

## LANGUAGE, THE PARENT OF THOUGHT: SPECULATING WITH HEGEL

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**ABSTRACT:** We speculate with Hegel about language, critiquing interpretations of Hegel's views on language given by Jim Vernon, John McCumber, Stephen Houlgate, and Michael N. Forster, as well as defending Sophisticated Radical Whorfianism from the objections of Maria Francisca Reines and Jesse Prinz. Prior to discussing Forster, we explicate Hegel's views on mechanical memory. We conclude by discussing why, although thought grows up, it does not move out.

**KEYWORDS:** Hegel; Language; Linguistic Relativity; Whorfianism

There is no mode of action, no form of emotion, that we do not share with the lower animals. It is only by language that we rise above them, or above each other—by language, which is the parent, and not the child, of thought.

Wilde 2004, 127

Hegelian dialectics has three moments, as everyone knows, except when it has more. Our article has seven. We speculate with Hegel about language. To articulate our *méditations hégéliennes*, we critique interpretations of Hegel's views on language given by Jim Vernon, John McCumber, Stephen Houlgate, and Michael N. Forster. We also defend Sophisticated Radical Whorfianism from the objections of Maria Francisca Reines and Jesse Prinz. Prior to discussing Forster, we explicate Hegel's views on

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mechanical memory. We conclude by discussing why, although thought grows up, it does not move out.

#### VERNON: A UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR GROUNDS COMMUNICATION

According to Vernon, Hegel believes that all languages share a universal grammar and that it is this grammar that makes possible mutual comprehension. Communication is possible only if the various languages have something in common: “The very act of communication presupposes a universal ground between subjects. It would be impossible for communication to take place, and senseless for it even to be attempted, if the participants did not presuppose some universal, common to all subjects, which both grounds communication, and in some way gets expressed through it. That is, the very existence of language betrays the fact that all subjects presuppose some internal, universal feature of consciousness that gets expressed within language” (Vernon 2007, 3). This commonality, Vernon urges, is a universal grammar, that is “the universal forms of determinate thought that find expression in all natural languages” (Vernon 2007, 42). The universal grammar is not contingently shared by all actual natural languages, as a matter of empirical fact. Rather, it is necessarily shared by all possible natural languages. As Vernon recognizes, this universal grammar corresponds to the deep structure of language postulated by Noam Chomsky, “transformational generative grammar,” while the various general or common grammars of different languages correspond to Chomsky’s surface structure (Chomsky 1965; cited in Vernon 2007, 141). The structures of the universal grammar are those that all possible natural languages must have. The empirical grammars of specific natural languages, in addition to the universal grammar, also have optional and contingent structures.

As a speculative thesis, the assertion that all *possible* natural languages must share a universal grammar for communication to be possible is contestable. As an empirical thesis, the claim that all *actual* natural languages do share a universal grammar is controversial (see Harris 1995). Nicholas Evans asks:

Chomsky’s theory of Universal Grammar has been hugely influential, but is it correct? If we take “universals” in their strongest sense, as designating properties that all languages must have, the haul of clear and empirically impeccable universals after decades of searching is pitiful. Consider “parts of speech”—the sets of similarly profiled words that determine what can be combined with what, and that are the fundament for all grammatical rules. The jury is still out on whether all languages at least distinguish nouns and verbs, but there are certainly languages without prepositions, adjectives, articles, or adverbs. Even if a language does have nouns and verbs, we cannot know in advance what words

will go into what category. “Paternal aunt” can be expressed by a verb in Ilgar, “know” is an adjective in Kayardild, and “love” is a mere suffix in Tiriyó. And things are equally fluid just about anywhere we look—in the sound system, in where the boundaries of concepts are established, in the architecture of grammar, and in which categories a language forces its speakers to attend to constantly.

Evans 2010, 46

That the empirical thesis is controversial itself strongly suggests that the speculative thesis is false.

Vernon does not consider the possibility that the commonality needed for communication might not exist prior to the encounter of persons speaking different languages but instead could be constructed in the encounter itself. For example, McCumber recognizes that Donald Davidson suggests that individuals may construct “passing theories” to comprehend each other. This means that “two interlocutors do not need to have the same linguistic starting point to understand each other, so long as at the end of their exchange they have learned enough about each other, so long as their passing theories are sufficiently similar. Hence, there is no such thing as a body of linguistic knowledge which must be *shared in advance* of any particular interchange and then employed in the act of communicating” (McCumber 1993, 268; see Davidson 1986). The language, or passing theory, that interlocutors mutually construct in order to communicate might have a grammar that the interlocutors then subsequently share. However, it would not be necessary that the languages which they spoke prior to their encounter had the same grammar, much less that those languages share a universal grammar.

Vernon cites two texts to establish that Hegel believes that there must be a universal grammar. The first text is from the *Science of Logic*, where Hegel writes:

He [*sic*] who is beginning to make his [*sic*] acquaintance with grammar finds in its forms and laws dry abstractions, arbitrary rules, quite in general a disconnected aggregate of definitions that have no other value or meaning than what they immediately signify; at the start, there is nothing to be known in them except themselves. On the other hand, he [*sic*] who has mastered a language and is also acquainted with other languages with which to compare it, to such is given the capacity to feel in the grammar of the language the spirit and culture of a people; the same rules now have an enriched, living value.

Hegel 2010b, 36; cited in Vernon 2007, 36-37.

According to Vernon, Hegel is asserting that “after both ‘mastering’ her [*sic*] own tongue and completing some ‘comparative’ study of other languages, she [*sic*] can return to them and find the universal form that essentially structures all languages.

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Grammar is universal across all languages and only a combination of study in languages not our own and some special kind of mastery of our natural tongue can bring this to our consciousness” (Vernon 2007, 37). Vernon believes that “the same rules” refers to the universal grammar that is shared by all languages and so constitutes the common ground that makes possible communication.

However, Hegel’s point is that the rules which were earlier experienced as “arbitrary” are the very same rules as those which are later recognized as having “an enriched, living value.” Indeed, Hegel’s claim that the knowledge of other languages creates a “capacity to feel in the grammar of the language the spirit and culture of a people” would be undermined if grammar were universal. If grammar were universal, each people would have the same spirit and culture.

Second, Vernon claims that Hegel argues that all languages share the same grammar in his lecture, “On Classical Studies” (Hegel 1981; cited in Vernon 2007, 38-43).

On the contrary, Hegel does not maintain that all languages share a universal grammar in this lecture. Rather, he claims that persons unreflectively employ the grammatical structures and concepts of their native language when they think and speak, not recognizing the presence of those structures and concepts. As long as these remain invisible, persons are unable to consider that those structures and concepts may influence the ways in which they think.<sup>1</sup> Learning Greek and Latin, with their different grammars, is a corrective to a blinkered view of the world. Having learned to think and speak with grammars and concepts that are initially external and alien, persons can then become conscious of the presuppositions embedded in the grammatical structures and concepts of their native language. As is obvious from this brief description, Hegel’s discussion in “On Classical Studies” assumes that languages have different grammars. It neither addresses nor presupposes that persons must share a universal grammar in order to communicate.

The supposed textual evidence that Vernon cites does not support his interpretation. Nevertheless, using clues that he believes are in Hegel’s *Logic*, Vernon attempts to make explicit the universal grammar. According to him, the words present within mechanical memory, which is discussed in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit*, lose all cultural specificity because they function only as variables or ciphers. (Vernon does not consider that regarding words as variables is itself culturally specific). Although words present within mechanical memory retain their sounds and meanings, these are irrelevant because the words are regarded only as variables, as subjects and predicates

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<sup>1</sup>Gerow1982 and Lawrence 1998 articulate this point in a different domain.

in judgments. That is, only the roles of the words as subjects and predicates in judgments are considered, not their sounds and meanings. Judgments then become the premises and conclusions of syllogisms. Vernon first generates judgments of existence, reflection, necessity, and the concept. He then generates the corresponding syllogisms.

Vernon's generation of the universal grammar that he believes is implicitly present in Hegel's *Logic* is ingenious. Nevertheless, there are six compelling reasons to doubt that it can do the work that Vernon intends.

First, Vernon does not explain where the copulative—the “is” of “S is P”—comes from or why it is legitimate to link the variables formed from the words in mechanical memory to form judgments. That the “is” simply appears and begins coupling subjects and predicates—thereby constituting variables as subjects and predicates—gives rise to the worry that the universal grammar that Vernon seeks to generate has instead been presupposed.

Second, even if such a grammar could be successfully generated, it would still be necessary to show that all natural languages really do, as a matter of empirical fact, have the same grammar and that this grammar is the one that Vernon believes he finds implicit in Hegel's *Logic*. Do all natural languages have the same grammar?

The grammar that Vernon generates requires recursion, the ability to unlimitedly extend sentences by embedding or adding clauses. *Hegel is a philosopher* can be extended to *Slavoj Žižek believes that Hegel is a philosopher*, and this in turn can be extended further to *Slavoj Žižek believes that Hegel is a philosopher to whom many poststructuralist thinkers are indebted, although they are reluctant to admit this*. That Vernon's grammar requires recursion is corroborated when he writes, in discussing the judgment of necessity, that “disjunction presupposes conjunction, that is, the disjunctive judgment has both a negative (i.e. ‘either ... or’) or a positive (i.e. ‘both ... and’) form, each of which demands syncategorematic terms, or equivalent surface expressions of this relation” (Vernon 2007, 96).

In “The Faculty of Language,” Marc D. Hauser, Noam Chomsky, and W. Tecumseh Fitch maintain that recursion is a necessary feature of every natural language (Hauser et al. 2002). However, Daniel Everett claims that the language of the Pirahã in Brazil does not have recursion (Everett 2005). If Pirahã lacks recursion, then it would not have the internal resources to generate the grammar that Vernon maintains is universal. It might seem tempting to respond that, if it lacks recursion, Pirahã is not a human language; or it is such a primitive language that it cannot be considered a counter-example to the thesis that all languages have a universal grammar. Such replies would be, respectively, wicked and naughty. Wicked: any natural language spoken by humans is a human language, and so the claim that Pirahã

is not a human language is actually the indefensible assertion that the Pirahã are not humans. Naughty: Pirahã might have grammatical structures that are missing in other languages, and hence it could be equally sophisticated; even it does not have other structures, since modern languages have less complex grammars than ancient languages, Pirahã could be the most modern. Is a Barnett Newman or a Mark Rothko—to switch to another register—more primitive than a Michelangelo or a Rembrandt? In any event, what is at stake is not whether the Pirahã can *think* recursively, but rather whether their *grammar* allows for recursion. For example, they could express *Slavoj Žižek believes that Hegel is a philosopher* as two sentences: *Slavoj Žižek spoke. Hegel is a philosopher.*

Everett's thesis that Pirahã lacks recursion is controversial (see Nevins et al. 2009; Everett 2009; Evans and Levinson 2009). It may be incorrect, of course. However, that his thesis is controversial itself strongly suggests that a language could exist which did not allow recursion and that it is in an empirical question whether all actual languages allow recursion. Hence, even if recursion is a structure that is present in all *actual* languages, it may not be a necessary structure of all *possible* languages.

Third, even if all possible languages could be shown to necessarily have that universal grammar, this would not demonstrate that the native speakers of any specific language avail themselves of all of that grammar's structures. Nor would it show that speakers actually recognize all of the sentences formed in accordance with the universal grammar as well-formed. These are empirical questions. However, they quickly becomes speculative. Insofar as any actual language does not avail itself of certain structures of the universal grammar, or if its speakers do not recognize sentences formed in accordance with the universal grammar as well-formed, then it may be plausibly maintained that those structures are not present in that language's grammar and hence that the universal grammar is not, after all, *universal*.

Put otherwise, it might initially be thought that all of the structures of the universal grammar could be within the linguistic competence of idealized speakers/hearers of every language, even if some of the structures of the universal grammar are never manifest in the actual linguistic performance of any of the speakers/hearers of a specific language. If some of the structures of the putative universal grammar are never manifest in the actual linguistic performance of any of the speakers/hearers of a specific language, however, the assertion that those structures are nevertheless within the linguistic competence of idealized speakers/hearers of that language would be highly suspect.

Fourth, a universal grammar generated from judgments is unable to provide the complete grammars of most, perhaps any, actual languages, since judgments can

express only declaratives, not questions, exclamations, or commands. So, even if judgments could be universally translated, it would not follow that such other grammatical structures as questions, exclamations, and commands could also be universally translated.

Fifth, there are valid inferences that cannot be expressed in syllogisms, for example, “man [*sic*] is animal, therefore the head of a man is the head of an animal” (De Morgan 1847, 114). So, even if the grammar that Vernon claims to find is universal, at least some of the modes of reasoning that speakers of most, perhaps all, languages actually use will not be expressible in that universal grammar. As a consequence, the universal grammar would be, at most, a proper subset of each of those grammars. Moreover, even if the universal grammar is a proper subset of every language’s grammar, this subset would not be sufficient to make possible mutual comprehension.

Finally, the previous three observations collectively suggest that, even with a universal grammar firmly in place, it would not suffice to enable communication between speakers of different languages. It is likely that what one party wishes to communicate would not be expressible in the grammar of the other group. For these areas, which may be considerable, speakers would have to rely on a Davidsonian passing theory. And if a passing theory is required in those areas, why would it not do for all? Vernon seems to intuit these points when he concedes that misunderstandings and intractable failures to mutually communicate are still possible. Although Vernon’s own emphasis is on willful misunderstandings, he recognizes that misunderstanding can occur even if persons are striving for mutual comprehension.

There are no compelling argument that all possible natural languages must share a universal grammar. Hegel’s texts show that he does not believe that languages share a universal grammar. It is an empirical question whether the grammar that Vernon believes to be implicit in Hegel’s *Logic* is universal. Finally, that grammar would be insufficient for human communication.

#### MCCUMBER: MECHANICAL MEMORY GIVES CONTENT TO NAMES AS SUCH

Whereas Vernon emphasizes grammar, McCumber focuses his attention on names. Hegel’s mechanical memory was introduced above, but it will receive a fuller treatment here. He distinguishes between retentive memory (which recollects names), reproductive memory (which can manipulate and combine items remembered), and

mechanical memory (the content of which is meaningless).<sup>2</sup>Hegel further distinguishes between “representational names” and “names as such.” A representational name can denote a particular thing, a universal, or an attribute. Representational names are public, not personal or idiosyncratic; in the fullest sense, they are signs, entirely arbitrary designators. Representational names acquire their meaning in a linguistic community, specifically through the discourse of experts.<sup>3</sup>Names as such are representational names that, in mechanical memory, are stripped of their meaning. A representational name can lose its meaning by incessantly repeating it, for instance, and children can memorize poems they do not comprehend.<sup>4</sup> Hegel remarks:

We obviously do not really know a composition by heart, until we attach no sense to the words; the recitation of what is thus known by heart therefore automatically becomes accentless. If the correct stress is introduced, it disturbs the mechanical sequence and therefore easily messes up the recitation. The capacity for being able to memorise by heart series of words, whose sequence involves no intelligible principle or which are already senseless for themselves (a series of proper names), is so supremely marvellous, because it is the very essence of mind to be *in its right mind*, but here mind becomes self-externalized *within itself*, and its activity a mechanism. But the mind is only *in its right mind* as a unity of *subjectivity* and *objectivity*; and here memory, after the mind is initially in intuition so external that it *finds* its determinations, and in representation recollects *this find* into itself and makes it its own, as memory it makes itself external within itself, so that what is its own presents itself as something that is found. Out of the two

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<sup>2</sup> Compare Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos 2005, Winfield 2007.

<sup>3</sup> McCumber’s view touches that of Burge 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Staal 1986, 31-32: “A prerequisite for the traditional study of ritual is that the student knows his own Veda by heart. He must know it thoroughly, from beginning to end. When given any couple of words, he must be able to continue the recitation from there. If he is good or takes pleasure in games, he can recite it backward; recite every other word; do with the words anything that a computer can be programmed to do; single out or count their occurrences, group them together according to certain criteria; in brief, perform the kinds of exercise of which the *vikrti* ‘modifications’ are simple examples. On this foundation he can learn to change the traditional order that he has committed to memory; and here we witness the beginning of those extraordinary exercises that are the bread and butter—or rice and ghee—of Vedic ritual. Most of these make no sense in terms of meaning (for the meaning has never been learnt), and often little sense even in terms of form; because many of them were, at the outset and at least in part, either due to intuitions that are no longer recoverable, or simply due to chance. Once put together, these exercises can be learnt. There may be elements that facilitate their study, for example, the occurrence of certain words; such as the word for dawn—*uṣas*—that the pupil will be familiar with even if he need not know what it means. Or ‘Agni,’ for that matter; much more common and familiar; yet to the young scholar who is beginning to find his way in the ritual maze, primarily nothing but a sound.”

moments of thinking, objectivity, is here posited within intelligence as a quality of intelligence itself.

Hegel 2007, 201, section 463 remark

It is worthwhile to tarry a moment to reflect on how flabbergasting is Hegel's declaration that meaninglessness is at the center of meaning, mechanism within spirit. The only other claim that is comparably astounding is the Védic assertion that the heart of ātman, the self, is excrement (*pūriṣam vai mādhyam ātmānah*).<sup>5</sup> Charles Malamoud could have referred as much to Hegel as to the Védas when he writes that “the Absolute is a friend of empty spaces” (Malamoud 1996, 71).

A name as such is a sound with no referent; it is a homophone of the representational name from which it is derived. “It is in names that we *think*,” Hegel maintains (Hegel 2007, 199, section 462 remark). Hence, thought both needs and can transcend language. Thought first must have representational names. These can be stripped of their meaning to create names as such. Thought then pours its own conceptual content into names as such. This content is itself generated by thinking only with names as such. Initially meaningless names as such function as “markers” which can abbreviate or expand other meaningless names as such. In this way, the names as such acquire meaning by abbreviating or expanding other names as such. This process of abbreviation and expansion can continue indefinitely.

McCumber believes that Hegel constructs his system so that the names as such which he deploys will have meanings that are relevantly similar to the representational names from which they are derived. Indeed, McCumber seems to suggest that representational names and names as such will be homophones with the same meanings (McCumber 1993, 308 and 321). As will be discussed in the next section, Forster claims that meaning *tout court* consists, for Hegel, in publicly shared word usage. However, McCumber believes that only the meaning of representational names consists in publicly shared word usage, primarily the usage in expert discourse, while the meaning of names as such consists in their usage by the speculative thinker. That Hegel's system is generated only through names as such allows it to be independent of anything external to it. McCumber believes that Hegel's procedures are a priori and universal:

The system then enriches itself further purely by regrouping previously introduced content, without appeal to experience. The entire sequence is thus a priori. Because it is thus a priori, it is also universally valid for all speaking

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<sup>5</sup>*The Taittīrya Saṃhitā* 5.3.5.2; cited Malamoud 1996: “In the midst of a person are his droppings” (63) and “the heart of the self is shit” (281).

beings—not because there is a body of truths which they can know independently of experience, or which would be accessible to a disembodied being, but because it is a way of thinking upon which they can embark regardless of their experience. The universality of thought for Hegel then does not mean that there are certain ideas which all humans share, or certain formal structures which they would all accept (such as *modus ponens*), or certain basic truths no one would deny (such as that she [*sic*] has a body). Rather, what is universal is just the fluent indeterminacy of thought itself, as it groups and regroups markers into new moments, a movement which nothing and no one can resist.

McCumber 1993, 160; see also 316

As McCumber recognizes, this has the surprising result that most of what Hegel discusses in his texts is irrelevant to his system.

There are four difficulties with McCumber's interpretation. First, treating names as such—representational names that have been stripped of their meaning—as markers that can be grouped and regrouped could at most produce a syntax but not semantic meaning. In this regard, the process of manipulating markers would be similar to the rules of an uninterpreted predicate logic. That is to say, names as such are initially meaningless sounds or, alternatively, marks on paper. However, they cannot become meaningful solely as a result of being stipulatively defined as the equivalents, abbreviations, or expansions of other names as such which are also meaningless. More precisely, such a procedure could generate syntactical meaning, providing rules for the manipulation of marks on paper, but it could generate neither representational nor semantic meaning.

Consider “being,” “nothing,” and “becoming.” Everyone knows the story that Hegel tells in his *Logic*: being is the most general concepts but, precisely as such, it cannot be distinguished from nothing; becoming then emerges as the result of the oscillation between being and nothing. This dialectical transition is convincing—but only because “being,” “nothing,” and “becoming” have representational meaning. If these are treated as names as such, sounds or marks without meaning, then there can be no dialectical transition. As a thought experiment, “being,” “nothing,” and “becoming” will be regarded as names as such, as meaningless marks on paper. To ensure that no representational meaning is surreptitiously introduced, these marks will be spelled backwards: “gniieb,” “gnihton,” and “gnimoceb.” No dialectical transition occurs—unless the representation meanings are smuggled into these marks. Gnimoceb

could be stipulatively defined as the abbreviation of *gnieb* and *gnihton*, but this would license only a syntactical rule.<sup>6</sup>

Second, in order for names as such to acquire meaning, that meaning must be imported from ordinary usage or expert discourse. Hegel's system would be dependent upon something external to it, pace McCumber, insofar as names as such become semantically meaningful.

Third, many peoples have not historically grouped and regrouped markers into new moments, and so the universality of thought to which McCumber refers can be only potential, not one that is actually existing. The problem is that *any* mental activity that proceeds according to specific protocols would also be potentially universal, and so there is nothing unique about markers being able to be grouped and regrouped into new moments. Everett maintains that the Pirahã do not have numbers and that they do not count, for example; nevertheless, they could be taught the Portuguese number words and then they would be able to count, if they wished to do so.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, blindfold chess could be introduced to cultures who had never heard of it. The movement of grouping and regrouping markers into new moments, like counting and blindfold chess, may be irresistible, but there is no requirement that persons practice it. Since the meaning of a name as such must be imported, moreover, the motivation remains obscure.

Finally, McCumber suggests that Hegel's philosophical system can be comprehended only because someone—in the first instance, Hegel—teaches the system to others; the teacher-student relation is necessary to the system's comprehension (McCumber 1993, 327). But who teaches Hegel? In order for a system to be possible, it must not only be teachable. It must also be inventible. If the system could be comprehended by persons only insofar as it is taught to them, then the system would be impossible. That a system is not inventible may not be an objection to the belief that the Védas of India are eternal and they were revealed to *ṛṣis*—seers or sages—who were then able to divine and express them in Sanskrit. It is, however, an objection that Hegel, who is no *ṛṣi*, would be able to invent the system that, for everyone else, requires a teacher to apprehend.

Contrary to McCumber, mechanical memory is the moment when—having made its own that which initially appeared as immediate and external, inwardizing or internalizing that content—spirit makes itself immediate and external to itself, and so

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<sup>6</sup>Fritzman2011 has a fuller articulation of this argument.

<sup>7</sup>Rather than counting, a more exact example would be mental calculation.

transform itself. Mechanical memory allows spirit to suspend meaning. Nothing is superior or alien to spirit. Spirit can sublimate everything, even itself!

What is spirit? Spirit is nothing, no-thing, it is the infinite power of negativity, the ability to self-determine itself without being constrained by anything external to it. Not because there are no constraints, in the first instance, but rather because spirit, in positing its own presuppositions, transfigures those very constraints into enabling conditions.

### HOULGATE: RESTRICTED ECONOMY AND MECHANICAL MEMORY

Focusing on the “Lordship and Bondage” section in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Jacques Derrida maintains that Hegelian consciousness functions according to a restricted economy, rather than a general economy. That is to say, Hegelian consciousness only appears to risk death, an absolute negativity from which there would be no return. However, it already knows in advance that there is no risk of death and that it will earn a profit. Derrida writes:

Hegel clearly had proclaimed the necessity of the master’s retaining the life that he exposes to risk.... To rush headlong into death pure and simple is thus to risk the absolute loss of meaning, in the extent to which meaning necessarily traverses the truth of the master and self-consciousness. One risks losing the effect and profit of meaning which were the very *stakes* one hoped to *win*. Hegel called this mute and nonproductive death, this death pure and simple, *abstract negativity*, in opposition to “the negativity characteristic of consciousness, which cancels in such a way that it preserves and maintains what is sublated ... and thereby survives its being sublated.”

Derrida 1978, 255

Although Hegelian consciousness seems to risk everything, Derrida charges, it actually risks nothing.

Stephen Houlgate responds that mechanical memory is a moment where Hegelian consciousness does indeed risk everything. In mechanical memory, the meaning of words is wholly lost.<sup>8</sup> This results, according to Houlgate, in the loss of an inner self:

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Hegel 2007, 200, section 462 *Zusatz*: “Just as the genuine *thought* is the *thing*, so too is the *word*, when it is employed by genuine thinking. Intelligence therefore, in filling itself with the word, receives into itself the nature of the thing. But this reception has another sense too: intelligence thereby makes itself into something *thingly*, in such a way that subjectivity, in its distinction from the thing, becomes quite empty, a mindless container of words, it becomes *mechanical* memory. In this way the *excess of the recollection* of the word veers round, so to speak, into extreme *alienation* of the intelligence. As I become more familiar with the meaning of the word, as the word thus unites more closely with my inwardness, increasingly the

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I connect words and sounds which have no relation to the specific images and experiences, the connecting, associating, interiorizing, and reproducing of which is all that I have hitherto understood myself to be. In mechanical memory, I thus cut myself off from and lose the very thing which have constituted my subjectivity and inner life so far. Indeed, to the extent that I concentrate wholly on memorizing words and sounds that have no meaning for me ... and lose sight of what has animated and given meaning to my words up to now, I cease being who and what I have previously experienced myself to be. And yet, although I now am, and know myself to be, nothing of what I have always been, I am still wholly aware of *myself*—namely, as the activity of mechanically connecting and retaining what means nothing to me and is nothing to me. Indeed, that is *all* I now know myself to be.

Houlgate 1996, 90

The self then becomes “the *abstract* activity of connecting as such,” the activity of connecting meaningless words. This self cannot know, prior to the moment of mechanical memory, that it has the potential to become a mere abstract activity of connecting. Moreover, having become an abstract activity of connecting, the self cannot know in advance that there will be a return. Further, the self that emerges after mechanical memory is something novel and unanticipated: “We *come into* a new consciousness of ourselves that we have never had—and could not conceive—in quite that form before” (Houlgate 1996, 90). Although a profit may be realized, consciousness has risked everything.

Houlgate’s interpretation of mechanical memory is highly suggestive and anticipates the reading developed in this article: mechanical memory allows spirit to suspend meaning, and so spirit can sublimate even itself. Nevertheless, it is not sufficient as a rebuttal to Derrida. Derrida could respond that Houlgate ignores the pedagogical context in which mechanical memory occurs. Children may be required to memorize famous speeches, poems, passages in foreign languages, or religious scriptures. They may comprehend nothing of what they have memorized. Houlgate would be correct to point out that these children can then become the abstract activity of connecting, since they see no point in these exercises and do not anticipate how their selves may expand as a consequence.

But their parents and teachers do! They are well aware that nothing is risked when children memorize and recite, even when the children do not understand what they have memorized. Derrida might further reply, moreover, that everything would be

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objectivity and hence the determinacy of the meaning of the word can disappear, increasingly, therefore, the memory itself, together with the word, can become something bereft of mind.”

risked in mechanical memory only if there were a substantial chance that subjectivity would be irrecoverably lost. That never happens. Indeed, Derrida could turn the charge that Hegel makes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—that the struggle of the “knight of virtue” against the “way of the world” is a “sham-fight” that the knight, who believes that virtue will inevitably prevail, “cannot take seriously” and “dare not allow to become serious” (Hegel 1977, 231, section 386)—against Hegel: it is a sham! Consequently, mechanical memory cannot serve as an example where consciousness risks everything.

The proper way to respond to Derrida is to note that Hegel’s story is retrospective, not prospective. Derrida incorrectly assumes that Hegel’s story is prospective and logically necessary, such that a given moment determines all subsequent moments. On this interpretation, Hegel has a restrictive economy. It requires that a profit will be realized on every expenditure, that there will be a return on spirit’s investment, and that risk is only apparent. The fix is in, Derrida believes, always already.

Because Hegel’s story is retrospective, he can know that a profit will be realized because it already has been. That is to say, a specific moment could have had several successor moments. It is even possible that there would have been no successor, that death would have been the end of the story. The risk is real. It is located in the *events* narrated, not in the story about them. However, if death were the end of the story—the story is about spirit, remember, not individuals—there would be no story. That there is a story—with a narrator and an audience—means that it did not end in death. Hegelian necessity is retrospective and narrational. A specific moment could have had several successors, and so which successor it has is contingent. Once a successor emerges, however, this then becomes necessary.<sup>9</sup>

To turn to Hegel’s discussion of “Lordship and Bondage” in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is possible that there were previous struggles to the death that ended in death. From them, there was only a victor and a corpse. How the struggle ends is contingent. Lord and bondsman, instead of victor and corpse, become possible only when a struggle to the death does not end in death, but rather in mastery and servitude. How a struggle ends is contingent, but it is necessary that the story of lord and bondsman not end in death.

#### MECHANICAL MEMORY: IT TAKES A VILLAGE

In order to adequately comprehend mechanical memory, it must be simultaneously perceived from two perspectives, in a binocular vision: the individual (typically, a child)

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<sup>9</sup>Fritzman 2001 has a further discussion.

and the community. Children engage in mechanical memory because they are cajoled or coerced. True, occasionally a child will mindlessly repeat a word until its meaning seems to evaporate. Typically, however, children develop a mechanical memory only because adults put them up to it. And so children memorize things they comprehend only dimly, or not at all. That children do not comprehend what they have memorized does not mean that their efforts have been wasted.

First, their ability to memorize has been expanded and this may serve them well in later years. Second, when reciting what they have memorized, children discover that they can, at the same time, think about other things. This ability to bifurcate consciousness is invaluable. It allows persons, not only to think *before* they speak, but also to think *while* they speak—to think about something else while they speak, perhaps about what they will say next—a skill especially useful to professors and politicians. Third, having memorized what they did not comprehend, persons may, in later years, find a world of meaning in those passages.

In John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, to give an example from a seemingly distant domain, he reports that his father, James Mill, gave explanations that the son found incomprehensible but remembered. Later, those explanations proved to be important nucleation seeds, sources of crystallization, for John Stuart Mill's own thinking: "The explanations did not make the matter at all clear to me at the time; but they were not therefore useless; they remained as a nucleus for my observations and reflections to crystallize upon; the import of his general remarks being interpreted to me, by the particular instances which came under my notice afterwards" (Mill 1981, 21 and 23).<sup>10</sup> There is a crucial element of retrospective projection here, whereby a person takes the meaning of a lifetime and projects it back onto the passages incomprehensibly memorized as a youth.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Also compare Mill 1981, 23 and 25: "My father's comments on these orations when I read them to him were very instructive to me. He not only drew my attention to the insight they afforded into Athenian institutions, and the principles of legislation and government which they often illustrated, but pointed out the skill and art of the orator—how everything important to his purpose was said at the exact moment when he had brought the minds of his audience into the state most fitted to receive it; how he made steal into their minds, gradually and by insinuation, thoughts which if expressed in a more direct manner would have roused their opposition. Most of these reflections were beyond my capacity of full comprehension at the time; but they left seed behind, which germinated in due season."

<sup>11</sup> Compare Hegel 2010a, 300, section 237 addition: "The absolute idea is comparable to the old man who says the same religious sentences as the child does, but for the old man they have the meaning of his entire life. Even if the child understands the religious content, what validity that content has for him is still of the sort that lies outside his entire life and world.—The same hold then also for human life in general and the occurrences that make up the content of it."

A fourth benefit of mechanical memory is that by emptying words of their content, persons learn to distance and disassociate themselves from their own beliefs, ideas, and mental content. No critique of ideology, of what passes as accepted practice and wisdom, is possible without this ability. This is the moment of truth in McCumber's interpretation.

Turning to the perspective of the community, especially parents and teachers urge children to memorize material that the children do not comprehend. This is done partly so that the adults can take pride in the sheer ability of children to memorize difficult material, but also because adults anticipate the likely benefits to the children of such memorization. Mechanical memory cannot be comprehended properly if attention is directed solely at those who memorize. It is necessary to include also those who set the tasks of memorization.

To return to McCumber, it is not necessary to invoke mechanical memory to explain how the extension of "swan" can be expanded to include, not only the Northern Hemisphere white swan with which Europeans were formerly acquainted, but the Australian black swan too. However, mechanical memory may be useful when considering whether to regard the Australian duck-billed platypus as a mammal. The platypus has a number of unusual features which are not typically associated with mammals. In addition to its obvious physical characteristics—such as webbed feet, rubbery snout, and ears at the jaw's base—the platypus is a venomous monotreme with electroreception, double cones in its eyes, a jaw unique to mammals, and bones in its pectoral girdle that other mammals lack (see Grant 2008). Hence, the defining criteria of mammal were altered so that the platypus can be included within the extension of mammal, and to that extent, the meaning of "mammal" changed. This process could be described as emptying "mammal" of all meaning and then infusing it with a new meaning, one that now includes the platypus.

A similar account could be given for referring terms during theory change. So, the defining characteristics of "force" change when it migrates from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics. Finally, such an account can explain how, for example, "freedom" changes its meaning, according to Hegel's account in the *Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1956, 18). It is not merely that people have, historically, had different views regarding freedom. What is crucial is that freedom's very meaning changes and develops historically. In retrospect, it is possible to recognize that freedom in the ancient oriental world would now be regarded as mere caprice, the freedom to act without interference from others, not rational freedom.

Spirit can reduce any word to empty meaningless sound. It can thereby regard its own mental content as a nullity. In doing so, moreover, spirit can thereby also regard

itself as a nullity. Spirit is not finally identical with any positive content. Rather, it is the ability to nullify all content. This insight highlights the limitation of Forster's view, discussed below, that thought is dependent on and bounded by language. This is not wholly incorrect, but it fails to include spirit's ability to make language a nothing and thereby transfigure itself.

#### FORSTER: THOUGHT IS DEPENDENT ON AND BOUNDED BY LANGUAGE

Hegel's views on language go through five stages, on Forster's interpretation, three where Hegel is influenced by Herder, two which relapse to more conventional positions.<sup>12</sup>

In the first stage, during the late 1780s, Hegel emphasizes the primacy of hearing over vision, and of the spoken over the written word. Language originates in the natural sounds of objects and is subsequently extended to non-sounding objects via sensuous analogies. Hegel believes that meaning consists in publicly shared word usage. Thought is essentially dependent on and bounded in scope by language. The possession of concepts depends on the mastery of the corresponding words. He further maintains that linguistic, and so conceptual, resources vary markedly in different historical periods and cultures. The ancient Greeks, for example, had modes of expression and words, and hence concepts, that modern languages lack. Because of such differences, persons should not interpretively assimilate the views of others to their own.

Forster locates Hegel's first relapse in 1796-1800. In the 1796 poem, *Eleuis*, and the 1798-1800 work, *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, Hegel abandons his earlier belief that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language, asserting instead that certain religious thoughts are ineffable. Forster cites Theodor Bodammer's book, *Hegels Deutung der Sprache*, to corroborate these claims.

In the second phase, 1803-1807, Hegel returns to the views on language that he advocates during the first stage.

Hegel's second relapse occurs during 1807-1827. It is characterized by diminished interest in language, as well as again rejecting the claim that thought depends on and is bounded by language (in the "Religion" section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). In "The Artificer" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and later in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel claims that not all thought need be linguistically expressible by the thinker. Rather, some

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<sup>12</sup> Whether Herder was the originator of the ideas discussed below, as Forster maintains, has been contested; see Lifschitz 2012.

thoughts may instead have a foundation in a non-linguistic expressive medium. Examples of this are architecture for the ancient Egyptians and sculpture for the Greeks. In the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel rejects the view that meaning consists in word-usage. He espouses a dualistic theory, Forster claims, in sections 458-464, especially in section 461, according to which the linguistic sign externally expresses an inner meaning. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Spirit*, moreover, Hegel renounces the view that there are sharp linguistic-intellectual differences between historical periods and cultures—and that assimilative interpretations must be avoided. He instead urges that there is a substantial degree of linguistic and conceptual commonality across periods and cultures in art, religion, and philosophy. Hence, he maintains that assimilative interpretations are appropriate in those areas.

In Hegel's third and final phase, 1827-1831, he again returns to the views he advocated during his first phase: namely, that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language; that linguistic, and so conceptual, resources vary markedly in different historical periods and cultures; and that assimilative interpretations must be avoided.

Forster correctly perceives that Hegel accepts that: meaning consists in publicly shared word usage; thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language; the possession of concepts depends on the mastery of the corresponding words; linguistic, and so conceptual, resources vary markedly in different historical periods and cultures; and persons should not interpretively assimilate the views of others to their own. However, Forster believes that Hegel's views on language consists in three *stages*, with the first two stages each followed by a relapse, because Forster interprets the trajectory of Hegel's thought as interrupted by relapses.

Hegel does not relapse. Rather than stages, his view on language constitutes a single continuous development.

Regarding the first alleged relapse, Hegel does believe that religious thought is ineffable—to *religion*. That is, religion is unable to adequately express what it would say because it cannot rise above the level of representations, of myths. What is ineffable to religion because it speaks in myths is fully effable to philosophy, which articulates in concepts what religion seeks to express. This is the point that Bodammer actually makes. Bodammer does not support Forster's thesis. Hegel does not maintain that some thoughts are entirely ineffable. Rather, he claims that they cannot be adequately expressed in everyday language or religious discourse. Hence, as Bodammer observes, Hegel develops a philosophical discourse in which what is ineffable for both everyday language and religious discourse becomes effable (Bodammer 1969, 216-218).

Concerning the second relapse. Hegel does accept that some thoughts that are expressible in a non-linguistic medium may not be linguistically expressible—*by the thinker*. Nevertheless, Hegel would accept what Forster denotes as “narrow expressivism” (which maintains that some thoughts which are linguistically expressible are also expressible in a non-linguistic medium). Hegel would reject “wide expressivism” (which claims that some thoughts are not linguistically expressible at all, but are expressible in a non-linguistic medium). Egyptian architecture and Greek sculpture express thoughts that *the Egyptians and the Greeks* were not able to linguistically express. Persons living in the modern era, however, can linguistically express those thoughts. Indeed, it is only because the thoughts of the Egyptians and Greeks are now linguistically expressible that it is possible to recognize that they were attempting to express those thoughts in non-linguistic media. The Egyptians and Greeks were not able to recognize this. This point is not only epistemological but also ontological. The thoughts that the Egyptians and Greeks sought to express can be seen, and actually exist, only retrospectively. Forster misses that Hegel applies a retrospective analysis. Only in retrospect can we see what the Egyptians and Greeks meant. Only in retrospect do they mean that.

Hegel does not espouse a dualistic theory of meaning, according to which the linguistic sign externally expresses an inner meaning, in the *Philosophy of Spirit*. To compress his exposition there, he believes that intuition shifts attention from the sensation to the external object. However, this object can be recollected, or inwardly intuited, as well as associated with other objects, such that one object may represent another. If the two objects relevantly resemble each other, the one is a “symbol” of the other, as the god Jupiter is represented by, symbolized by, an eagle because both are considered to be strong. If the objects do not resemble each other, the one is a “sign” of the other, as a nation is represented by, signified by, a flag. Spoken words do not symbolize, they signify (hieroglyphics symbolize, alphabets signify). They signify because their meaning consists in publicly shared usage. It is because English speakers use “lion” to refer to the lion that “lion” has the meaning that it does. Moreover, on Hegel’s account, signs may become autonomous from sensations. In discussing the lion, speakers need not have any image of the lion present to mind: “Given the name lion, we need neither the intuition of such an animal nor even its image; the name, when we *understand* it, is the simple image-less representation. It is in names that we *think*” (Hegel 2007, 199, section 462 remark).

Hegel never believes that people living in different historical periods and cultures have relevantly similar views about art, religion, or philosophy. Nor does he accept that assimilative interpretations are legitimate in those domains. Hegel believes that

art, religion, and philosophy express the concept, the narrative that a people tells itself about their place in the nature and society. Reflecting on the West, Hegel claims that a developmental history can be told, so that earlier historical periods and cultures—and so their art, religion, and philosophy—resulted in the present modern period. In retrospect, it can be seen that elements of Egyptian and Greek culture contributed to modern culture. On Hegel's historical account, more specifically, previous understandings of art, religion, and philosophy are seen as converging on the modern understanding. This commits Hegel to asserting neither that those cultures were similar to modern culture nor that assimilative interpretations are appropriate. Rather, it is only by recognizing how other cultures markedly differ from his own that Hegel is able to tell his developmental history.

Having shown that there are no relapses in Hegel's account of language, it remains to address several other criticisms Forster makes.

First, Herder maintains that inner forces—he is apparently referring to energies that are internal to a person's body—are the source of word meaning. Forster extends Herder's claim when he suggests that understanding meaning is a matter of being in a real disposition. Forster claims that this is an alternative that Hegel does not consider, although Hegel is aware of it, as it is Herder's position, and that this alternative is superior to Hegel's view that meaning consists in publicly shared word usage. In making this charge, Forster does not recognize that Hegel's section on the "Upside Down World" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* would also provide a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against Herder's claim. If inner forces were the sources of word meaning, then it would be possible for word meaning and publicly shared word usage to be entirely disconnected. This is so because word meaning that had its source in inner forces must be distinct, in principle, from publicly shared word usage. Otherwise, Herder's claim that inner forces are the source of word meaning and Hegel's view that meaning consists in publicly shared word usage would state independent conditions for meaning that have identical extensions; neither would be an alternative to the other. So, word meaning that has its source in inner forces could be the opposite of meaning that consists in publicly shared word usage: the south pole (in word meaning that has its source in inner forces) might actually be the north pole (in publicly shared word usage), attraction could be repulsion, and virtue vice. Publicly shared word usage would then be irrelevant in comprehending the word meaning of other persons; such comprehension would require telepathizing their inner forces. As a consequence of this *reductio*, it is clear that appeals to inner forces cannot explain word meaning, and so Herder's claim must be rejected. Ever if it were conceded that there are such inner forces, inasmuch as they are relevant to comprehending others, their meaning could

only be the result of a retroactive projection from meaning that consists in publicly shared word usage. Herder's claim that meaning consists in inner forces is also in sharp tension with his belief that thought is causally dependent on and bounded by language.

As Robert B. Pippin recognizes, however, Hegel believes that meaning is located at the level of publicly shared expression. Pippin notes that, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "Hegel argues that our conventional modern understanding of agency makes a distorting error by clumsily 'separating' the inner intention from the outer manifestation of the inner, and also in trying to explain the action by reference to the isolated separate intention as prior cause.... We cannot determine what actually was a subject's intention or motivating reason by relying on some sort of introspection, by somehow looking more deeply into the agent's soul, or by some sincerity test.... Only as manifested or expressed can one (*even* the subject herself) retrospectively determine what must have been intended" (Pippin 2008, 156). It is not only that the actual intentions cannot be known *by others* until they are publicly expressed. In addition, what an individual's intentions actually are may not be transparent to the individual either. Whether individuals have sexist or racist beliefs, for example, is determined by their words and deeds. They may sincerely report, based on first-person introspection, that they do not have sexist or racist beliefs. However, their words and deeds may show that they actually do have such beliefs. Hence, individuals may not think what (they think that) they think.

More radically, an individual's intentions (inner forces or dispositions) are constituted by what the individual actually does. Intentions become ontologically determinate only as a result of their public expression. What that public expression is, what it means, is what other people take it to be and mean. There is an element of provisionality here, to be sure, as what persons initially take it to mean may be subsequently comprehended differently, and so revised, by others.

Hegel's position has the seemingly counter-intuitive consequence that sexist or racist intentions, for example, could not legitimately be ascribed to individuals if those intentions never expressed themselves in sexist or racist actions (and, of course, speech acts are a form of action).<sup>13</sup> Intentions are not internal mental states, for Hegel. Rather, intentions are externalized mental states, expressed in actions. Mental content is not located in an interiority that is directly accessible only by the agent. Instead, mental content is located in the external world, in its expression, and is often more

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas D. Smith is thanked for this suggestion.

accessible to others than to the agent.<sup>14</sup> These points are expressed, *mutatis mutandis*, in Fritz Ringer's discussion of the interpretation of historical texts: "When we ask about an author's 'intention' ... we are seeking evidence, not about his [*sic*] state of mind while writing a particular work, but about certain objective characteristics of his [*sic*] text, and especially about its relationship to a given complex of other texts. We are asking questions, in short, about the positional characteristics of a text in its field" (Ringer 1990, 271).

Intentions are retrospectively ascribed to individuals as a consequence of their actions and based on how individuals respond when they are confronted with their actions (when, for example, individuals recognize that their actions—and so their intentions—have been sexist or racist). Hence, sexist or racist intentions cannot be legitimately ascribed to persons who never act in a sexist or racist manner. To paraphrase Hegel's paraphrase of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's aphorism: "If anyone says, 'You certainly act like a person who is free from sexist and racist prejudices, but I can intuit from your unexpressed interior mental states that you really are a sexist and a racist'; without a doubt, every honest person to the end of time, when thus addressed, will retort with a box on the ear."<sup>15</sup>

Second, Forster interprets Hegel as espousing physicalism, behaviorism, and eliminative materialism (Forster 1998, 101). However, Forster also recognizes that "close analogues to our received mentalistic concepts do have application to reality" (Forster 1998, 101; see also 144 and 154). Hegel's view is more subtle, however. Although he would deny that individuals could have thoughts which, as a matter of principle, they could not express in a publicly shared language, individuals can have thoughts that are not expressed. Since meaning, for Hegel, consists in publicly shared word usage, the meaning of unexpressed thoughts, their content, is dependent on their (counterfactual) public expression. The content of thoughts is thus indeterminate insofar as they are not publicly expressed, and—as noted above—that content need not be transparent to the individual. Individuals may flatter others without meaning to do so, insofar as those individuals are taken by others to have engaged in flattery, rather than expressing genuine praise and admiration.

Finally, Forster suggests that meaning need not consist in publicly shared word usage since it is possible that language could originate with a single individual in an instant. In *Wittgenstein on the Arbitrariness of Grammar*, he writes: "On the face of things, we can coherently imagine an intelligent creature who understands meanings being

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<sup>14</sup> Compare Fritzman and Parvizian 2012 and 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Compare Hegel 1977, 193, section 323.

created by God, produced by a chance confluence of atoms, or whatnot just for a few instants, and then destroyed immediately afterwards ... or—even more easily—a radical variant of Robinson Crusoe who, though quite alone in the world from birth, nonetheless comes to understand and express meanings” (Forster 2004, 94). Wittgenstein would respond, and Hegel would second that response, that meanings are public. A sound, gesture, or mark has meaning—this point is ontological, not only epistemological—only insofar as a linguistic community would so recognize it. A creature popping in and out of existence, or a Robinson Crusoe who never has contact with other humans, could not understand and express meanings. As with mechanical memory, discussed above, it takes a village.

#### REINES AND PRINZ: LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY REVIVED

Readers will have recognized that Hegel accepts a version of Whorfianism, the principle of linguistic relativity.<sup>16</sup> Maria Francisca Reines and Jesse Prinz distinguish four versions. The first version, Trivial Whorfianism, maintains that “languages influence psychological processes because, when we use words, we draw attention to things that we might happen to neglect without it” (Reines and Prinz 2009, 1028). This version is trivial because, as Reines and Prinz explain, everyone agrees that language can direct attention. Habitual Whorfianism, the second version, holds that “languages influence psychological processes because they instill habits of thought that lead us to think in certain ways by default that we would not have thought in without language learning” (Reines and Prinz 2009, 1028). Reines and Prinz note that Habitual Whorfianism results from Trivial Whorfianism, since if language is used frequently enough to direct attention to specific things, attention will habitually be directed to them. The third version, Ontological Whorfianism, claims that “languages influence psychological processes because they lead us to organize the world into categories that

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<sup>16</sup> Compare Whorf 1956, 221: “The phenomena of language are background phenomena, of which the talkers are unaware or, at the most, very dimly aware—as they are of the motes of dust in the air of a room, though the linguistic phenomena govern the talkers more as gravitation than as dust would. These automatic, involuntary patters of language are no the same for all men [*sic*] but are specific for each language and constitute the formalized side of the language, or its ‘grammar’—a term that includes much more than the grammar we learned in the textbooks of our school days. From this fact proceeds what I have called the ‘linguistic relativity principle,’ which means, in informal terms, that users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world.... From each such unformulated and naïve world view, an explicit scientific world view may arise by higher specialization of the same basic grammatical patterns that fathered the naïve and implicit view.”

differ from those we would discover without language” (Reines and Prinz 2009, 1029). As Reines and Prinz note, Ontological Whorfianism is confirmed by numerous empirical studies. Radical Whorfianism, the final version, avers that “languages influence psychological processes because thinking depends on natural language” (Reines and Prinz 2009, 1027).

Reines and Prinz grant that this may be true for some domains, but they exclaim that “the idea that *all* thought depends on language strikes us as completely implausible” (Reines and Prinz 2009, 1027). They give four sets of reasons to support their incredulity. First, research on animal cognition, mental imagery, transient aphasia, and language-deprived adults indicates that “sophisticated decision-making can be achieved without language” (Reines and Prinz 2009, 1027). Second, they also argue that “to learn a language, we must map its words onto concepts that we already possess, and, doing that presupposes that thought does not depend on natural language” (Reines and Prinz 2009, 1027). Third, although tests on bilingual speakers demonstrate effects of grammatical gender, even though these tests are conducted in English, which does not have grammatical gender, Reines and Prinz nevertheless maintain that “given their level of fluency, it is unlikely that subjects reverted to their original languages” when responding to the questions (Reines and Prinz 2009, 1027). Finally, they note that Whorfian effects are frequently reversible.

Two versions of Radical Whorfianism should be distinguished: Naïve Radical Whorfianism and Sophisticated Radical Whorfianism. Naïve Radical Whorfianism asserts that all cognition depends on language. This is false, as many nonhuman species have cognition although they do not have language. Nevertheless, Naïve Radical Whorfianism is likely more true than false. Insofar as a nonhuman species has a proto-language, significant aspects of that species’ cognition may depend on it. In contrast to Naïve Radical Whorfianism, Sophisticated Radical Whorfianism maintains that human thought (sapience), unlike nonhuman cognition (sentience), depends on language.<sup>17</sup> And language, *nota bene*, includes gesture and sign language. Although a complete defense of Sophisticated Radical Whorfianism is beyond this article’s scope, its lineaments may be sketched.

If mental images are subsumed under some description, to respond to Reines and Prinz’s other arguments, those images depend on language. That persons with transient aphasia can recover, often in a few days, without having to relearn their

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<sup>17</sup> Compare Sellars 1966, 160: “*All* awareness of *sorts, resemblances, facts*, etc., in short, all awareness of abstract entities—indeed, all awareness even of particulars—is a linguistic affair ... not even the awareness of such sorts, resemblances, and facts as pertain to so-called immediate experience is presupposed by the process of acquiring the use of a language.”

native language strongly suggests that they temporarily lose some language functions, not that their decision-making occurs entirely without language. To the extent that the thinking of language-deprived adults resembles human thinking, rather than nonhuman cognition, it does depend on language. It may also be that humans do not possess two kinds of thinking—nonlinguistic thinking which they share with nonhuman species, and thinking that depends on language—but that even what had been nonlinguistic thinking becomes transfigured, for humans, into language-based conceptualized thinking.

In their second set of reasons, Reines and Prinz argue that learning a language requires that words be linked to concepts, that such concepts must have been learned prior to learning the language, and so thought does not depend wholly on language. However, in endorsing Ontological Whorfianism, they deny this:

Don't we need to conceptualize a category before labeling it? We think not. We do need to be able to represent particular objects, but language can invite us to group together a set of particulars that we would not otherwise group. This new group can be used to form a prototype, which can then be used for further categorization and cognitive elaboration. The role of language is contingent on this scenario (something non-verbal could make the group salient), but profound. In leading us to habitually group certain particulars together (an effect of Habitual Whorfianism), language shapes the categorical boundaries that constitute our subjective organization of world. On this view, language influences our understanding of what kinds of things exist—our ontologies. And, given that these influences are not obvious from introspection, we are prone to mistake category boundaries that are linguistically influenced for boundaries that are privileged, natural, and inevitable. This would make Whorf smile.

Reines and Prinz 2009, 1029

In order to learn language, then, children do not need to already have acquired concepts. All that is required is the ability, which they share with nonhuman species who do not possess language, to perceive objects.<sup>18</sup> It is the Sophisticated Radical Whorf who smiles.

Reines and Prinz's third reason is confused. It would maintain that tests show the effects of grammatical gender and that, nevertheless, those effects are not effects of language. Further, it implausibly assumes that the languages which bilingual speakers know are wholly encapsulated.

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<sup>18</sup> Although Reines and Prinz write of *representing* objects, there are compelling reasons to be wary of representations; see Chemero 2009.

Finally, that Whorfian effects can be reversed does not show that they are not effects of language. It also does not suggest that the conditions that obtain after the reversal are not effects of language.

### THOUGHT, LANGUAGE'S CHILD, GROWS UP

Herder would endorse Sophisticated Radical Whorfianism, as he believes that thought is bounded by and determined by language. Two passages corroborate that Hegel agrees with Herder. First, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel maintains: “Although it is commonly said that reasonable people pay attention not to the word but to the thing itself, yet this does not give us permission to describe a thing in terms inappropriate to it. For this is at once incompetence and deceit, to fancy and to pretend that one merely has not the right *word*, and to hide from oneself that really one has failed to get hold of the thing itself, i.e., the concept. If one had the concept, then one would also have the right word” (Hegel 1997, 198, section 329; translation modified). Second, in the *Philosophy of Mind*, he further claims:

Words thus became a reality animated by thought. This reality is absolutely necessary to our thoughts. We are only aware of our thoughts, only have determinate, actual thoughts, when we give them the form of *objectivity*, of *being distinct* from our *inwardness*, and thus the shape of *externality*, and of an externality, too, that at the same time bears the stamp of the highest *inwardness*. Only the *articulate sound*, the *word*, is such an internal externality. To want to think without words ... is, therefore, a manifest absurdity.... It is also ridiculous to regard the attachment of thought to word as a defect of thought and a misfortune; for although the common opinion is that it is just the *ineffable* that is the most excellent, yet this opinion, nurtured by vanity, is entirely groundless, since the ineffable is, in truth, only something murky, fermenting; it only gains clarity when it can get into words. Of course, one can also grapple with words, without comprehending the thing. But then what is at fault is not the word, but a defective, indeterminate, superficial thinking.

Hegel 2007, 200, section 462 *Zusatz*

However, does Hegel endorse the strong version of the principle of linguistic relativity that maintains that language wholly determines thought? Or does he instead accept the weak version that claims that language only influences thought? Readers familiar with Hegelian dialectics have already anticipated the answer: Both!

There is language and there is language. Or, more accurately—since “language” can function as a mass noun and a count noun—there is Language (that is, Language as such, the sum total of all possible languages) and there are languages. Any specific language can influence but not determine thought. What is crucial in this context in

not what people have the *capacity* to articulate in a specific language, verbally or mentally, but rather what they *typically* express. There is considerable empirical evidence that languages can influence the thoughts of their speakers, both the speakers' beliefs as well as their ways of thinking.<sup>19</sup> However, a language's influence on thought easily transitions to its determining thought when native speakers are not aware of the ways in which their language influences their thoughts. When this happens, the strong version of the principle of linguistic relativity obtains. Not only a language's grammatical structures and concepts are at issue; worldviews, metaphysics, received wisdom, common sense, ideologies, and prejudices of all kinds are embedded in a language. It turns, these predispose speakers to think in certain ways and to develop certain sorts of conceptual systems, rather than others. It is not that these systems are always false. They may be true. The point is that they are accepted as true without reflection or the recognition that they could be sensibly contested. What is more germane is that, even if some speakers do reflect on these, the criteria of their reflections are accepted without examination. When speakers do not recognize such an influence, they lack the resources to evaluate it.

Discerning such influence from a perspective wholly within a language, without comparing a language with others, will not be successful. Speakers think with the grammatical structures and concepts their language makes available. In thinking with their language's grammatical structures and concepts, speakers see the world through them, and so those structures and concepts become invisible. By itself, conceptual analysis is inadequate. What is required in addition is comparative analysis. There is only one way for speakers to become aware of a language's influence on their thought: to learn other languages. Or, at least to learn how the grammatical structures and concepts of other languages differ from their own. Only then will speakers have a basis for comparison that will allow them to see what is not visible within their own language. Insofar as speakers come to recognize the influence of their own language, a recognition primarily achieved by learning other languages, they can resist that influence.

And the best languages for that purpose are those that are furthest—temporally and spatially—from the speakers' own, since those the grammars and concepts of those languages will differ the most from those of the speakers. Indeed, this is precisely why Hegel recommends Classical Studies.

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<sup>19</sup>See Lakoff 1987, Lucy 1992a and 1992b, Bowerman and Levinson 1992, Gumperz and Levinson 1996, Lee 1996, Danziger 1997, Pütz and Verspoor 2000, Gentner and Goldin-Meadow 2003, Deutscher 2010, Leavitt 2011.

The study of Greek and Latin, as well as Sanskrit, provides a good basis for comparison to see what is invisible in English. Better would be the study of such modern non-Indo-European languages as Basque, Tamil, or Turkish. Even better would be the study of such ancient non-Indo-European languages as Sumerian, Akkadian, or Etruscan. Best would be the study of all three types. Every language can make visible something that remains invisible in every other language. The death of any language represents an irrecoverable loss to Language, almost certainly accompanied by the permanent inability to think what would have been visible in the deceased language.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that “the wounds of the Spirit heal and leave no scars behind” (section 669, page 407). Nevertheless, absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence: no wounds, no scars; but not vice versa. That we remain forever ignorant of the diminishment of our potential conceptual resources, when a language dies, is itself a diminishment. Linguists predict that more than half of the world’s six thousand languages will die in the next century; see: Evans, *Dying Words*.

Hegel can acknowledge that meaning consists in word usage and that thought is bounded by language, but also emphasize that thought need not be constrained by any specific language. Thought has available to it, potentially, the resources of every language. So, regarding languages, Hegel accepts the weak version of the principle of linguistic relativity. A language influences, but does not determine, thought.

Would Hegel then also endorse the strong version of the principle of linguistic relativity, that Language wholly determines thought?

Yes. Well, almost. Actually, no.

In the first instance, Language wholly determines thought. Thought thinks, however, and these thoughts result in new concepts and, less often but sometimes, new grammatical structures. Thinking in language, language changes—and, so too, Language—and, as a result, there are new thoughts, thoughts that were not previously possible. Thought cannot transcend Language, but it can transcend any particular language by availing itself of the resources available in other languages. Moreover, Language can be expanded through metaphor. Language is not, as the Structuralists and Russian Formalists feared, a prison-house (Jameson 1975). Thought is always already paroled, free “to roam the open ranges of discourse” (Murdock 1997, 89). What was determined itself becomes the determiner. Language is the parent of thought. But thought, the child, grows up. Hegel calls this the positing of the presuppositions.

Thought grows up. Does it move out?

No. Thought, thinking in language, can enlarge and enrich a language, and so Language. Thought is a dutiful child, and so it does not move out. On rare occasions, thought has to parent the parent.<sup>20</sup>

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