves; his argument is that the account offered by romanticism as to what may taken as authoritative grounds for belief and action may itself be reconstructed as being the type of account that was necessary to resolve the dilemmas generated within the idealist movement in its attempts to determine what it would mean to realize freedom in the modern world. In the case of the romantic movement in Germany, with which Hegel would naturally have been most acquainted, the influence of the movement of philosophical idealism on the romantic artists was indeed present and in some cases profound. Fichte played a large role in this development, inspiring not only younger philosophers such as Schelling and Hegel, but also exercising a large influence on younger artists and critics, who attempted to apply some Fichtean ideas to art and art criticism. Some, like Novalis and Friedrich von Schlegel, heard

Fichte's lectures and were deeply inspired by him. Hegel's youthful friend, the poet Hölderlin, also heard Fichte's lectures in Jena and was inspired by him to formulate some philosophical ideas that criticized Fichte's philosophy; those ideas in some very general ways also bear a strong similarity to some of Hegel's ideas.

The romantic project undertook to realize the principle of freedom by thinking of personal subjectivity not in terms of anonymous rational subjectivity (as the Kantians had done) but in terms of the existing, concrete subjectivity of particular individuals.¹⁴⁴ The post-revolutionary idealist movement had come to see an individual as free to the extent that he *determines for himself* what is to count for him as an authoritative reason for belief and action, and he can do that only by willing from an appropriately anonymous point of view; self-determination required the idealist agent to detach himself from all particular perspectives – both social and natural – in order to achieve the requisite independence necessary for self-determination. The idealists held that only by assuming that detached, impartial standpoint could the agent really be said to be free and to be able to make his beliefs and actions *his own*; the idealist movement had done that by focusing on the conditions under which the agent could make his *representations* his own. In opposition to this notion of freedom, the romantics turned away from the idealist account of making representations one's own in favor of a more concrete sense of making something's one's own by looking inward and exploring one's *own* subjectivity in the hope of finding therein the grounds for a truly free and non-alienated human life.

The romantics thus shift the conception of modern freedom away from the idea of rational, anonymous self-determination toward something more like the ideas of authenticity, irony, and true feeling. In particular, they shift moral consciousness away from the idea of obedience to a self-imposed *law* toward the idea of being "true to oneself." The idealist *transcendental* self that is beyond appearance is displaced in favor of the *actual, individual* self, which is available to certain forms of introspection and is best expressed in certain artistic treatments. The romantic self, so it seems, appears as it is in the actual empirical world. There is no anonymous self *in itself* that determines the way the world appears to an individual; there is only the existing, concrete self of the individual, with his full emotional makeup and his particular life-history. What is to bind free agents together in the world would not be an appeal to a common rational law, which each would freely impose on himself, but an appeal to *conscience*, to being true to oneself and one's convictions.¹⁴⁵ Genuine freedom for the transcendental idealist consists in bringing one's personal convictions into line with what was required from an impersonal ("universal") point of view (the standpoint of "reason"). Genuine freedom for the romantic consists in acting from the *personal* point of view, in acting in accord with one's deepest personal convictions; it consists not merely of acting in terms of what is impersonally rationally justifiable but in terms, for example, of the agent's religious views, his concrete conceptions of the good life, his own personal biography, and so on – provided that these

conceptions can be said to be genuinely *his own*. The romantics had thus in one sense returned to one of Rousseau's questions: What really are my deepest personal convictions, and how can I know them?

There is, of course, a schoolbook objection to this, which the romantics themselves recognized: "What if two different consciences make contradictory demands?" The romantics took themselves to have an answer to that objection in their ideal of a free *community*, in which each individual would act only on the basis of his own conscience, each would freely recognize the right of conscience in the others, and, since each would be genuinely free, each would be acting in concert with the others. The genuinely free community would be one in which each would be allowed to go his own way, to explore his own self, knowing that others affirm this for him instead of forcing him into some social mold. The romantic who authentically looks inward and examines his emotional life and beliefs will then be able to act on the basis of ideas and emotions that are genuinely *his own*. He does his duty to others by reflecting on what kinds of actions are appropriate, that is, what in good faith he can do according to the convictions of his own conscience, and, in the community of romantics, he is *recognized* as a man of good faith and conviction in his actions. The community of romantics thus determines for itself *as a community* what is to count and what is not to count by virtue of each attempting to become an authentic individual and in each assisting the others through his acts of recognition to become such authentic individuals.

The moral worldview lacked this element of recognition. The subjective idealist agent acts on the basis of motives that he has elected to count for him as motives, that he has "let" determine his actions because he can see them as fitting a rational principle that he himself has (anonymously) accepted for himself. No social act of recognition is necessary for this election of motives, nor could one in any way assist it or be constitutive of it. Implicit in romanticism, however, is the idea that one finds one's true motives – that one is "true to oneself" – *only* in and through a process of mutual recognition within a community (or that one finds one's authentic self only in community with a romantic other, a theme very prominent in the poetry of romantic love). The romantic agent does his duty by acting authentically in terms of his conscience – by doing what he has elected to do in terms of his own deepest convictions – and he has thus determined the content of his action out of his own authentic self, but he understands himself as having done his duty because others bestow a certain *recognition* on his actions and thereby affirm his own self-understanding as an authentic individual.¹⁴⁶ The individual romantic agent can thus understand himself as acting in accord with the essence of things by virtue of acting in accordance with his own deepest and therefore most true feelings and convictions.

The romantic individual is not to be mistaken for the "man of sincerity" portrayed by Hegel in the section of the *Phenomenology* titled "The Spiritual Kingdom of Animals." The sincere individual can be sincere about anything; the "real thing" (the *Sache selbst*) about which the "sincere individual" claims

to have an interest is in fact a fully empty conception. Moreover, the sincere person can *sincerely* believe something without *authentically* believing it; one can sincerely believe, for example, in the validity of some social rule without ever having considered whether that rule is defensible or whether it fits one's own deepest convictions. In the romantic conception, the "real thing" is the actual, subjective life of the individual himself, what the individual *authentically* feels, wants, and believes. The authentic individual cannot be authentic about anything as the sincere individual can; he can only be authentic about what comes from his true emotional life and convictions, what he has genuinely made or found to be his own, not just something he has found within himself and about which he is sincere.¹⁴⁷

However, while it may not immediately fall prey to the schoolbook objection to it, the romantic solution still has trouble within its own terms. There is nothing in the appeal to conscience per se (in the appeal to one's authentic convictions) that seems to specify any determinate duty or action whatsoever. For the romantic, the determinateness of any action or duty cannot come from any general appeal to "reason" or to any generalized idea of "conscience"; it can only come from the individual's own concrete emotional life and from the acts of recognition on the part of the community. But in the last analysis, the individual himself must remain sovereign over his own decisions and actions; he must decide for himself whether some action that is demanded of him, or seems to be called for in some situation, is in fact one that he can do in good faith. The romantic agent who acts only in terms of his conscience thus takes his own determinate *self* (his "I") to be final, at least in the sense that duties are his to accept or reject, according to his convictions and his knowledge of the circumstances.¹⁴⁸ The community of moral romantics thus consists of each doing his duty by consulting his own deepest convictions and in that way constituting himself as a truly self-determining individual within a social life. However, since nobody's appeal to conscience can claim any superiority to any other's appeal to conscience, the romantic community is a community of equals.¹⁴⁹ What was the universality of rational agency for the subjective idealists is pictured by the romantics as the concrete unity of humanity united in its mutual respect for each other's own point of view, of each heeding their own consciences. Only in this way, the romantics thought, could each overcome the alienation present in non-romantic communities; since each acts only out of what he can with best conviction determine as being his own authentic beliefs, each will necessarily find himself identifying with his activities, "at home" in his world, and the community of romantic selves will thus overcome the alienation between the impersonal (communal) point of view and the subjective point of view. The romantic community can thus lay claim to genuinely realizing the principle of freedom in the modern world. (The community of romantics thus non-accidentally resembles a community of Fichtean "I's," each recognizing each other and being completely free in doing so.)

Since each is absolutely free to determine his own duty – since nothing can count for an individual unless it can answer to his own deepest convictions –

each is independent of determination by an "other" (whether it be another person or simply external circumstances). Therefore, no individual can recognize the declarations of conscience by another as in any way binding on him. Yet each demands that the other recognize him as a free person who acts on the basis of his own conscience. In these mutual declarations and in the complex ways in which the romantic agents socially deal with each other in such communities, the romantic *self* is constituted. The romantic self understands his freedom to consist in his looking into his own subjectivity and discovering therein his own deepest convictions, and by only acting on such convictions that he can count as *his own*, the romantic individual only does that which is true to his own self. But such a self-exploration makes sense only in a social context in which the declarations of conscience and conviction are set off against the requirements that others make of him; the romantic self thus actualizes himself only in these declarations to others of what his conscience requires.¹⁵⁰ Without a society of others *against* whom the romantic can declare his convictions, the romantic self has no room to exist. (The world of the romantic artist and his hangers-on, constantly baiting the more staid elements of the middle class, and the nineteenth-century discovery of "bohemia" also make their appearance with this form of self-understanding. What for the pietists had been the struggle of godly men and women against a world enmeshed in sin – and who by looking into their own hearts for God's commands, could triumph over wickedness – became for the romantics the person of deep conviction – like Rousseau – who finds that he cannot live within "society's" strictures because they conflict with his deepest convictions and his desires, with who he "really" is, but who, unlike Rousseau, can triumph over an inauthentic world by being true to himself and by becoming *authentic*.)

The deep problem with such a form of self-understanding is that although it is in these declarations of conscience and conviction to each other that such romantic individuals constitute themselves, each romantic agent understands himself as acting not in terms of anything constituted by "external" social institutions but only in terms of his own deepest self. In the terms of the romantic individual's self-understanding, if he is to act out of what are really *his own* motivations – if his *self* is to identify with his activities, if he is not to be alienated – then he must act from convictions that come from his "self," not from convictions that have been "imposed" on him by "society." The romantics are thus faced with the problem of how to unite the impersonal point of view of the community (the "universal") with their own deeply subjective point of view (the "individual"). This is partially accomplished by the linguistic and therefore public acts of "declarations of conviction" (or their more modern equivalents, the "protests in the name of conscience" by such individuals).¹⁵¹ The function of the reciprocal declarations of conviction for the romantic individual is to provide an *assurance* to each that he is indeed acting in a self-determining manner.¹⁵² Thus, in these reciprocal declarations to each other, the romantics form a community, a shared sense of who they are; they fashion themselves, that is, into a self-conscious formation

of spirit.¹⁵³ The *assurances* that each individual gives to the other in an institutionalized system of mutual recognition unites, so it seems, the impersonal and personal point of view. This formation of spirit is best embodied in a form of *religious* community, of individuals bound together in a community by their declarations to each other of what lies deepest in their hearts about what counts as having inherent and absolute value.¹⁵⁴

The "moral genius" and the "beautiful soul"

In this context, it is thus no accident that one of the most characteristic ideas of romanticism, that of the *genius*, would appear. The specifically "moral genius," who appears particularly in the writings of the German romantics, is that person who in his "inner voice" hears the divine voice; he thereby unites the impersonal point of view with his own personal point of view in that in simply his pursuing *his own* interests and desires he produces artifacts and utterances that are of interest to humanity as such.¹⁵⁵ The romantic community would thus logically think of itself (at least to the extent that it fully realized itself as a *romantic* community) as a community of such "moral geniuses," each expressing the universal divine truth by looking most deeply into what each as an individual believes, with each finding that in doing so, he has discovered a moral truth that others can now make their own. This "solitary worship service," as Hegel sarcastically calls the "moral genius's" exploration of his own subjectivity, would be in actuality also a *communal* worship service, with each declaring to the other the purity of his heart and the authenticity of his convictions, and the community existing in this reciprocal assurance of each other's conscientiousness.¹⁵⁶ For such a community, there would be no hidden metaphysical essence determining things for them; there would be only the immediately present truths of their own inner lives, which when authentically followed out would incorporate within themselves the impersonal point of view (what Hegel often calls the "in-itself," or the "essence" for this form of life).

In such a romantic religious community, individuals mutually pursue the goal of communal authenticity: of coming to know themselves as and coming to be authentic individuals, that is, as individuals, who, in acting on the basis of what in their deepest convictions they know to be *their own* desires, also express the life of the community and express what is of interest not only to each individually but also to humanity. The shared self-knowledge of such a community would consist in the fully public acts of "the community's speaking about its spirit," the ways in which the community articulates itself to itself in its social institutions.¹⁵⁷ The problem for the romantic form of self-consciousness is therefore: How would such a community be possible?

Such a community would consist of "beautiful souls."¹⁵⁸ There are three possibilities for the "beautiful soul" to develop his sense of himself and act on the basis of the way he takes himself. First, the "beautiful soul" can withdraw into himself and focus exclusively on his own subjectivity, withdrawing from the world and trying to find what is truly his own by attending exclusively to

the purely personal and most subjective elements of his life. This possibility was actualized in the lives of some romantic artists. For example, the German romantic writer Novalis held that the best poems are those that are entirely personal. Indeed, Novalis came to embody this romantic possibility centering on the search the individual subjective life in its purity; in Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the search for the "blue flower" in both dream and fable stands for this possibility of the "beautiful soul." However, this search for the purely personal, the purely subjective, leaves the "beautiful soul" with no room to act. To act would compromise the integrity of the "beautiful soul"; the result therefore of taking this possibility as an adequate account of what the beautiful soul's life should be is that the "beautiful soul's" inner life becomes empty. Deprived of all social content, it has nothing to it. In his search for the truly authentic as being the absolutely personal, the "beautiful soul" finds that there is no "core" to himself; he finds that searching for the self in the purely subjective parts of one's life is like peeling away the rings of the onion only to find that when all the rings have been peeled away, there is nothing there, that there is in fact no "core" to the self that supposedly lies at the end of such an activity of "paring down" to the "core." With nothing there at the end of the journey for self-knowledge, the "beautiful soul" wastes away, its subjective glow gradually dying out like an ember. And indeed actual poets such as Novalis and Keats end up "wasting away" just as does Rousseau's fictional "beautiful soul," Julie, in his *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.¹⁵⁹ Even when they do not succumb to tuberculosis (the romantic poet's disease par excellence) it is absurdly fitting that they die young, because there is nothing to sustain them into further life.¹⁶⁰

The "beautiful soul" as ironist and as moralist

There are two other possibilities for the "beautiful soul" to work out some way in which the personal autonomy and authenticity of different agents can be compatible with the life of the community so that the romantic community does not simply deteriorate into a community of confrontation in which each individual challenges the others because of what *his* conscience demands, with there being no possible concord among such differing demands of conscience. One possibility is for the "beautiful soul" to become a romantic *ironist*. Hegel does not use the word "irony" here in the *Phenomenology*, but, given what he says about irony in his later works, it is clear that it is romantic irony that he has in mind in his discussion of the possibilities for the romantic self-understanding to work its account of itself out. (For example, in his *Philosophy of Right*, he links his treatment of the romantic community in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* more or less explicitly to his other views on the nature of irony.¹⁶¹) Nothing can count for such a "beautiful soul" unless he *lets* it count for him, and this election of what counts for him is something entirely personal, something that he must decide on his own to do in terms of *his own* basic convictions. This formation of the romantic authentic individual is thus logically led to taking an ironic attitude toward everything, includ-

ing himself. Nothing can count as absolute, nothing as definitive unless he, *as an individual*, elects to count it as such; but the romantic, authentic individual knows that in principle this cannot be a sufficient ground for convincing others of the meritoriousness of what he has elected to count as worthy of belief or action because the others must elect to count it for themselves on the basis of their own convictions. (This also holds true, for romantics, for all the so-called principles of rationality.) Thus, the romantic agent knows that nothing can be final and definitive in a communal sense, and knowing that, he also knows that nothing can be final and definitive for himself, since whatever bonds he puts on his thoughts and actions can also be loosened and thrown off by him. The only appropriate attitude therefore is that of *irony*, the belief that whatever one believes and takes seriously cannot be final and definitive even for oneself.

The other possibility for the “beautiful soul” is to preserve his moral purity and stick to his convictions, demanding that the world take him on his own terms or not at all. This “beautiful soul” cannot be ironic, for that would mean for him that he should abandon his own deepest beliefs. However, a community of such “beautiful souls” would be unlikely to be able to sustain itself since it would quickly deteriorate into pure confrontation among uncompromising “men and women of conscience.” But would it be possible for a set of such non-ironic “beautiful souls” to form a coherent community with a set of ironic “beautiful souls”? Each after all represents one of two real possibilities for a romantic community: (1) a community united by a set of firm convictions which each individual identifies as *his own* – that is, a community united around a set of basic truths which have been arrived at authentically and reflectively (in distinction from the idealized Greek form of life, in which these truths would be simply taken for granted); (2) an ironist community united by no common belief except that each individual is the locus of authority for what is to count for him as true and good, and that no individual can claim more than a subjective validity for his own beliefs (for what “works for him”).¹⁶² Moreover, each would see the other as a subordinate part of what he takes to be true. The ironist sees the determining “I” as the basis of everything (that is, that he as an individual must decide to *let* something count for him), and his knowledge of this therefore loosens the hold on him that these beliefs may have once had.

The ironist therefore must see the non-ironist as being deluded about what he believes he can really claim with authority. The non-ironist, on the other hand, must see the ironist’s standpoint as parasitic on the general life and beliefs of the community, as a self-indulgent pretense of assuming a “higher” standpoint than the community out of which he takes his ideas. For the non-ironist, the ironist can only appear to be evil, for the non-ironist can only see the ironist as someone who sets himself apart from the basic self-evident truths to which any “rational” or “sane” or “intelligent” man or woman would assent. The ironist declares not only that he does not agree that the truths are so “self-evident” and not only that he must reserve the right for himself to decide whether these truths can possibly count for him – worse, he declares

that these so-called truths *really have no* validity on their own unless some individual (such as himself) elects to count them as his own. The ironist thus seems to be denying outright what the non-ironist understands for all practical purposes to be the "commonsense" criteria of intelligence and rationality themselves. The ironist's account denies the very possibility of the validity of the non-ironist's account of what is authoritative; he thus challenges directly whom the non-ironist takes himself to be. Since the ironist does this knowingly and self-consciously, he thus seems to the non-ironist to be not just philosophically mistaken about a few abstruse issues in the theory of knowledge but to be *bad*. Moreover, he seems to express his contempt for what is true and virtuous by his insistence that *for him* all the so-called "self-evident truths" voiced by the non-ironist count for nothing unless by his own free act he (the ironist) *elects* to count them. The ironist also claims to do this out of only the most high-minded of motives: his refusal not to browbeaten into going against his own convictions. To the non-ironist, he thus also seems to be a *hypocrite*, since he pretends to take seriously things that on his own terms he cannot.¹⁶³

To the non-ironist, it will seem obvious that at least the "commonsense" of any community will cluster around some set of beliefs that will seem obvious and self-evident to the members of that community, and to that extent there will always be a non-ironic consensus about what needs to be counted as true and valuable. Out of the institutions and practices of the community will emerge a set of beliefs that will be reciprocally recognized by the members of the community but against which the ironist will assert his own authority. The ironist will point out that whatever the set of beliefs may be, it has its force only in the practices of mutual recognition by the members of the community and has no definitive claim on anybody who does not participate in those practices. In reply, the non-ironist asserts against the ironist that all "intelligent" (or "rational" or "sane" or whatever other term of approval he uses) people in the community recognize in their hearts that such-and-such is just "the way things have to be done." (If the non-ironist is philosophically inclined, he might also claim that such-and-such form a set of "basic intuitions" against which all other moral claims or theories must be measured.) The ironist replies that it is not the case that all well intentioned, rational (or sane or intelligent or whatever) people share these beliefs, since he and his non-ironist friends do not or at least need not share them. (If the ironist is philosophically inclined, he can claim that these are only the basic intuitions of a single group, and even if he does contingently happen to share them, this nonetheless confers no special authority on them.) Moreover, the ironist takes the non-ironist's appeal to things like "the beliefs we all share" as all the more proof that what he, the ironist, says is correct. In fact, the ironist would claim, if anybody is a hypocrite it is the non-ironist who claims a universal validity for what he in practice admits are only the shared beliefs of a particular community (or maybe even just his own intuitions on the matter).¹⁶⁴

The non-ironist thus represents the *judgmental* agent who condemns the ironist but does not act, whereas the ironist represents the agent who realizes

that he must act even in the face of what he takes to be the contingency of all standards. When followed out to their logical conclusions, both the ironist and non-ironist transform into two common figures of modern life: (1) The judgmental agent becomes the person who does not act but only prattles on about the "absolute standards" that must be maintained and is forever moaning about the loss of such standards; (2) the ironist becomes the kind of casuistical agent who is always invoking the "complexity" of life to justify his own self-serving actions, and pointing out to others how they have "failed to understand" just how very complex is the situation he is in. In reality, both are hypocrites in that both make duty a matter merely of words, each claiming all the while the high moral ground for himself: the judgmental agent in terms of his insistence on purity and clean hands, the casuistical ironist in terms of his insistence that whatever he does (given how "complex" life is), he is doing his "duty."¹⁶⁵ One becomes the "beautiful soul" who is forever above actually doing anything and who is forever intoning against the corrupt world he always finds around him; the other becomes the "beautiful soul" of action, invoking his sterling conscientiousness, his fine intentions and the regrettable complexities of the situation to justify whatever it is he happens to do. The judgmental agent holds the acting ironist to be a hypocrite, since he can only see his claims as casuistical, *ex post facto*, self-serving legitimations of what is really just a matter of personal interest; able to understand only motives that are pure, he is unable to see any motives in the ironist's actions other than those that can only seem to him to be self-serving.¹⁶⁶ The acting casuistical ironist sees the judgmental non-ironist as the kind of hypocrite who claims purity only by avoiding ever actually *doing* anything.

This would seem to be an impasse in the romantic account of what constitutes an authoritative reason for belief and action, and it would seem to undermine the romantic's claim to have construed what would count as a realization of freedom. However, in confronting the various statements by the judgmental agent, the ironist becomes capable of seeing himself in the "other," the judgmental agent himself – that is, he becomes capable of understanding what he is really doing by reflecting on the other agent's practices, something that, after all, the ironist actually claims to do in his taking himself to be "above it all." By his own hypocrisy, by claiming to be "above it all" while never having to act, the judgmental agent actually holds up a mirror to the ironist, showing him that his own way of talking about what he is doing is, after all, just talk, often being simply a prop that he uses for convenient justifications of what he wants to do. Even on his own terms, the ironist himself must be able to separate what is merely an action that serves his own interests from what he takes to be an important action, even when both those aspects fall within the same action. Moreover, the ironist holds that his actions can have, given the institutions, practices and history of his community, great importance within the community, even while he also holds it to be true that there is no "metaphysical," definitive justification for those practices outside of the structure of mutual recognition within that community. He comes to see that the non-ironist has a point, for the non-ironist expresses

the shared beliefs that give the community the shape that it has and that therefore structure the self that the ironist himself has. The ironist thus comes to give up his standpoint of being "above it all," for he now sees that even his own ironist self is a *social* self; without *this* past, in *this* community, the romantic ironist self would not and could not exist. The ironist thus sees that like the judgmental agent, he too held that there is one thing that any "enlightened" (or "rational" or whatever) agent must believe – namely, the primacy or superiority of the ironist *self*. However, in coming to that belief, he implicitly ceases being a romantic ironist, and thus ceases being a "beautiful soul."¹⁶⁷ Just as there is no immediate knowledge for "sense-certainty," there is no immediate knowledge even of oneself or one's own heart. All knowledge, even self-knowledge, even the "knowledge" of that which it seems that one "must" believe, is mediated. There is no fixed Archimedean point to which any agent can fasten his beliefs that is independent of all other points.

Hegel asks us to imagine the romantic ironist confessing this to the judgmental agent. The former ironist now sees his equality with the other, and in confessing to the other, expects a new form of mutual recognition (of spirit) to appear. But the other rebuffs him, for he remains a "beautiful soul," only now not really so beautiful; instead, he becomes the "hard-hearted" moralist, who refuses to identify himself with the former ironist.¹⁶⁸ But the same possibility exists for the hard-hearted moralist as did for the ironist; the ironist holds up a mirror to the judgmental consciousness, showing him that there are no truths that can be taken as metaphysical anchors independently of social practice, and that his own reliance on "the universal" (on "basic intuitions," or on "what we must all take for granted") is hypocrisy when it is expressed as what "any sound mind" must believe, for the judgmental consciousness is either dogmatically taking his *self*-selected standards to be *the* standards against which all these things are to be measured, or at best is representing the standards of a particular, historical community as if they expressed timeless truths, or, to the extent that he is aware of the contingency of his own beliefs, is actually no different from the ironist himself. If the judgmental consciousness follows up the confession made by the ironist, seeing the ironist's point and seeing his similarity to the ironist, then the judgmental agent also ceases to be what he was.¹⁶⁹ Each forgives the other, and in that way each comes to be reconciled to the other. Each comes to see that a depiction of what is authoritative for belief and action must take into account the historical contingency of those standards, and thus each comes to accept a key part of what the ironist intends; but each also comes to see that the ironic stance toward such contingency is not enough and that the community must work out within its own terms an account of why its standards have the authority they do in order for those standards to be satisfactory to the members of the community. In that way, the ironist and the judgmental agent come to see the "truth" of each other's viewpoints as they each abandon their own particular viewpoint.

In this reconciliation, the romantic community abandons its account of

itself as a *romantic* community while preserving what it takes to have been the truths of such a community. Its members come to see that they are indeed held together by a set of shared beliefs; that all actions are motivated out of a complex of passions, interests and so on, and that the significance of what one does is a matter of its recognition by members of the community; and that action is complex, and wrongs can be done, but that the community can best realize its self-identity if it bases its practices not exclusively on praise and blame based on contingent and partial perspectives but on the reconciliation and forgiveness that becomes possible when those perspectives are seen for the partial, contingent perspectives they are.

The former romantics thus find themselves no longer in a romantic community but in a kind of community that is by virtue of its reflections on itself an *absolute* community: It is not mediated by any metaphysical "other" but only by the free-standing structures of social practice that make it up. This community now has the possibility of understanding and structuring its institutions and practices so that they are not alien impositions on its members but continuous with their sense of who they are. These institutions may then be rationally reconstructed to serve as supports and embodiments of its members' desires and their duties, such that in acting on the dictates of these institutions, individuals can find themselves *in* the activities they require and can be fully reconciled with the social world around them, thereby becoming genuinely free. Modern lives thus acquire the *possibility* of being non-alienated in communal life, of perhaps discovering a modern form of *Sittlichkeit*, of a form of life in which "the way things are done" is congruent with the modern sense of reflective distancing and of agents *electing* what is to count for them, with appeals to subjective conscience fitting together with moral certainty. Such *possible* social institutions would not be legitimated by an appeal to any transcendent values but only by appeal to the way in which those practices can show themselves to be satisfactory in light of the insufficiencies of past communities' accounts of what they took to be authoritative and in light of what it would mean for a modern form of life to realize the ideal of freedom.

At this point in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel argues that this form of community can only be a *modern religious* community – that is, a community that is oriented to reconciling its members with each other by reflecting on what it is that binds them together but which does not at the same time deny their distinctively modern sense of individuality.¹⁷⁰ In this modern religious community, humanity therefore acquires the possibility of *coming to terms with what it has come to be*, rather than seeking to create itself along the lines of any kind of metaphysically structured image. Hegel must now explain how this religiously bonded community brings us to such self-certainty and truth and why it will not break down as the other forms of self-understanding have done. It will turn out, so Hegel will argue, that the God of this religious community is not the transcendent metaphysical God of orthodox Christianity but is what is divinely immanent within human life itself as the human community has come to understand itself. What we take as *sacred* – the

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divine – are the things that for us have come to have absolute value (that is, in Hegel's words, what “exists in and for itself”). Humanity's highest interests are expressed in what it holds, as it were, to be beyond bargaining, to be what for it is the absolutely good; it is this “absolutely good” that counts as the sacred in human practice. It is Hegel's thesis that the reconciled community is held together by a definite and shared sense of what is sacred – of what is not simply important for it but what is of absolute value for it – and it is his further thesis that this element of the sacred is established in modern life as the principle of the sacred quality of rational, self-conscious *life*, of *spirit* itself as the self-conscious reflection of a community on what it takes as authoritative for itself. Hegel takes religion to be the institutional communal practice of such reflection and affirmation of what we have as a historical community come to take as sacred. It is also Hegel's thesis that the very concept of religion leads necessarily to the religious community's secularizing itself in the modern world, although without its thereby abandoning its sense of itself as religious.