

SOWING FRESH SEEDS ON SCORCHED EARTH: A SYSTEMATIC INTERPRETATION
OF THE CONCEPT OF *BILDUNG* IN G.W.F. HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

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To the best of my knowledge, all of the views expressed in this document are my own, except for the erroneous ones, which probably belong to my union-busting employer.

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Preface

The inspiration for this dissertation came to me in the spring of 2017, during Karen Ng's seminar on G.W.F. Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. A mixed experience of wonder and disillusionment brought it about. The wonder was in reading a work of Hegel's cover-to-cover and seeing how his thinking moves uninterruptedly from the most abstract part of the subject matter to the most concrete, each moment building on the one before it and preparing the one after it, like a plant growing. This is what the German Idealists called organic systematicity, philosophy following the method of life. Impressed by it, I considered for the first time that studying a systematic thinker like Hegel could benefit my philosophy education, training me to go through all the stages of an idea's development before passing judgment on it.

That was the wonder. The disillusionment came in reaching the end of *Philosophy of Right* and finding that its answers on a number of basic political questions did not satisfy me. This tension between appreciating the work's undeniable formal beauty and being disappointed by its conclusions is, I believe, what led me to want to write about it. I am the kind of person who likes to spend time with philosophers with whom I disagree but with whom I have some elective affinity. Hegel is one of these philosophers; Plato is another. I acquired this sensibility from historians of philosophy. Reading Strauss on Rousseau, or Berlin on Tolstoy, is rewarding precisely because of the fitting mismatch of philosophical commitments. No one is less instructive than a philosopher who has nothing but adoration or contempt for their object. The best philosophy grows out of mixed feelings: wonder and disillusionment, love and discord.

An ironic aspect of my research experience was that after I had decided to write about a systematic philosopher, nothing went according to plan. This project started out as a critique of the concept of *Bildung*, or "political education," in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. From that starting point, I expected to develop the critique further and connect it to other problems in the same book. As it turned out, however, what I thought would be the beginning of my dissertation turned out to be its end. The last of the three core chapters was the first conceived, and its analysis is the culmination, not the launching point, of my research. What precedes it is a systematic presentation of the concept of *Bildung* across Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, including the *Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Mind* books. A few things explain this change of plans. First, during my comprehensive exams, Karen guided me through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and our discussions reinforced to me just how centrally – and systematically – the life-process figures into Hegel's political thought. Second, around that same time, I responded to a call for papers about the concept of "life" in German Idealism. The paper I submitted did not make it into the conference, but the research I did led me to some important discoveries. The biggest was that *Bildung*, which I had always interpreted as a humanistic concept, was likewise a scientific concept used among German-speaking biologists in the second half of the eighteenth century. For these scientists (and for Hegel, too, I soon learned), *Bildung* is something that happens to living nature in general, not just to human beings. But if this is the case, then "political education" is tethered to natural development more intimately than I had imagined. My new task thus became to find the path from "natural" *Bildung* to "political" *Bildung* and merge this with my original critique of *Philosophy of Right*.

Writing a dissertation has many challenges, but the greatest of all, for me, was finding the right fit between the questions I wanted to answer and the questions other scholars were asking. My preferred mode of argumentation is exegesis. Interpreting another thinker, I come up with

insights that are somehow wholly theirs and wholly mine. Philosophy is what happens between us as we hang out together in the text. I work this way because it is most natural to me, but I also recognize that more is demanded of me than interpretation. Scholarship requires engaging other people who are interested in the same things and settling scores with them. Thus, I have tried to find the line of best fit between what I like to do and what I have to do to create relevant scholarship. I felt I would be able to finish this project only if it centered on questions I desired to answer, questions that came out of my own life's syllabus. In that regard, I have been totally uncompromising. Still, I have given much thought to how my work fits into a larger picture of what is happening in German Idealism and academic political philosophy. About this I have a couple of things to say:

1. My dissertation is one of numerous recent reappraisals of *Bildung*'s legacy within German intellectual history. Kristin Gjesdal, for example, has done important work on the concept in Herder's works, showing its methodological purport in both his philosophical anthropology and philosophical hermeneutics. Moreover, Gjesdal offers convincing arguments that the *Bildung* tradition has critical-democratic, not bourgeois-conservative, political ends. Jennifer Herdt, too, has just published a book-length study on *Bildung*'s legacy in German theology, highlighting the concept's Pietist origins and arguing for its redemptive political potential. A whole camp of intellectual historians writing about later-Enlightenment German science – Robert Richards, Stephen Gaukroger, Peter Hans Reill – are also in close conversation with this study.

2. Contemporary scholars are becoming more interested in Hegel's long-neglected philosophy of nature and philosophical anthropology. This project learned much from, and makes a contribution to, interpretive discussions about "second nature" (Andreja Novakovic), "social ontology" (Frederick Neuhouser), and the naturalistic basis of self-consciousness (Italo Testa). With regard to Hegel's political thought, I am part of a huge cohort of people concerned about the democratic applications of the *Philosophy of Right* (John Dewey, Axel Honneth, Lucio Cortella, Terry Pinkard, etc.). My specific contribution is tethering the concept of *Bildung* to democracy with systematic rigor, for although many Hegelian democrats invoke *Bildung*, all of us could benefit from being more precise.

Another challenge of dissertating was trying to distill two years of research and reflection into a single, succinct thesis. I am not sure I succeeded at doing that. In general, I approached my argument as a sequence of nested theses culminating in a final synthetic judgment. That said, if I had to provide a one-off summary of my argument, I would borrow the words of the wise person who wrote:

"[E]ducation is not a prerequisite for political control—political control is the cause of popular education."

Natural Genesis and Political Education: A Historical Introduction to the Concept of *Bildung* in G.W.F. Hegel's Thought that Includes an Outline of the Dissertation

The best conducted human activities are those which most faithfully resemble the operations of the natural world. The seed, for example, which drops into the awaiting soil, unseen and unheeded, brings a richer and more blessed growth than the violent eruption of a volcano, which, however necessary, is always destructive...

-Wilhelm Humboldt, *On the Limits of State Action* (1792)¹

I.

These words of Wilhelm Humboldt reflect the wary attitude of an entire generation of German intellectuals toward the swift and brutal overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy in France. Between 1789 and 1792, the year these words were written, French revolutionaries had effectively ousted King Louis XVI and begun drafting a constitution that enfranchised masses of people previously shut out of national politics. The total transformation of the French state sent shocks and convulsions throughout the globe. To German onlookers, the French masses seemed terrifyingly resolved to erect their new democracy upon the ash heap of the old monarchy. Much as thinkers like Wilhelm Humboldt, Friedrich Schiller, and G.W.F. Hegel affirmed the progressive direction in which the new constitution tended, particularly its expansion of the domain of individual rights, such provisions did little to mitigate their concerns about the people's contempt for their feudal past. Many turn-of-the-century German intellectuals feared that a mass movement bent on totally negating the old way of doing things would eventually stumble upon the most extreme methods of doing so. Political guilt would be proven by mere suspicion; assassinations would take place in the public square; worst of all, the politically inexperienced would govern.

But there is more than just a forecast of failure in Humboldt's words. There is a submerged theory of human development as well. The contrast Humboldt draws between the processes of geological eruption and biological continuity is the theory's linchpin. Human reason and human will, like the erupting volcano, have the power to impose seismic changes on the physical world. As the events of 1789 proved, a few powerfully expressed ideas can cause an entire social reality to appear illegitimate and in need of reconstruction. Yet *living* nature, the domain of organisms and ecosystems, cannot thrive in a physical world upset by incessant revolutionary convulsions. The fragile interdependence of organism and ecosystem persists only when the overall physical environment is stable and change happens so gradually as to be almost imperceptible. As J.W. Goethe, an associate of Humboldt's, famously posited: "nature makes no leaps." And given that human beings remain natural beings in spite of their considerable rational powers, they do better when they conform their rational activities to this basic law. Reason is capable of defying life for a time; yet whatever reason builds against life will one day have to face its judgment.

Later-Enlightenment German intellectuals embraced this theory of human development in no small part because they sensed that the German kingdoms themselves were in the midst of their own social crisis, and they did not want to see France's tribulations repeated at home. As the Revolution descended into a Reign of Terror, making way for Napoleon's bloodless coup and imperial restoration, intellectuals like Humboldt settled on the following analysis of Germany's dilemma, paraphrased insightfully by Timothy Lenoir:

¹ Wilhelm Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics (London: Cambridge UP, 1969), 10.

The bonds of the feudal world were undergoing rapid dissolution [in turn-of-the-century Germany], but within this general ferment, the outlines of the new world were not yet clearly visible. What was clear was that a return to the old world was impossible; the effects in Germany of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic occupation, and the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire had permanently shut that door. While shouldering the burden of being thrust into the future, albeit in most cases with some reluctance, German intellectuals asked themselves whether it was necessary to sever completely the concrete ties to the past and rush forward headlong without any apparent direction, as the French had seemed to do, or whether it might be possible to preserve elements of the past, weaving them rationally into the fabric of a new state that might more appropriately realize the cultural aims of genuine freedom, morality, and the recognition of human dignity, which had been aborted in the misguided results of the French Revolution.²

Guillotines notwithstanding, many German thinkers felt that France's repudiation of monarchy in favor of drafting a new constitution *tabula rasa* was the true horror of 1789. At a distance, it appeared as if the revolutionaries, seduced by the people's rapid mobilization, had neglected to account for their inexperience in self-governance. While force and fire easily took the Bastille, the rising masses lacked the more potent arsenal: a theory of human development consonant with natural law, and a political education that could stabilize, conserve, and reproduce a republican society. The question for German intellectuals, therefore, became: If Germany and other soon-to-be post-feudal nations were to avoid going down the same path as France, then what was to be done about the politically undereducated masses? The bourgeois intelligentsia offered a nearly unanimous, one-word answer: *Bildung*.

It makes sense that a word with connotations such as "education," "culture," and "formation" would be invoked as the antidote to political underdevelopment. But to understand why it was *Bildung* specifically and not some other educational term like *Pädagogik* (pedagogy), *Unterricht* (schooling) or even *Erziehung* (childrearing) that came to prominence, the word's etymological history must be probed. Today, *Bildung* tends to refer to "education" in a broad, secular sense that includes formal schooling as well as informal self-cultivation and socialization. In the eighteenth century, however, *Bildung* still retained its theological aura from medieval High German, where it was a term of art for the spiritual rehabilitation of fallen humanity. It imitated the Latin *formatio*, a word that referred to the divine craftsman's formation of matter "in his own image" (Martin Luther, translator of the first German-language Bible, rendered this phrase as "*in seinem Bild*").³ Among Lutheran Christians, particularly the sect called the Pietists, *Bildung* was the divinely guided process of being re-formed in God's image. According to Jennifer Herdt, Pietists believed that reformation in God's image was only possible, "by way of an evacuation of human will and agency that opens up space for God to work within." Moreover, they believed that human imagination (*Einbildung*) and human art (*Menschen-kunst*) interfered with divine sculpting, disfiguring the human soul. To deal with the incommensurability of divinely guided formation and human self-formation, Pietists repudiated the latter from their religious practices, submitting their wills entirely to God.⁴ By the time of the Enlightenment, the Pietists' self-effacing spiritual practices came to be associated with the "self-incurred immaturity" that Immanuel Kant chastised

² Timothy Lenoir, "The Göttingen School and the Development of Transcendental Naturphilosophie in the Romantic Era," *Studies in History of Biology* 5 (1981): 195.

³ Jennifer Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 28.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

in the essay “*Was ist Aufklärung?*” Philosophers like Kant who grew up during an age of reason envisioned a secularized version of *Bildung* that could elevate ordinary people into political judgment the way they had once been elevated into spiritual piety. In a radical departure from his Pietist roots, Kant argued that the agent of this formative task had to be humanity itself, not an all-powerful God (Kant had famously demoted God to a practical postulate of reason in his second *Critique*), and that human beings ought not to submit their powers of judgment unquestioningly to the extant ecclesiastical and political authorities.⁵ At the time he authored these views, Kant was not so much calling for full-on revolution as benevolent monarchy, admonishing kings and subjects alike to embrace the restrained voluntarism of “*sapere aude*” – daring to be wise.⁶

Kantian acolytes like Wilhelm Humboldt and Friedrich Schiller, who came of age intellectually during the French Revolution, celebrated the intrepidity of rational humanity while stressing the role of the feelings in the *Bildung* of individuals and societies. Schiller in particular viewed the Montagnard Reign of Terror as the inevitable result of reason’s suppression of nature. On Schiller’s view, the Terror was nature’s monstrous, equal-and-opposite reaction to pure reason’s self-appointment as humanity’s lawgiver. The composite conception of *Bildung* that emerged from Schiller’s writings was “aesthetic education” (*ästhetische Erziehung*), a process of “playing with beauty” that resulted in the mutual checking of the mental faculties and the natural drives. Aesthetic education, Schiller argued, was the kind of self-rehabilitation rooted in living nature that would steer humanity toward freedom without transitional violence. Humboldt, by contrast, situated *Bildung* within the project of a self-restraining, liberal monarchy like the one then prevailing in Prussia under Friedrich Wilhelm II. First and foremost, Humboldt claimed, there must be negative liberty in order for *Bildung*, defined as the process of harmonizing and perfecting the rational and sensitive faculties, to be possible. Schiller and Humboldt represented two distinct horns of the *Bildung* dilemma: either *Bildung* was the path to freedom or freedom was the precondition of *Bildung*.⁷ Both views ran into difficulties. If *Bildung* was the path to freedom, and freedom was the activity of being one’s own moral legislator, then it seemed that one had to learn, presumably from a higher human authority, how to be autonomous. Conversely, if freedom was the path to *Bildung*, and *Bildung* was the solitary activity of perfecting one’s own faculties, then it seemed that one had to learn how to learn, autonomously, without the aid of a more experienced teacher.⁸

Whether they sided with Schiller or Humboldt on the causal ordering of *Bildung* and freedom, most philosophers of the time agreed with Friedrich Schlegel’s maxim that “only by being educated (*gebildet*) does a human being become altogether human and permeated by humanity.”⁹ Schlegel wrote these words in 1797. By 1807, the year G.W.F. Hegel reformulated *Bildung* as the process of developing a second nature, the concept had so permeated German philosophy that it was no longer merely viewed as an antidote to revolutionary violence but as *the* essential activity of the human species. In the effort to uplift the species in a manner conformable to nature, the laws of life and human reason had become fully one. At least two important developments directly ensued. First, *Bildung* came to be equated with formal schooling and trade apprenticeships, institutions which were starting to receive public subsidies from the crown. In

⁵ Kant, “What is Enlightenment“, in *Kant’s Political Writings*, edited by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: 1971).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ I adapt this framing of the Schiller/Humboldt dilemma from Jennifer Herdt.

⁸ How one answered these questions determined whether one strove, in the long run, for democratic republicanism (Schiller) or liberal monarchy (Humboldt).

⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Furchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), I 65.

East Prussia, the idea of compulsory schooling as an instrument of “spiritual, moral, and social renewal”¹⁰ preexisted the French Revolution, yet it was not until after the Revolution began that Prussian intellectuals threw their full weight behind the education reform movement in their kingdom.¹¹ Friedrich Wilhelm III’s appointment of Wilhelm Humboldt as minister over the education reforms was a watershed moment in the history of public education. *Bildung* was the cornerstone of Humboldt’s personal philosophy, and his task during his tenure as minister was to decouple its association with aristocratic privilege so that it became the aim of the Prussian everyman. Humboldt’s vision was that every person, even the poorest, would have sufficient opportunity to develop his personal capacities to the maximum, harmonizing them into a coherent and judicious personality.¹² The mechanism for doing this would be a levels-based schooling system, fully integrated from the elementary to the university levels, in which every person would reap their right “to learn how to learn.”¹³ While the Prussian state’s official interest in the education reforms was in part to preempt a mass democratic uprising, Humboldt’s program had enormous democratic implications for ordinary people, not only normalizing the idea of mass schooling, but also creating a professional class of education workers who would become a major force in the revolutions of 1848.¹⁴

Second, beyond formal schooling, *Bildung* would become increasingly associated with the physical process of the “formation” of organisms, i.e., their self-development, self-conservation, and self-reproduction over the course of a complete lifespan. Later-Enlightenment German botanists, zoologists, and philosophers employed *Bildung* as a technical term in their theories of the natural genesis of organisms, with some, like J.G. Herder, even extending its application to the Earth’s geological processes.¹⁵ The Göttingen anthropologist J.F. Blumenbach made the most enduring contribution to the science of *Bildung* when he contrived the term “formative drive” (*Bildungstrieb*) to explain how organisms compulsively fulfill their life-processes.¹⁶ Blumenbach’s theory of *Bildung* connected the life-process immanently to the process of mental cultivation, synthesizing them into a unified, stepwise process of natural genesis (*Epigenesis*) and formal education.¹⁷

Recent scholarship expounds on this history of what *Bildung* meant to later-Enlightenment thinkers. Peter Hans Reill contextualizes *Bildung* within the scientific discourse of “Enlightenment Vitalism,” where it was deployed to resolve the tension between mechanistic and animistic

¹⁰ James Melton, *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 109.

¹¹ As Jonathan Israel documents, the education movement connected to the Condorcettian faction of the Revolution emphasized mass schooling as a safeguard against political tyranny, of becoming “agent and victim of one’s ignorance.” This was the educational vision that most inspired Germans. The Robespierrian faction was far less progressive in its educational proposals, scoffing at the education of women, the public funding of scientific research, and other reforms. See Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 379–89.

¹² Paul Robinson Sweet, *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Biography* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 43–46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37–40.

¹⁵ J.G. Herder, *Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Mankind*, ed. Frank Manuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

¹⁶ According to Helmut Müller-Sievers, as Blumenbach’s coinage became more well-known, it became “divested of all narrow scientific connotations...; [the] uncontrollable polysemy of the word *Bildung* helped it rise through the ranks of philosophical concepts to the transcendental point where theoretical, practical, and natural philosophy find their articulation.” See Helmut Müller Sievers, *Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy, and Literature Around 1800* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997), 84.

¹⁷ For a brief yet comparable description of the essential elements of the concept of *Bildung*, see Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 30.

accounts of causality.¹⁸ Robert Richards narrates how *Bildung* became the conceptual bedrock of Romantic-era biology, transforming scientists' conception of nature from a system of eternally fixed mechanisms into a dynamic historical unfolding mirroring the process of human cognition.¹⁹ Finally, Stephen Gaukroger shows how the "naturalization of the human" by Enlightenment science brought about a concomitant "humanization of nature" by post-Enlightenment philosophers.²⁰ Gaukroger's work in particular illuminates what was common to both the radical and conservative extremes of German Idealism, namely, their propensity to probe living nature for a check upon reason's hubris.

The affinity between these vitalistic discourses and the prevailing conservatism of the post-French Revolution period was perceptible even at the time.²¹ A minor but important thinker named Christoph Girtanner, an avid student of Kant's philosophy and Blumenbach's biology, established the connection between philosophical vitalism and political conservatism in two dense volumes he authored in the 1790s. The first of these, titled *Über das Kantische Prinzip für die Naturgeschichte*, presented a philosophical synthesis of human reason and the life-process (as these were defined by Kant and Blumenbach, respectively). The second, titled *Historische Nachrichten und politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution*, argued that the atrocities committed in the name of human reason had caused France to backslide toward barbarism.²² For Girtanner, one of the first to make this thought explicit, the conceptualization of *Bildung* as natural genesis underscored the conservative case for political restraint.

In my view, however, it was G.W.F. Hegel who made the most systematic contribution of his generation to the formulation of *Bildung* as the unified, stepwise process of natural genesis and political education. It remains to be appreciated just how systematic. Nowadays, when the concept of *Bildung* is mentioned in appraisals of Hegel's legacy, it tends to be construed primarily as the *Bildung* of spirit (*Geist*) that unfolds apace with the civilizational shifts from Athens to Rome to Christian Europe. This is an accurate summary of the basic plots of texts like the *Phenomenology of Mind*, the *Philosophy of History*, and the *History of Philosophy*.²³ Yet Hegel used the concept of *Bildung* far more expansively than that. The *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* in particular showcases *Bildung*'s polysemy across Hegel's mature philosophical system. In that text, Hegel finds an application for the concept in every domain of his system (Logic, Nature, and Spirit), presenting it overall as the unified process of natural genesis and political education that actualizes the logical concept of life. Starting in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel characterizes conceptuality itself

¹⁸ Peter Hans Reill, "Science and the Construction of the Cultural Sciences in Late Enlightenment Germany: The Case of Wilhelm von Humboldt," *History and Theory*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 1994, 345-366.

¹⁹ Robert Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Introduction.

²⁰ Stephen Gaukroger, *The Natural and the Human* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), concluding chapter.

²¹ Timothy Lenoir's study of the Göttingen School of biologists concludes with an insightful discussion of the links between German biology and conservative politics. Writes Lenoir: "As heirs of the Enlightenment [German Idealists and Romantics] could not avoid the issue of whether nature was constituted in a manner consistent with the realization of human freedom and what the laws of nature, particularly the laws of organic nature, had to say about the organization of the state structured toward that end. It is not surprising, therefore, that the different styles of natural philosophy during the period 1790-1830, the differing views of nature and the organic realm, reflect in large measure the different political orientations of the period, for the sciences provided part of the rationale for constructing a particular vision of the future." See Lenoir, 195-96.

²² Christoph Girtanner, *Über das Kantische Prinzip für die Naturgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1796); Christoph Girtanner, *Historische Nachrichten und politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution* (Berlin: J.F. Unger, 1792).

²³ Kristin Gjesdal, "Bildung," in *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal and Michael Forster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), www.oxfordhandbooks.com.

as a developmental process (*Entwicklung, Bildung*) akin to the growth of a seedling into a mature plant. In the same way that a plant must grow to maturity before realizing what is essential to it (i.e., the seed-bearing fruit that contains the next generation), a concept must unravel itself in increasingly self-referring “moments” (*Momente*), such that what starts out as “in-itself” (*an sich*, the mere potentiality of the seed) becomes “for-itself” (*für sich*, the actuality of the self-reproducing plant).²⁴ In *Hegel’s Concept of Life*, Karen Ng discusses how the activity of living things serves as Hegel’s model for human self-consciousness, likening the “inner purposiveness” or self-organizing character of organisms to rational activity itself. “[T]hought is said to be living,” Ng explains, “because [like the organism] it gives shape to itself, actualizes itself, and gives itself its own content...”²⁵ Hegel elaborates upon this homology of thought and natural genesis in the “Organics” division of the *Philosophy of Nature*, where he outlines the plant and animal life-processes from embryogenesis to death. These chapters are peppered with mentions of *Bildung* in relation to the self-organizing, purposive activity of living things, synthesizing the logical concept of life with the empirical life sciences. The third book of the *Encyclopedia*, the *Philosophy of Mind*, explores the species-specific *Bildung* of human beings in its subjective and objective modes. It is in this part of Hegel’s system that the structural homology of natural genesis and political education comes fully into view. On its subjective side, the human being is a thinking animal that must supersede its unconscious, natural being in order to realize its potential as a self-conscious, free being. On the objective side, it is a social animal that must organize its natural needs into a coherent system in order to take its rightful place in a universal normative order.

II.

What makes Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* the culminating intellectual achievement of its generation, then, is its systematic reconstruction of *Bildung* as the homologous, integrated processes of natural genesis and political education. That said, Hegel did not arrive at this synthetic understanding of *Bildung* overnight. Like his German contemporaries, Hegel’s sense of the concept’s historical relevance stems directly from his views on the French Revolution. His critique of the Revolution’s missteps goes much further than his contemporaries’ superficial concerns about the French people’s repudiation of their national past.²⁶ In the *Phenomenology of Mind* and *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel probes deeper into the Revolution’s intellectual origins in attempt to explain its failures, finding ample material in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s writings, particularly *Le contrat social* and *Emile, ou de l’éducation*.²⁷ Hegel’s readings of these two texts had a significant bearing upon his mature political views, including his theorization of *Bildung* as the answer to

²⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences: Science of Logic*, §140.

²⁵ Karen Ng, *Hegel’s Concept of Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2020), Introduction.

²⁶ Hegel addresses this concern in the *Philosophy of Right*, remarking that France is the only modern historical example of a nation that tried to construct a new society from scratch, basing its constitution on a set of principles completely foreign to its national past. This point is very much related to the argument, borrowed from Montesquieu, that constitutions are organic products of the nations that generate them and that nations have the constitutions most befitting of them. France, apparently, would be an exception to this general rule, an example of what happens when reason gets carried away with its own powers. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §258R, §274. See also Allen Wood’s comment about Hegel and the French Revolution, §5, n. 3, p. 397.

²⁷ Robert Grandroute, Jean Bloch, and others discuss how *Emile* in particular set the terms of the debate about public education in revolutionary France. See Robert Thiery, ed., *Rousseau, l’Emile et La Revolution* (Paris, France: Universitas, 1992). Jonathan Israel, too, discusses Rousseau’s enormous influence on the French revolutionaries, arguing that the debate over public education, the terms of which were largely set by Rousseau, reflected larger ideological tensions among the revolutionaries. See Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 389.

Europe's political and social crises.²⁸ The connection between Hegel's commentaries on the *volonté general* (general will), the signature concept of *Le contrat social*, and *l'éducation* (education), the signature concept of the *Emile*, is therefore crucial for understanding the origin and development of his concept of *Bildung* as well as the problems he tried to solve with it.

With regard to the French Revolution, Hegel is most interested in the origin of a form of political consciousness that sought to negate its entire social reality and replace it with brand-new institutions. At §582 in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, in the final pages of the division titled "*Bildung*," Hegel explains how Rousseau's notion of the *volonté general* led the revolutionaries to take some of their most drastic political missteps, including the Reign of Terror.²⁹ In *Le contrat social*, Rousseau defines the *volonté general* as the convergence point of all the particular wills that have assented to the sovereign. Whereas the particular will is partial to a narrow set of interests (of an individual or a faction), the general will bends toward the most universal, commonly held interest (of all who collectively constitute the sovereign). According to Rousseau, a legitimate social contract is governed entirely on the basis of its general will, which imparts equal weight to all the particular wills that comprise it.³⁰ The general will, he stresses, is harmed by political factions that try to reshape it in the image of their particularity. "None ought consider himself when voting for all," writes Rousseau:

[The] general will – to be truly general – should be so in its object as well as its essence, that it should come from all in order to be applied to all, and that it loses its natural rectitude when it is directed toward some individual and determinate object, because then, in judging what is foreign to us [as a collectivity], we have no true principle of equity to guide us.³¹

Rousseau's thought is that legitimate statecraft issues from the general will and concerns itself exclusively with universal objects, shunning particular interests from politics altogether. To some, this appears to leave particularity rather underdetermined in relation to universality, a point upon which Hegel's critique seizes. "The general will's purpose is the general purpose, its language universal law, its work universal work," Hegel writes. It subsumes individuality into itself without concretely recognizing it, divorcing itself from the genuine interests of its constituents. Consequently, the general will necessarily turns into a "fury of destruction," an absolutely negative political force, for the individual cannot discern their own will in it but only the collectivity's.³² Alluding cryptically to the destruction of the *ancien régime* and the Reign of Terror, Hegel surmises that

[the] work of [this] absolute freedom is death, with no more meaning than cutting off the head of the cabbage. It is self-consciousness that refuses to divide itself, it acts as a single individual, so that the government, when it wrongs the people, appears merely as the

²⁸ The link between these two lines of interpretation has yet to be well established in scholarship. Frederick Neuhouser has established Hegel's philosophical relationship to Rousseau, emphasizing the importance of *Le contrat social* and the *Second Discourse*. See Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

²⁹ Hegel meticulously avoids naming names in this section, leaving it to the reader to track his allusions to real figures and events. Many historians, I suspect, would be critical of Hegel's generalizing tone with regard to how the concept of the general will was used politically. Jonathan Israel, for example, contends that the worst abusers of the concept were Robespierre and his faction, and that the Condorcettians had a subtler and more philosophical sense of it.

³⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract," in *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. John T. Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 179.

³¹ *Ibid*, 184.

³² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §585-589.

victorious faction over them, not as the general will. Revolution is the norm, for the general will is the restless agony of the unexpressed individualities that comprise it.³³

This “restless agony of unexpressed individuality” is a function of the dearth of substantive connections between individuality and universality. For Hegel, recognizing and satisfying particular interests is what ultimately grounds and stabilizes the general interest. When particularity’s relation to universality is underdetermined, the former seeks at all costs to assert itself, to secure its own interest over against the other particularities struggling for recognition. By abstracting from all particularity, then, the general will consigns itself to permanent instability, inviting the machinations of fractious opportunists like Maximilien Robespierre, who, in order to grab hold of power, had only to claim that the *volonté general* had turned in their favor.³⁴ To borrow Humboldt’s metaphor: politics under the general will is a series of volcanic eruptions that repeatedly annihilate the social world without building it back up. It is the absolute antithesis of the life-process in which the body politic matures incrementally through its exercise of sovereignty. In Hegel’s judgment, the French Revolution, inspired in no small part by Rousseau’s political philosophy, proved that when the life-process is shunned from politics, revolution and reaction fill the void.³⁵

Hegel’s critique of Rousseau’s abstract universalism continues into *Philosophy of Right*, where he asserts that, during the Revolution, the French masses repeatedly “destroyed...the institutions they had created, because all institutions are incompatible with the abstract self-consciousness of equality.”³⁶ Here, it is not the concept of the will itself to which Hegel objects; in fact, Hegel affirms Rousseau for recognizing the will as the “principle of the state.”³⁷ Hegel’s criticism, rather, is that Rousseau’s misbegotten formulation of the general will decouples universality from particularity, making the former but an abstract impression of the latter, unrooted in actual practices and institutions. One of Hegel’s aims in *Philosophy of Right* is to re-describe the political will that moves the modern state as a “concrete unity” of universality and particularity – a will, that is, in which a rooted particularity sees itself reflected in universal norms and practices. A concrete unity obtains when individuals have a part in constructing substantive institutional links (political-economic, epistemic, ethical) between themselves and the state. Such links safeguard the state against the constant threat of upheaval, since individuals come to see that the satisfaction of their particular wills has its basis in the overall. Yet, because Rousseau categorically excludes particular interests from public affairs, admitting only the most universal objects into the public discourse, he overlooks the essentialness of these particularized institutional bonds, leaving the general will with nothing to do but tear down what does not conform to its current whim. Hegel, by contrast, seeks the best of both worlds: a universality that asserts its priority over particularity by reconciling with it.

³³ Ibid, §590.

³⁴ Hegel continues this line of argument in §258 of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, expanding it to explain how the abstract notion of the general will inspired the rebelling masses’ total negation of the past: “When these abstractions [of Rousseau’s] were invested with power, they afforded the tremendous spectacle, for the first time we know of in human history, of the overthrow of all existing and given conditions within an actual major state and the revision of its constitution from first principles and purely in terms of [rational] thought...” See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258.

³⁵ This is why Hegel viewed Napoleon’s intervention in the French political scene as a positive moment in France’s national history. Napoleon broke the chain of revolutions and counterrevolutions, uniting the French state under his authority and thereby enabling genuine historical reflection on the misbegotten idea of the general will to take place.

³⁶ See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §5.

³⁷ Ibid, §258.

What Hegel fails to mention is that Rousseau was aware of this “decoupling problem” in *Le contrat social* and tried to address it through the mythic figure of the lawgiver who educates the members of the nascent polity in the mores of their new social contract:

He who dares to...establish a people’s institutions must feel that he is capable of changing, so to speak, human nature; of transforming each individual, who by himself is a complete and solitary whole, into a part of a greater whole from which that individual receives as it were his life and his being...As a result, when each citizen is nothing, except with all the others..., the [lawgiver’s] legislation can be said to be at the highest point of perfection.³⁸

Rousseau’s description of the lawgiver’s transformative influence shows that he views political education as the mediating link between particular wills and the general will.³⁹ The mythic lawgiver symbolizes the educative force exerted by the general will on the particular wills who assent to it. This educative force “changes human nature,” such that the people themselves come to create, conserve, and reproduce the social contract both collectively and locally. Rousseau admits, however, that the process sometimes runs into practical difficulties. “[The] social spirit that is to be the work of the institution [has] to preside over the institution itself,” he writes, “and men [have] to be prior to the laws what they are to become through the laws.”⁴⁰ In other words, the way out of the decoupling dilemma leads Rousseau into a new dilemma – an “educational circle,” if you will, in which the effect of the laws must somehow become the cause of them.

Rousseau dedicated an entire separate book, *Emile, ou de l’éducation*, to squaring the educational circle from *Le contrat social*.⁴¹ The *Emile* is a novel with a simple yet compelling plot: two children, a boy named Emile and a girl named Sophie, are born, grow up, and receive educations that form them into adults capable of reconciling their particular wills with their polity’s general will. Like Plato’s *Republic*, the *Emile* tries to address the entirety of the human condition, showing what it takes to bring up free, natural, and civic-minded human beings under the alienating conditions of modern European life.⁴² The lawgiver-figure from *Le contrat social* reappears in the *Emile* as the tutor Jean-Jacques, a man who gives the better part of his adult life to preparing Emile and Sophie for their adult lives. As Emile and Sophie grow, Jean-Jacques invests an immense amount of personal attention and communal resources into educating them, making sure they grow up unspoiled by society’s corrupting tendencies. At intervals nature deems developmentally appropriate, Jean-Jacques introduces Emile and Sophie to the concepts and practices they will need to make a living in civil society, nurturing their moral emotions, arranging useful work for them to do, and encouraging them to develop autonomy in their judgments. By novel’s end, the protagonists have received an education by “nature, things, and men,” entering the world of adults as naturally complete beings, equally fit to govern their peers as to be governed by them. Notably, the process by which Emile and Sophie realize their natural humanity is the same one by which

³⁸ Rousseau, *Le contrat social*, 191.

³⁹ Although I would digress if I were to discuss it at length, it is worth noting that Rousseau had an immense impact on German intellectuals. Immanuel Kant kept an annotated copy of *Emile* and a portrait of Rousseau on his writing desk in Königsberg; Schiller made the education of the feelings the lodestone of his critique of Kant; Goethe admired the *Emile* and recommended Rousseau’s botanical writings to his friends in the scientific community. There is no question, therefore, that the tradition of *Bildungsphilosophie* in Germany claimed Rousseau as its most important predecessor.

⁴⁰ Rousseau, *Le contrat social*, 192.

⁴¹ *Emile* was published the same year, 1762, as *Le contrat social*. The democratic spirit of both works alarmed King Louis XV and forced Rousseau to flee to Neuchâtel.

⁴² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, translated by Allen Wood (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 40. The “modern” here is always a contrast with the “ancient.”

they develop a kind of democratic self-consciousness. Rousseau squares the educational circle by deriving the ends of political education from the natural genesis of the human organism itself.⁴³

Hegel's critique of the *Emile* indicates that he did not fully grasp the affinities between Rousseau's concept of *l'éducation* and the German concept of *Bildung*. When Hegel mentions the *Emile* in §153 of *Philosophy of Right*, he focuses on what he considers to be its one-sided naturalism with regard to human development:

Those pedagogical experiments in removing people from the ordinary life of the present and bringing them up in the country (cf. Rousseau's *Emile*) have been futile, because one cannot successfully isolate people from the laws of the world. Even if young people have to be educated in solitude, no one should imagine that the breath of the spiritual world will not eventually find its way into this solitude and that the power of the world spirit is too weak for it to gain control of such remote regions. The individual attains his right only by becoming the citizen of a good state.⁴⁴

Hegel makes two noteworthy points here, one explicit, one implicit. The first, explicit point is that Rousseau's educational naturalism, which purports to shield children from society, is impracticable, for the simple reason that it is impossible to escape society's influence, even in geographic isolation. The modern European world is a world totally permeated by human activity. The child growing up in the countryside encounters the state in their parents, guardians, or educators who, having reached maturity, cannot help but bear its spiritual stamp. The second, implicit point – the deeper point – is that educational naturalism is conceptually untenable, since the aim of *Bildung* is not only to actualize nature but also to actualize one's particularity in relation to universality. This latter aspect of *Bildung* is necessary because the state itself is a precondition for human life. Particularity must recognize the state's priority and internalize its normative spirit if it is even to secure a bare, animal existence.

While Hegel prioritizes the state over mere nature, he understands that the genesis of the human being as an organism is an integral part of *Bildung*. Just paragraphs earlier, in §151, he states that “art of education” (*Pädagogik*)⁴⁵ is the “art of making human beings ethical” by showing them “how their first nature (*erste Natur*) can be transformed into a second, spiritual nature (*zweite, geistliche Natur*).”⁴⁶ Once the process of *Bildung* is realized, the human being's self-determining second nature functions as if it were its first nature. Hegel sometimes ascribes the word habit (*Gewohnheit*) to this acquired, second-natural activity, which encompasses everything from personal culture to normative practices. Andreja Novakovic, building on Hegel's conception of habit, notes that it is essential to Hegel's conception of freedom, insofar as habit raises human beings out of a state of being determined entirely by nature, as other animals are, into a form of activity of their own making. According to Novakovic, acquiring a regime of habits requires one to pass through socially- and self-imposed forms of training that crystallize into a system of principles and practices. Habit, then, is not the rote or reified behavior that many philosophers of freedom make it out to be. Rather, it is the ultimate proof that reflection has taken place, that a particular principle or practice has been sufficiently evaluated as to be enacted. Freedom, it follows from this, is a synthesis of reflection and reflexivity. Human beings can think about and reconsider

⁴³ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on Inequality,” in *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. John T. Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 37–151.

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §153.

⁴⁵ Hegel does not use *Pädagogik* interchangeably with *Bildung*. As I explain in Chapter Three, *Pädagogik* is the “art” (*Kunst*) of education and is a moment of the process of *Bildung*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, §151.

everything they come into contact with, but this reflective activity alone is not what makes them free. Additionally required for freedom is a stable regime of reflexive or automated activities that make it possible for thought to concern itself with higher affairs.⁴⁷ Implicit in Novakovic's analysis is a conception of first nature that provides the model for second nature. How the human being behaves as a naturally determined organism is not so unlike how it behaves as a self-determining, spiritual being. Indeed, the spiritual human being can be called free only after passing through a formative period of thinking during which they learn to conduct their spiritual affairs with the same regularity as the animal conducts its natural affairs.

Like Rousseau, Hegel views natural genesis and political education as interrelated processes. The difference is that, for Hegel, the political supersedes the natural by installing a "second nature" (habits determined internally by the socialized individual) in the place of "first nature" (drives determined externally by nature). Whereas Rousseau presupposes that education can begin without society's influence, Hegel tethers education to a fully actualized political state. And yet, by characterizing habit as a kind of second nature, Hegel signals that first nature remains immanent within political education. The modern political order described in *Philosophy of Right* ostensibly satisfies two kinds of human needs: natural and spiritual. Natural needs are those material needs such as nutrition, shelter, and reproduction that human beings have in common with nonhuman animals. Spiritual (*geistlich*) needs are "needs of second nature"⁴⁸ that arise out of thought's mediation of the first-natural ones. Hegel consistently refers to this process of "idealizing" animality as *Bildung* itself. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel construes the *Bildung* of human subjectivity as if it were just the natural life-process, remarking that it is the process of "the organic" (the emergent political subject, here likened to the animal organism) devouring "the inorganic" (the extant political world, here likened to nature).⁴⁹ Moreover, Hegel says that *Bildung* is the process by which individuality becomes alienated from its particular animal being into its universal political being.⁵⁰ These definitions sync up in *Philosophy of Right* as the transformation of first nature into a "second, spiritual nature,"⁵¹ the formulation that has led many Hegel commentators to seize upon *Bildung*'s naturalness, on the one hand, and its second-naturalness, on the other. John McDowell, for instance, alluding to the *Phenomenology*, says that human nature is "largely second nature, and our second nature is the way it is not just because of the [natural] potentialities we were born with, but because of our upbringing, our *Bildung*."⁵² Frederick Neuhouser, making a similar point, notes that "although it is the essential nature of human beings to be free, freedom does not come naturally to them" but must be brought about, second-naturally, via *Bildung*.⁵³ And Thomas

⁴⁷ Scholars disagree as to whether Hegel applied the concept of second nature exclusively to individual subjective *Bildung* or if he intended its application to extend to social institutions as well. Simon Lumsden, for example, thinks that Hegel intended second nature only in the former sense, arguing that, because it appears in the Subjective Spirit section of the *Encyclopedia*, it is meant only to describe the habituation of acquired experiences. See Simon Lumsden, "Between Nature and Spirit: Hegel's Account of Habit," in ed. David Stern, *Essays on Hegel's Subjective Spirit* (New York: SUNY, 2013), pp. 121-138. Italo Testa, by contrast, views objective institutions themselves as concretizations of social "habits" and therefore as a manifestation of a collectively shared second nature. See Italo Testa, "Hegel's Naturalism or Soul and Body in the *Encyclopedia*," in ed. David Stern, *Essays on Subjective Spirit* (New York: SUNY, 2013), pp. 19-38.

⁴⁸ I import this term from Michael Lebowitz, whose study of Marx's later works, *Beyond Capital* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), takes up similar questions as mine.

⁴⁹ PhG §28.

⁵⁰ PhG §489.

⁵¹ PR §151.

⁵² John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 87-8.

⁵³ Frederick Neuhouser, *Hegel's Social Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 149.

Khurana observes that *Bildung* happens in a “quasi-natural” manner.⁵⁴ What all these commentaries have in common, despite their differences, is the idea that first-natural activity is immanent in second-natural activity. The unconscious life-process is the genetic forbear of self-conscious human development.

Hegel is not incorrect to stress that Rousseau gives nature priority over society in determining the telos of *l'education* (Rousseau admits as much). However, Hegel is on shakier ground in claiming that Rousseau's educational naturalism is institutionally underdetermined and therefore decoupled from an actual political world. Rousseau prioritizes nature over society because he judges that the material inequalities and selfish mores of modern European societies alienate man from his natural egalitarian condition. *L'education* rights this wrong by letting the child grow up as “natural man” would have done, in hopes that that such a process will transform society's corrupted, inequalitarian institutions into more humane, egalitarian ones. In this sense, *l'education* is a method determined negatively by the historical conditions that make it necessary, and its positive aim is to give sovereignty over politics back to nature. The result is an ideal synthesis of natural genesis and political education. When Emile and Sophie reach natural maturity, they do not divorce themselves from the state but take their places in it as civic-minded citizens capable of making their own autonomous judgments.

Hegel's misprision of *l'education* influenced how he conceptualized *Bildung* in his mature works. Caricaturing *l'education* as a one-sided naturalism, Hegel overlooked Rousseau's derivation of political education from the natural genesis of the human organism, causing him to understate the affinities – and overstate the differences – between *l'education* and *Bildung*. The fundamental affinity between the two concepts is that they both refer to a unified process of natural genesis and political education; the fundamental difference is that they let nature and the political state respectively determine their ultimate ends. It should come as no surprise, then, that the full implications of Hegel's misprision of Rousseau show up in his mature theory of the state. *Philosophy of Right* focuses primarily on the spiritual side of *Bildung*, describing how particularity finds reconciliation with universality via familial childrearing (*Erziehung*), formal schooling (*Pädagogik/Unterricht*), and political education (*Bildung*).⁵⁵ Like Rousseau, Hegel acknowledges the democratic upshot of the notion that children have a right to grow up and be educated, no matter where they begin in life. Unlike Rousseau, however, Hegel does not conclude that the democratic potential of *Bildung* must be actualized in the form of the state itself. On the contrary, Hegel is adamant that the modern political state should not become a democratic organization, even if some of its component institutions, such as the union-like trade corporations and the publicly supported schools, are proto-democratic in spirit. As his critique of Rousseau's *Le contrat social* makes clear, Hegel finds the very notion of the rule of the “many” (he uses the Greek *hoi polloi* to show the extent of his contempt) to be a confused abstraction.⁵⁶ If the “many” has any meaningful referent, it is not some universal will abstracted *en bloc* from particular wills but a concrete unity of particular wills with the universal will embodied in actual institutions. Without this concrete unity, which, as I discussed earlier, can only be sustained by building on already established social bonds, Hegel doubts that democratically enfranchised citizens would ever be able to supersede their particular wills in favor of what is best for the whole. As Thom Brooks correctly observes, Hegel thinks that the concrete unity of particularity and universality suffices as

⁵⁴ Thomas Khurana, “The Politics of Second Nature,” in *Philosophie der Republic* (Mohr Siebeck), 428.

⁵⁵ These are the three essential moments of ethical education that I discuss in Chapter Three. The moments roughly correspond to childhood, youth, and early adulthood in the *Emile*.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *PR*, §301.

a popular check on monarchy.⁵⁷ When the rulers of the state fail to make decisions that sustain this unity, they decouple themselves from the citizens, creating a crisis in which the citizens, who, according to Hegel, lack the capacity “to know their own will,”⁵⁸ begin to view themselves as the democratic arbiters of their collective destiny.

Hegel’s resistance to full political democratization all but ensures that there will be a permanent tension in his philosophy between citizens who shape their particular wills toward the state and a state that does not fully return the favor.⁵⁹ If Rousseau’s challenge is to explain how the actualization of the democratic state and the natural development of democratic consciousness via *l’education* reciprocally cause each other, then Hegel’s challenge is to explain how the proto-democratic self-consciousness produced via *Bildung* can reconcile itself to a state that restricts formal democracy.

III.

Such were the problems Hegel faced in systematizing the concept of *Bildung*. The overall picture becomes even more complicated when his earlier works are considered. In the *Phenomenology of Mind*, for example, Hegel gives an alternative account of *Bildung* as political education that focuses, not on the rights-bearing citizen, but on the rightless bondsman, a figure over whose referent scholars have long puzzled. In the famous lord-bondsman allegory from the “Self-Consciousness” section, two human beings engage in a primordial life-and-death struggle over control of economic production and political power. The struggle initially resolves itself into a hierarchical relationship wherein one party (the lord) subdues the other (the bondsman) as a forced laborer. Over time, through the dual experience of fearing for their life under the master’s yoke (the political struggle) and exercising their agency through working upon nature (the economic struggle), the bondsman begins to conceive of themselves as independent from the lord’s control and of their bondage as ethically illegitimate. Upon this revolution of the bondsman’s self-consciousness, the *Phenomenology* turns into a story about the actualization of their freedom in the social world. According to Hegel, upon thinking their independence from the lord, the bondsman travels through several transitional modes of consciousness that actuate progressive stages of freedom.⁶⁰ Eventually, the bondsman’s self-liberation entails the transformation of the social world into one that recognizes both their right and the former lord’s. Importantly, what the bondsman seeks is not vengeance against the lord but universal freedom for all, for they understand that the lord, too, keeps themselves in a kind of bondage by outsourcing all socially necessary work to another. As Hegel expounds in the *Encyclopedia*, the lord is eventually compelled to submit their one-sided will to the truly universal will of the freedom-seeking bondsman. The new law posited by the bondsman’s struggle becomes the recognized law of all, and those who once confronted each other in a life-and-death struggle now face each other, for the first time, as free beings.

⁵⁷ Thom Brooks, “Plato, Hegel, and Democracy,” PDF downloaded from academia.edu, 43.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *PR*, §301.

⁵⁹ One concrete manifestation of this tension can be seen in the unhappy reconciliation between what Hegel terms “patriotism” and “public opinion,” a problem I will address in detail in Chapter Three.

⁶⁰ Stoicism, the first mode, is the bondsman’s retreat inward, toward the infinity of subjective thought. Skepticism, the second stage, is the infinite questioning of objectivity that follows from the discovery of the richness of subjectivity. The Unhappy Consciousness, the third mode, is a state of disaffection with a world that suppresses the objective self-realization of the subject. These stages roughly follow the historical trajectory of ancient Roman philosophy, starting with the ex-slave Epictetus, whose *Enchiridion* survives as one of the founding texts of Stoicism.

Hegel says, in the *Encyclopedia*, that the lord-bondsman dialectic is a necessary moment in the founding of states as well as the natural life-cycle of human beings, adding that the experience of social subordination is “a necessary moment in the *Bildung* of every man.”⁶¹ What this statement implies, first of all, is that the state’s end of nurturing loyal, intelligent citizens is compatible with “soft” forms of domination, such as disciplining children who question adult authority or workers who try to act above their paygrade. On the other hand, the statement appears equally to imply that the bondsman’s *Bildung* is not wholly subsumable under the state’s ends (as, presumably, the citizen’s would be). Indeed, what ultimately lifts the bondsman out of subordination into freedom is their self-conscious rejection of the objective norms that hold them in subjugation. The result of their *Bildung* is a “second, spiritual nature” that is educated by struggle, rather than by the state’s end of bringing up good citizens. In other words, the bondsman’s *Bildung* is a democratic struggle for freedom and equality in which the extant state plays little to no positive role and for which it cannot take credit.

Susan Buck-Morss conjectures that Hegel modeled the lord-bondsman dialectic after a political event in the French colony of Sainte-Domingue known today as the Haitian Revolution.⁶² Breaking out in 1791 in the wake of the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution was a bloody struggle against plantation slavery and European colonialism in the New World. Led by slave-turned-general Toussaint L’Ouverture, the black workers of the most productive sugar colony in the world took up arms against the colony’s white elites to found an abolition republic premised on the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.⁶³ General L’Ouverture’s explicit goal was to leverage the uprising to abolish slavery in all of Europe’s colonial territories. In its early years, the Sainte-Domingue Revolution put France’s universal ideals to the ultimate test. While some French *philosophes*, such as Nicolas de Condorcet and Olympe de Gouges, promoted black emancipation and education in their writings, many more revolutionaries balked at the prospect of abolishing slavery and incorporating blacks into the French family. As C.L.R. James chronicles in *Black Jacobins*, French colonial interests in the Caribbean played a major role in shaping public opinion on the issue.⁶⁴ Bourgeois revolutionaries who held investments in slavery and its partner industries complained about the short-term economic costs of liberating the enslaved, either consciously contradicting the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man* or paradoxically restricting its application to white men only. Others wavered on metaphysical grounds, wondering whether blacks inherently possessed reason and could be educated into European customs and laws. According to Buck-Morss, the revolution caught Hegel’s attention because of its continuation of the collapsed republican experiment in France. While many recoiled in horror from the spectacle of an organized, slave-led revolution, Hegel sympathized with what he viewed as the inevitable worldwide dissolution of slavery and other forms of political domination. Following a trail of documents from the years Hegel was working on the *Phenomenology*, Buck-Morss makes a convincing case that the final version of that work, published in 1807, was directly impacted by Haiti’s successful self-liberation in 1804.

If Buck-Morss is correct about the connection between Haiti and Hegel, then what are the implications for Hegel’s account of the bondsman’s hard-won *Bildung*? One is that the lord-

⁶¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: OUP), §454.

⁶² Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Pitt Illuminations (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

⁶³ Establishing a sister republic to France was L’Ouverture’s initial goal. After he was captured by Napoleon and jailed in France, his successor, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, tried to chart a different, more independent course. See Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 39.

⁶⁴ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Vintage, 1989).

bondsman dialectic is a documented instance of Hegel acknowledging that a volcanic eruption – a total revolution spearheaded by the oppressed – was a necessary step in a modern liberation struggle. Out of this, a second implication follows: the bondsman’s political education becomes, at some point, a trial by fire. This resonates with what C.L.R. James writes regarding the expedient political ascent of revolutionaries like L’Ouverture, who, with minimal or no exposure to formal learning, were able to lead whole armies and strategize cunningly against the most powerful organized militaries in the world. L’Ouverture, moreover, became a political orator comparable to “Pericles on democracy, Paine on natural rights, [and] Marx on communism.” But while the latter were “men of liberal education, formed in the tradition of ethics, philosophy, and history,” Toussaint was “a slave...bearing alone the unaccustomed burden of war and government...”⁶⁵ Of L’Ouverture’s remarkable educational trajectory, which stemmed directly from his exercise of the political control given him by the black masses, James writes:

French generals, officials, and colonists who wrote reports and memoirs about these [black] generals and other officials when at the height of their power, all noted the ease and quickness with which they had learned to command. Pamphile de Lacroix said of these slaves that they had learned more quickly than French workers or peasants in a similar position could have done. This was probably true, and it was because the black leaders were not so permeated by the ideas of the ruling class as a French worker or peasant would have been. Mass support had elevated them and maintained them in supreme power, and the responsibility gave them confidence.⁶⁶

James’ descriptions of the black vanguard of the Sainte-Domingue Revolution contain an implicit critique of the doctrine that political education, like the growth of a plant, must happen stepwise – “making no leaps” – in order to be fulfilled. To be sure, James is not suggesting that revolutionary circumstances alone were responsible for L’Ouverture’s rise. His hypothesis is that the revolution furnished an opportunity to actuate a political education that, during slavery, had to be conducted in secret, in a world apart from the master’s supervision. The fact that L’Ouverture had risen out of enslavement, rather than out of feudal subjugation or arrested middle-class development, accelerated his political education exponentially. Still, even the General himself believed that systematic formal education was needed to secure Sainte-Domingue’s long-term stability as a free republic. Before his capture by Napoleon, he sent many black children abroad to receive European-style formal schooling, expecting that, by the time they completed their studies, they would return to Sainte-Domingue to govern the new abolitionist republic. The black slave’s *Bildung*, in James’ portrait, consisted of organized political struggle supplemented with formal schooling aimed at cultivating self-governing citizens – a sowing of fresh seeds on scorched earth.

James centers the theme of political education in the story of Haiti’s self-liberation. Linking James to Buck-Morss, it becomes clear that the Hegel who wrote the *Phenomenology* was at least open to the possibility that *Bildung* in the sense of political education could occur under conditions of intense upheaval and struggle. As Buck-Morss points out, the younger Hegel of the *Phenomenology* was far more open to revolutionary politics than the older Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopedia*. Where the former appears to affirm the legitimacy of the bondsman’s self-liberation through concerted revolutionary action, the latter stresses the stepwise nature of the life-process when it comes to fundamental individual and social transformation. “Slavery is in and for itself injustice,” Hegel says in one of his later lectures, “for the essence of humanity is freedom; but for this man must be matured. The gradual abolition of slavery is therefore wiser and more

⁶⁵ Ibid, 258.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 196-7.

equitable than its sudden removal.”⁶⁷ Hegel has this more “lifelike” theory of *Bildung* in mind when he says that the bondsman’s political self-determination out of slavery cannot – and thus should not – happen overnight. Instead, it must be nurtured incrementally, first through the nominal recognition of the humanity of the enslaved, then through the piecemeal reform of the institutions that keep them in subjugation. On this view, the bondsman whose freedom has been recognized morally but not yet materially has to endure a terrible contradiction. On one hand, they must believe that they are free and deserving of the rights pertaining to that freedom. On the other hand, they must accept that they are somehow not yet ready, because experience has not yet prepared them, to actualize that right in the world.⁶⁸

Notably, the revamped lord-bondsman section of the *Encyclopedia* ends on the same note as the “Bildung” section of the *Phenomenology*, invoking the “abstract universal self-consciousness” that the younger Hegel equated with the “restless agony of unexpressed individuality.” What this indicates is that the older Hegel came to view the results of the Saint-Domingue and French revolutions as effectively the same. In each case, a submerged mass revolted against an unjust state of affairs and became fully conscious of their collective power in the process. Yet the form of consciousness they developed, while necessary for abolishing the in-and-for-themselves unjust institutions of feudalism and slavery, was insufficiently rooted in extant social relations and so failed to secure stability for the republican states they founded.⁶⁹ In each case, the philosophical lesson was to embrace the laws of a living nature that makes no great leaps forward but instead climbs, part by part, like a plant toward the sun.

IV.

Hegel’s complicated responses to the two great democratic revolutions of his lifetime reveal that the concept of *Bildung* remains a site of fecund ambiguity in his thought. On the one hand, examining the abortive republican projects of both revolutions, he argues that the systematic model for human *Bildung* is that of the citizen whose natural genesis and political education are functions of the nurturing hand of the rationally organized political state. On the other hand, looking upon the French and Haitian people’s extraordinary short-term achievements, he acknowledges the possibility that at least a measure of what he would call genuine political education can be won through direct struggle. Ultimately, Hegel resolves the tension between these analyses by offering the rather cryptic assertion in the *Encyclopedia* that the bondsman’s struggle is a “necessary moment in the *Bildung* of every man.” In other words, Hegel presents the citizen-figure as a supersession of the bondsman-figure, and the citizen’s *Bildung* through nurture as a supersession of the bondsman’s *Bildung* through struggle.

Because of this, Hegel’s account of the citizen’s *Bildung* is by far the more systematic and comprehensive one. My dissertation will test Hegel’s judgment that the citizen’s *Bildung* supersedes the bondsman’s through a systematic examination of the concept’s development in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Taking a systematic approach to this text raises at least three major philosophical questions that will guide me to my ultimate judgment of whether Hegel’s official account of *Bildung* is coherent. First, how can natural genesis and political

⁶⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, quoted in Buck-Morss, 68.

⁶⁸ It is doubtful that Hegel had much hope for Haiti’s post-revolutionary political prospects, given his derisive comments about African-descended peoples. I will have more to say about this in Chapter Two.

⁶⁹ On this reading, Napoleon’s takeover of France, and the West’s neo-colonial domination of a politically isolated, post-revolutionary Haiti, was an attempt to make sure that what the Haitian Revolution achieved – a free black republic – would not be fully realized.

education be discussed in analytic separation if they are also dialectically entwined? Second, once the analytic distinction between the two senses of *Bildung* is posited, how are we to understand the shift from discussing natural genesis, a concept that can be applied to living nature in general, to political education, a concept that applies exclusively to the species-specific life-activity of human beings? Third, what does it mean to conceptualize *Bildung* as political education through nurture? My purpose in answering these questions is to make a final judgment as to whether Hegel achieves a coherent account of *Bildung*. My judgment, if I may state it preemptively and incompletely here, is that Hegel does not quite achieve it. Indeed, I judge that Hegel's systematic presentation of the citizen's *Bildung* fails to supersede the bondsman's but rather relies upon it as a supplement to what it cannot accomplish on its own terms.

Why is it relevant to relitigate the problems surrounding Hegel's concept of *Bildung*, which, admittedly, belong to another historical moment with different political concerns than ours? Such a question could be asked of any history-of-philosophy project, but I have two apologies to give for my approach. The first is that Hegel provides us a valuable philosophical narration of how "democratic self-consciousness" and "democratic sociality" come into being through the convergence of certain natural and historical processes. For those of us who are committed to growing democracy, in the young or in society as a whole, Hegel delivers a model that deserves serious consideration. Of course, not all of the historical particulars of his model should or even could be perfectly translated across time and space. Even so, the general bent of his account provides a useful starting point for a more concrete, material analysis of how to bring democratic self-consciousness into being. Second, Hegel's failure to achieve a fully coherent account of the citizen's *Bildung* is an object lesson in the dialectical entwinement of natural and political *Bildung*, namely how the political side of that process can thwart the natural side. This, too, is an important lesson for our time, an age, if I may generalize, in which genuine political education under the state's nurturing hand is a vanishing – if not already null – possibility.

The dissertation will proceed as follows:

Chapter One, titled "A Satire on Humanity: The *Bildung* of Living Nature," addresses the question of how natural genesis and political education can be analytically separated by examining Hegel's account of the organism in the *Philosophy of Nature* (the second book of the *Encyclopedia*). The chapter starts by combining Hegel's scattered mentions of the word *Bildung* in his discussions of plants and animals into a stable definition. Drawing on the philological context of Hegel's later works, including the scientific writings of J.W. Goethe and J.F. Blumenbach, I stipulate that *Bildung* is the natural genesis (*Epigenesis*) of the organism between embryogenesis and death. After defining what "first nature" is, the chapter pivots to a technical analysis of the essential conceptual determinations that Hegel ascribes to *Bildung* as natural genesis: living form (*Gestalt*), assimilation (*Assimilation*), and the genus-process (*Gattungsprozeß*). My main claim in this part of the chapter is that these essential determinations of natural genesis establish the basic naturalistic criteria that any valid form of political education must meet:

1. Living form is the unconscious natural being presupposed as the starting point of political education and as such is the basic matter upon which it works. A valid political education must therefore grow and conserve the living form of the organism in a manner conducive to its full self-actualization.

2. Assimilation is Hegel's term for the interactivity of organism and world, an activity that has both receptive and constructive moments that prefigure how thought itself operates. On the one hand, the organism relates to its surrounding environment through unconscious drives that

seek satisfaction for its metabolic needs, “assimilating” or interiorizing external matter in order to conserve its own life. On the other hand, some organisms, especially more complex animals like human beings, relate to their environment in a shaping manner, leaving an indelible imprint of their subjectivity on the outer world. A valid political education must therefore facilitate the metabolization of external “matter” (the customs and laws of the community), on the one hand, while outfitting the subject with the necessary means of objectifying its subjectivity in the social world.

3. The genus-process, finally, establishes the ontological priority of the species over the individual member, while leaving room for the individual’s self-actualization via reproduction. Unlike other animals, human beings do not realize their nature through biological reproduction alone. Because of their capacity for self-conscious thought, human beings engage in a mode of self-reproduction the product of which is infinite self-determination, as opposed to infinite repetition. Human beings can “think” their sociality as a species, opening a whole world of possibilities, including the acquisition of novel social needs beyond that of natural self-actualization. A valid political education, therefore, must make “thinking the species” one of its ends, effectively transmuting natural reproduction into the self-conscious process of social reproduction.

Chapter One follows the *Philosophy of Nature* to its conceptual outer limit – the natural genesis of life in general. Chapter Two, titled “Ages of Life: The *Bildung* of Human Subjectivity,” aims to reconstruct Hegel’s account of the species-specific natural genesis of human animals from the “Subjective Spirit” division of *Philosophy of Mind* (the first half of the third book of the *Encyclopedia*). The transition from animality in general to human animality in particular introduces new considerations about the relationship between nature (*Natur*) and mind (*Geist*), the latter being Hegel’s term for the thinking activity that distinguishes human from nonhuman animality. Hegel conceives of human animality as a unity of nature and mind in which the latter wholly permeates the former, meaning that human *Bildung*, from embryogenesis onward, is always already mediated by thinking activity. Still, Hegel’s conception of mind cannot be fully described within the conceptual limits of philosophical naturalism because the external form-constraints of nature do not obtain for human minds in the same way that they obtain for animality in general. Hence, I must explain how natural activity and mental activity can be unified without resorting to metaphysical dualism. *Bildung* serves as the keystone concept of my explanation. In the subsection of the text called the “Ages of Life” (*Lebensalter*), Hegel discusses in unison the natural and mental stages of an individual human life. My main claim in this section is that the ages of life can be read as a naturalistic account of the essential determinations of mind. As such, the ages of life provide additional, mental criteria by which to track the species-specific natural genesis of human beings and can be viewed as the subjective benchmarks of political education:

1. “Childhood” (*Kindheit*), or the “anthropological soul,” is the age in which mind finds itself in immediate unity with nature, corresponding to the “living form” stage of natural genesis.

2. “Youth” (*Jugend*), or the “phenomenological mind,” is the age in which mind finds itself in direct contradiction with the world; it is homologous to the “assimilation” moment of natural genesis.

3. “Adulthood” (*Erwachsensein*), or the “psychological mind,” is the mediated unity of mind and world attained through the individual’s self-conscious reconciliation with its objective world. It stands for the subjectively determined unity of the individual with its local species-life and in this regard is a reflection of the natural genus-process.

Taken all together, the ages of life yield a more complete, though not yet fully complete, picture of what human *Bildung* looks like from its subjective side. One distinguishing mark of human natural genesis is the acquisition of novel “needs of second nature” that issue from subjectivity’s interactions with its objective species-life. Chapter Three, titled “A Solar State: The *Bildung* of the Political Animal,” completes the reconstruction of Hegel’s account of human natural genesis from its objective side, focusing on the “Objective Spirit” division of *Philosophy of Mind*. The objective side of natural genesis, or what I have been calling political education, encompasses all the social determinants of individual development. I open the chapter with some interpretive work, stipulating a general definition of political education from Hegel’s opening remarks in Part Three of *Philosophy of Right*, then proceeding to some taxonomical work on three key terms that appear throughout the text: *Erziehung*, *Pädagogik/Unterricht*, and *Bildung*. Taking a careful measure of interpretive liberty, I propose that these various terms for political education are not interchangeable and should be understood as internally differentiated moments of a systematic process that increases the points of epistemic contact between citizens and their state. *Erziehung*, or familial rearing, belongs to the first moment of ethical life—the family; *Pädagogik/Unterricht*, which combines theoretical and vocational learning through formal schooling, belongs to the second moment—civil society; and *Bildung*, or political education, belongs to the final moment—the state. With this taxonomy in place, I consider political education’s efficacy in dealing with a major political problem that I will shorthand as the public-opinion (*öffentliche Meinung*) problem. I interpret the public-opinion problem as a case of stymied *Bildung*, for it shows that the political state educates citizens to hold subjective opinions on its universal affairs while suppressing their need to exercise their nascent political judgment by prohibiting their full participation in the state’s decisions. Public opinion thus has the twofold impact of fortifying and destabilizing the state: fortifying it by linking the citizen’s feelings to the state’s fate, destabilizing by failing to satisfy their second-natural needs. Facing down this contradiction, I argue that the crisis of epistemic alienation embodied in public opinion is dialectically entwined with the human organism’s alienation from its natural being. Public opinion is a symptom of the absence of adequate material and epistemic links between individuals and the sovereign element of their species-life. As such, it fails to satisfy at least two of the naturalistic and mental criteria that Hegel ascribes to human flourishing: first, the objectification of subjectivity in the outer world (in this context, in political-economic institutions), and second, the activity of “thinking the species” (in this case, volitionally thinking the unity of individuality and universality in the authoritative decision procedure).

My final assessment, offered in the conclusion to this dissertation, is that Hegel’s failure to solve the public-opinion problem bodes ill for his systematic concept of *Bildung* as the unified process of natural genesis and political education. The citizen’s stymied development under the state’s stringent formal constraints preserves the lord-bondsman relation within formal politics itself. This is crucial because it shows how, in the highest sphere of the citizen’s development, they remain constrained by a one-sided power, breaking Hegel’s promise that the citizen fully supersedes the bondsman and attains freedom. My final claim is that the citizen’s *Bildung* through nurture must therefore be supplemented with the bondsman’s *Bildung* through struggle in order to save the account. Intergenerational *Bildung* requires something that the political state does not provide: a motive to struggle against the cyclically alienating forces of human species-life.

A Satire on Humanity: The *Bildung* of Living Nature

“Life is capable of the most diverse modifications of its *Bildung*; [yet] the universal powers of nature must always retain their complete mastery.”

-G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia* §369

I.

In order to prescribe that human development should follow the model of living nature, as Hegel did after the French Revolution, one must believe that human beings are capable, even if only to a limited extent and for a limited time, of acting against life.⁷⁰ Hegel judged that the French Revolution offended life by imposing a new constitutional order that had its basis, not in the one it sought to leave behind, but in the abstract prescriptions of pure reason. Lacking this historical basis, the new order emerged out of the old, not organically as a continuation of the French people’s historical self-development, but volcanically as an explosion caused by a subterranean disturbance. The primary agent of the disturbance was an intrepid form of enlightened reason that took itself to be the absolute, sovereign shaper of humanity, uninhibited by the form-constraints that governed the rest of living nature. In this respect, the Revolution was merely the equal-and-opposite reaction to the very power it sought to overthrow, installing an absolutist mob in place of an absolutist king. The problem, for Hegel, was that the nascent republican masses did not have the level of political education – the intergenerationally acquired *Bildung* – to grow, conserve, and reproduce the ideals of their new constitution. It was never republicanism itself, nor the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity that were in principle problematic. It was the pathological idea, propagated by *philosophes* and Montagnards alike, that a politically inexperienced people could bear the fruits of freedom without having first put down the necessary roots and branches.

Because it defied the laws of living nature, the French Revolution could not but leave death and destruction in its wake. In a morbid allusion to the executions by guillotine in the Place de la Concord, Hegel equated toppling the *ancien régime* to lopping off the head of a cabbage, conjuring a visceral metaphor of fully dehumanized, vegetal life.⁷¹ The metaphor suggests that by acting against the laws of life, human beings turn themselves – and their thought-filled heads – into mere living objects whose deaths carry no more metaphysical significance than a heap of cabbages rotting on the ground. However, by remaining within the laws of life, and resisting the hubris of abstract reason, human beings could become something more than mere life, beings which infinitely determine themselves through the power of concrete thinking. The way toward that result, Hegel believed, is to comprehend living nature both in its difference from, and its unity with, human thought, such that the form-constraints of nature can be experienced as facilitators, rather than inhibitors, of human freedom.

Hegel grounds his conception of living nature in the idea that life and self-consciousness are formally homologous and dialectically entwined. This thesis has two interrelated meanings within his philosophical system. One is exclusively logical, having to do with the conceptual affinities between living things and cognitive activity; the other is material, having to do with cognition’s relationship to the animal body that generates it. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel claims that self-consciousness presupposes the concept of life as the logical *sine qua non* of its own

⁷⁰ “There are two kinds of laws, laws of nature and laws of right: the laws of nature are simply there and are valid as they stand: they suffer no diminution, although they may be infringed in individual cases.” G.W.F. Hegel, “Preface,” in *Philosophy of Right*, 13.

⁷¹ Hegel, PhG, §590.

activity. In an exegesis of this claim, Karen Ng identifies at least two conceptual affinities that link the activity of living nature to the activity of human cognition. The first is the internal purposiveness exhibited in living creatures, “in which subjective purposes, aims, and ends are realized objectively.”⁷² The second is what Hegel calls “speculative identity,” or the identity and non-identity of subjectivity and objectivity exhibited in living things. What a living thing is, for Hegel, is an internally coherent form (subjectivity) relating to an externally coherent form (objectivity) that is at once distinct from and assimilable to it. An animal, when eating, simultaneously posits the non-identity and the identity between itself and its food-object, and during metabolization, it re-positions this distinction between itself and its own body, as if its body were at once subject and object, one and not-one with itself. Similarly, human thought is the unity-in-difference of subjective cognition and worldly objects, on the one hand, and subjective cognition and itself, on the other. In Ng’s paraphrase, life is the “immediacy” of speculative identity; it is the shape that thought itself takes in its process of attaining self-knowledge.⁷³ Further evidence for Ng’s reading can be found in *Philosophy of Mind*, where Hegel remarks that living creatures manifest “a sensory, external, and at the same time simply internal, existence,” and that through experiencing “this living unity of what is distinct,” consciousness is rendered capable of distinguishing between its own subjective and objective sides, such that it becomes *self-consciousness*, “a difference that is no difference.”⁷⁴ The logical form of living objects, in other words, actuates self-consciousness as no other nonliving form can.⁷⁵ As Ng sums it up: “Self-consciousness without life is empty; life without self-consciousness is blind.”

The material dimension of Hegel’s thesis concerning the dialectic of life and self-consciousness – the one with which this chapter is primarily concerned – is explained in *Philosophy of Nature*, where he claims that thinking subjectivity is presaged materially in living nature, namely in embodied animality.⁷⁶ “The perpetual action of life is Absolute Idealism,” Hegel writes in the Introduction to that book, by which he refers to the speculative identity of subjectivity and objectivity realized in life-activity.⁷⁷ What makes life “ideal” is how it endures and resolves the contradiction with itself and its other. The living creature confronts an “inorganic,” outer world

⁷² Karen Ng, *Hegel’s Concept of Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2020), 261.

⁷³ Karen Ng, “Life, Self-Consciousness, Negativity: Understanding Hegel’s Speculative Identity Thesis,” in *The Freedom of Life*, ed. Thomas Khurana (Frankfurt: August Verlag), 34.

⁷⁴ Hegel, *PM*, §423.

⁷⁵ Non-living nature cannot do this in the same way, following Hegel’s reasoning. Consider the simple example of a rock, which lacks the internal purposiveness and subject-object identity that an animal has. A rock does not act upon external objects but is acted upon by them. Its activity is entirely determined by forces outside of it.

⁷⁶ An issue of *Critical Horizons* was recently dedicated to redressing the misunderstanding and neglect of Hegel’s naturalism. See Heikki Ikäheimo, “Nature in Spirit: A new direction for Hegel-studies and Hegelian philosophy,” *Critical Horizons*, Vol 13., No. 2 (2012), 149-153. Ikäheimo and the other contributors offer a critical evaluation of the idealistic strain of Hegel interpretation found in scholars like Robert Pippin, Robert Brandon, and Terry Pinkard.

⁷⁷ The absolute Idea is Hegel’s term for the unity of mind and world, subject and object, concept and reality that comes about when human beings turn their experiences over to thought. Hegel conceives of it as human thought’s ground and result. It is ground insofar as human thought presupposes it in the very activity of cognizing objects, and it is result insofar as thought objectively discloses the determinations of the absolute Idea to itself through its cognitions. If such a definition sounds circular, that is because it is: Hegel affirms the circular shape of his philosophy, claiming that the end is the beginning and vice versa (see Hegel, *SL*, §15). The absolute idea’s very thinkability is premised on this circularity, on thought’s holding itself together as a holistic system whose results are but explanations of its presuppositions (ibid., §14). Jacques Derrida has it right when he says that the absolute Idea is both “always already” and “not yet” present to human thought (see Jacques Derrida, “The Age of Hegel,” in *Right to Philosophy* (Stanford University Press, 2002). It is always already present because it is akin to thought’s a priori ground, and it is not yet present because it does not become actual except through a posteriori experience.

of indifferent physical and chemical forces and must conserve itself over against it.⁷⁸ It does this by venturing out into the world and returning to itself through it. A deer, for example, replenishes its bodily form by eating the berries and grasses it finds on the ground, and it evades danger by camouflaging itself in the forest. A deer can make its own body a means to its self-formation as well. When winter comes and nutrition is scarce, the animal metabolizes its own fat reserves, drawing calories from cells stored up during the winter months. Moreover, it grows a thick coat of fur to insulate its body heat from the cold air, shedding the excess fur once the cold months pass. What enables the deer to make the inorganic world its own, and to relate to its own body as to an inorganic object, is life. Logically and materially speaking, life is the unity-in-difference of the organism and its world (the first-order subject-object distinction that enables it to eat, hide, etc.) as well as the unity of subject and object in the body itself (the second-order distinction that enables the living being to use itself as a means to its own end).

What Hegel calls “life” in the Organics division of *Philosophy of Nature* closely resembles what Aristotle calls *psyche* in Book β of *De Anima*.⁷⁹ There, Aristotle defines soul as the “first actuality of a natural body that has organs.”⁸⁰ As first actuality, soul is not the organized body itself but the body’s form or principle. It is that in virtue of which the organized body has the capacity to live and flourish. But it is likewise the body’s byproduct, for by exercising its capacity to live – by eating, moving, resting, etc. – the body reciprocally realizes the soul.⁸¹ According to Alfredo Ferrarin, Hegel views Aristotle’s soul as an “immanent form,” the very being of which consists in the process of realizing itself. Soul is “form understood as end,”⁸² form as cause and effect of itself. Hegel says in §337 that wherever cause and effect are one and the same, “life is there.”⁸³ But life and soul have more in common than just immanence of form. Hegel imports Aristotle’s subdivision of the soul into nutritive, sensitive, and thinking powers that correspond to vegetable, animal, and human-animal life-forms, respectively.⁸⁴ The nutritive power is the simplest of these and is a necessary and sufficient condition for life. “This fact is evident in plants,” Aristotle says; “for no power other than that of nutrition belongs to them.”⁸⁵ In nonhuman animals, the sensitive power is present in addition to the nutritive, and in the human animal, the nutritive, the sensitive, and the thinking powers all obtain.⁸⁶ The more complex power controls the subordinate power. Thus, sensitivity, or as Hegel calls it, “self-feeling,” is the essence of the nonhuman animal, while thinking is the essence of the human-animal soul and controls the feeling and nutritive powers under it.⁸⁷

A difference exists between Hegel and Aristotle in the way they conceive of human animals as natural beings. Where Aristotle determines human animality entirely within *physis*, Hegel treats the human life-form in its natural determinations as being always already on the way to realizing

⁷⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford: OUP), §365.

⁷⁹ Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 9. As Ferrarin notes, Hegel’s conceptions of “life” (*Leben*) and “soul” (*Seele*) are not directly translatable into Aristotle’s *zoe* and *psyche*. In fact, *Leben* is closer to *psyche* than to *bios*.

⁸⁰ Aristotle, *De Anima*, translated by H.G. Apostle (Grinnell, IA: Peripatetic Press, 1981), 412a25.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 412a10-413a5.

⁸² Ferrarin, *Hegel*, p. 10.

⁸³ Hegel, *PN*, §337.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, §351.

⁸⁵ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 413b.

⁸⁶ Aristotle’s tripartite division of life continues to contribute to evolutionary biology and philosophy of science. See, for example, Simona Ginsburg and Eva Jablonka’s recent book, *The Evolution of the Sensitive Soul: Learning and the Origin of Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2019), “Introduction.”

⁸⁷ Hegel, *PN*, §351.

a second-natural, self-determining existence in thought. Sebastian Rand rightly points out that this existence has an unmixed, non-natural aspect that exists within nature but which is not reducible to naturalistic categories. The material body, on Rand's exegesis, is a kind of "proto-subjectivity" that, in the case of nonhuman animals, lacks the type of nervous system that yields self-conscious, conceptual thinking. The nervous system that does yield self-conscious, conceptual thinking, i.e., the human one, opens to a non-natural realm in which terms like "human" and "lion," which function as signifiers of both concrete particulars and universal categories, take on a life of their own. Human thought's power to reconstruct nature as a systematized world of universals (instead of experiencing it as a chaos of concrete particulars), and by implication to discern its own activity in natural forms, is what raises it above the continuum of nonhuman life-activity. That human beings are different from the rest of life does not change the fact that the formal self-relation of the living organism is homologous to that of self-consciousness. This is what Hegel means when he says that the animal organism in particular is thought "in the form of externality." It is literally the materially estranged, immediate being of self-consciousness.

Embedded in Hegel's claim that life immediately embodies the subject-object identity of self-consciousness is the further claim that life's *Bildung* is the model for human *Bildung*.⁸⁸ This simple entailment has been underappreciated, I suspect, because Hegel himself stops short of stipulating a coherent definition of the *Bildung* of living nature.⁸⁹ Hegel sprinkles the concept throughout the Organics division of the *Philosophy of Nature*, variously applying it to the plant's articulated organs,⁹⁰ the animal's assimilation of inorganic matter,⁹¹ and mammalian sexual development.⁹² While suggestive of systematic meaning, these scattered mentions do not amount to a cohesive definition. Yet it is possible and worthwhile to build a definition of the *Bildung* of living nature for the light it would shed on human beings, who develop as other living things do but with the additional mediation of thought. As I will show hereafter, a mixed philological and hermeneutical reconstruction of the "Organics" chapter of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* yields the desired result. Starting from the assumption that the *Bildung* of living nature in general is analytically distinct yet dialectically entwined with the species-specific *Bildung* of human beings, I will investigate its philological context as a scientific concept in late-Enlightenment biology and track its most notable recurrences in the text. After working through these materials, I will eventually stipulate that the *Bildung* of living nature is the process of natural genesis (*Epigenesis*) that all living things undergo between embryogenesis and death. Then, I will argue that each moment of the life-process that Hegel outlines – living form (*Gestalt*), assimilation/construction (*Assimilation*), and the genus-process/species-life (*Gattung*) – corresponds to a moment in the *Bildung* of human beings, establishing the baseline naturalistic criteria by which any valid form of human *Bildung*, understood as the unified process of natural genesis and political education, must be evaluated.

That said, the fact that natural genesis is the form that political education takes does not mean that the two are the same in terms of their content. Hegel makes it clear that the difference between them is that between unconsciousness and self-consciousness. What can sometimes be challenging when interpreting Hegel is judging how exactly to parse that difference. One point

⁸⁸ No additional features to the ones Hegel flags have to be attributed to life to arrive at this implication. It is implied in the "internal purposiveness" feature that life must develop itself toward the realization of that purpose.

⁸⁹ Another reason that the *Bildung* of living nature is rarely discussed in the scholarly literature is because most humanities scholarship focuses on the cultural, political, and pedagogical meanings of *Bildung*.

⁹⁰ Hegel, *PN* §346a.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, §365.

⁹² *Ibid*, §369.

that I will stress at the conclusion of this chapter and throughout this dissertation is that Hegel's conception of self-consciousness is not to be understood as an absolute negation of unconsciousness but a supersession of it. What that means is that self-consciousness conserves some measure of unconsciousness within itself, namely, those aspects of its natural being, such as the baseline bodily needs of eating, sleeping, copulating, etc., in which thought plays no determining role. What ultimately distinguishes unconscious life from self-conscious life is the way each respectively orients itself to these baseline needs, particularly the organism's need to be connected to the reproduction of its species-life. Understanding the integrated moments of the *Bildung* of life in general is the necessary starting point, then, in accounting for the self-positing "needs of second nature" of the human life-form in particular.

II.

I mentioned earlier that Hegel's concept of life borrows from Aristotle's concept of *psyche*. In *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel syncs this neo-Aristotelian concept of life with findings from the empirical life-sciences of his era. In particular, Hegel's extended commentaries on J.W. Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790) and J.F. Blumenbach's *On the Formative Drive and Procreation*, two texts in which *Bildung* figures as a central concept, support the philological judgment that his sense of the *Bildung* of life is a philosophical rendering of the late-Enlightenment scientific concept of natural genesis (*Epigenesis*). Goethe and Blumenbach draw on the concept of *Bildung* to address different yet interrelated questions. For Goethe, *Bildung* is the plant's self-articulation into parts from seed to flower and back to seed.⁹³ For Blumenbach, *Bildung* distinguishes organic objects from inorganic objects and supplements the mechanistic conception of physics with a teleological principle that captures the inner purposiveness of organisms. Hegel endorses these two empirical theories of *Bildung* (with a few critical qualifications) and incorporates them into his understanding of the organismal life-process as the real, material configuration of absolute idealism.⁹⁴

Goethe was the most influential botanist of the later Enlightenment to question the limits of Linnaeus' anatomy-centric approach to botany. In anatomy, "the living thing is separated into its elements, but one cannot put these elements together again and give them life," Goethe says.⁹⁵ For this reason, "[true] science has always evinced a tendency to recognize living forms as such," to understand life as a property of the whole that emerges from the reciprocal cooperation of the parts. No isolable part of the plant is alive on its own; only the whole lives. Goethe calls the complex of life in an organism its form (*Gestalt*) and the bringing-forth of this form its formation (*Bildung*). *Gestalt* is a determinate moment of *Bildung*, a holding-fast of a fixed arrangement of parts which eventually transitions into some new arrangement. "What has just been formed (*das Gebildete*) is instantly transformed (*umgebildet*)," writes Goethe, and in order for botanists to keep track of this ceaseless transforming (*fortwährendes Umbilden*), "[they] must strive to keep [themselves] as flexible and pliable as the example [nature] herself provides."⁹⁶ Yet *Bildung* is not simply the linear succession of the appearances of *Gestalt*. It is additionally the transition from

⁹³ Goethe was influenced by Rousseau's "natural method" of botany, among other things. See Alexandra Cook, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Botan: The Salutary Science* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), xx, 321.

⁹⁴ There are of course more scientists, such as Haller, Treviranus, and others, on whose works Hegel relies. I have selected Goethe and Blumenbach given the centrality of *Bildung* to their researches.

⁹⁵ J.W. Goethe, *Botanical Writings*, translated by Bertha Mueller (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1953), 23.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 24.

one *Gestalt* to the next.⁹⁷ Comprehending *Bildung* requires botanists to understand that they “must at all times stay focused on the dynamic process whereby [organic] phenomena make their appearance.”⁹⁸ In other words, botany must take the form of a narrative of the dialectic of *Gestalt* and *Bildung*, a process Goethe calls metamorphosis (*die Metamorphose*).⁹⁹

Goethe’s 1790 essay, *Metamorphosis of Plants*, is the poet’s first attempt at a scientific treatment of this dialectic. The narrative focuses on the ideal plant archetype, the metamorphosing *Urpflanze*, that is present in all empirical plants. The *Urpflanze* is not an idealization of the plant’s physiological composition, which can vary widely from species to species, but of the plant’s process of forming and transitioning – of metamorphosing itself – from one *Gestalt* to the next. Goethe stresses that every iteration of *Gestalt*, as soon as it appears, is always already transitioning to a new one. The seed, once activated, is already transitioning to the roots and cotyledons, the stem leaves to the calyx, the flower to the fruit, the fruit to a new seed, and so on. The key to grasping the *Urpflanze* in its living movement is not its completed anatomy, therefore, but this metamorphosis of simpler into ever more complex parts. Notably, Goethe says that just one fundamental organ alters during metamorphosis, a protean leaf (*Blatt*)¹⁰⁰ that appears to the eye as the various articulated *Gestalten* of the plant – seed, stem leaf, calyx, pistil, stamen, and so on. “From first to last,” Goethe writes, “the plant is nothing but *Blatt*.”¹⁰¹ The temporal language is crucial, for what Goethe is tracking is the unity that comes to be through self-differentiation over a complete lifespan. *Blatt* is both one and not one organ, a term that meaningfully affixes to all that holds fast for a perceptible moment, then changes, in the ceaseless transformation of the *Urpflanze*.

Goethe’s sequel to the book, the 1798 poem “Metamorphosis of Plants,” elaborates the spiritual (*geistlich*) significance of the plant’s *Bildung*. “Like unto each the form, yet none alike,” the poem begins. “And so the choir hints a secret law,/A sacred mystery...”¹⁰² The mystery is metamorphosis, the plant’s inner dialectic of *Gestalt* and *Bildung*, which, for the poet, is a homologue of human natural genesis. “Artless the shape that first bursts into light–/The plant child, like unto the human kind–/Sends forth its rising shoot...” Both the seedling and the child reiterate their forms “[in] infinite variety,” gathering themselves “node to node” in “infinite freedom.”¹⁰³

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the origin and importance of the concept of transition in Goethe’s thought, see Eckart Förster, “Goethe’s Spinozism,” in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁹⁸ Thomas Pfau, “‘All Is Leaf’: Difference, Metamorphosis, and Goethe’s Phenomenology of Knowledge,” *Studies in Romanticism*; Boston 49, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 35.

⁹⁹ Goethe, *Goethe’s Botanical Writings*, 88. Cf. Pfau, “Leaf,” 35: “[t]he practice of any science must be just as attentive to the process of *Darstellung*, that is, the symbolic and narrative process that makes present what has appeared in such a way as to disclose the hidden, primordial law or idea of which the phenomenon is a fleeting manifestation...”

¹⁰⁰ J.W. Goethe, *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), §4. Gordon L. Miller notes that Goethe probably called this organ *Blatt*, instead of some other name, because of the way the stem leaves on many plants anticipate their transitions to the next, more complex parts, through coloration, shape, size, etc. The upper leaves of many flowering plants, for example, are closer in color to the flower petals than to the other leaves on the stalk. Ultimately, though, Miller judges that the term is just a “convenient” one and refers not to an actual leaf but to the formative forces at work in the plant. See G. Miller, “Introduction,” in Goethe, *Metamorphosis*, xix.

¹⁰¹ J.W. Goethe, *Italian Journey* (London: Penguin, 1962), 366, quoted in Miller, “Introduction,” xvii.

¹⁰² Goethe, *Metamorphosis*, 1. In German: “Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich, und keine gleichet der andern;/Und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz,/Auf ein heiliges Rätzel“ (Goethe, *Morphologische Schriften*, 216.)

¹⁰³ Goethe, *ibid*, 2, translation slightly modified to stress German word-choices. In German: “Aber einfach bleibt die Gestalt der ersten Erscheinung;/Und so bezeichnet sich auch unter den Pflanzen das Kind./Gleich darauf ein folgender

Notably, their infinite freedom is comprised of two wholly compulsory elements. The first is their determining-from-within-toward-without or inner drive toward fullness of form (*Fülle*). The second is their being-determined-from-without, which is nature's counter-check of the inner drive. "Doch hier halt die Natur...die Bildung/Here Nature halts [the plant's] *Bildung*." What Goethe calls infinite freedom here is just the mutual checking of these two compulsions, resulting in the *Bildung* of the organism "from all directions in all directions." In the logic of the poem, reproduction is the fullest actualization of the plant's freedom, carrying the finite individual life into the next generation, ad infinitum. After the flower displays "her endless forms in orderly array," heralding the plant's ripeness for reproduction, "Twin forms (pistil and stamen) spring forth...destined for union." A veritable marriage-bed scene ensues, with a consecrated altar blessed by the god Hymen, followed by the sumptuous image of a swelling, seed-bearing fruit that evokes a human embryo enclosed in the female womb.¹⁰⁴

Hegel critically incorporates Goethe's idea of *Bildung* into his philosophical treatment of plants in *Philosophy of Nature*. While the former endorses the latter's description of the *Urpflanze* as an immanent form that exists as a unity of differentiated parts, calling it a "great insight into Nature,"¹⁰⁵ he does not think that the plant's formal unity is the same as the animal's, given how much they differ in their part-to-whole relationships.¹⁰⁶ The limb of an animal is not alive except when it is linked to the whole body. The limb of a plant, on the other hand, can be severed from the stalk and grown as a new individual. This is why Hegel says that "every plant part is the whole [and] can exist as a complete individual," and that the subjectivity of the plant is "immediate" in comparison to the animal's complex of mediated parts. Moreover, the plant's part-to-whole relationship differs from the animal's with respect to its *Bildung*. When an animal's body grows, it grows out of a unity-in-difference that is more or less fully articulated at birth. A human baby exits the womb with its essential internal and external organs already formed. A plant, by contrast, starts from a seedling and successively articulates new parts (the leaf, the calyx, the flower, and so on), so that its finished form looks quite different from its seedling.¹⁰⁷

Hegel approves of Goethe's presentation of the plant as a "spiritual conductor"¹⁰⁸ that realizes speculative identity materially. The plant is a spiritual conductor by virtue of its infinitely free, living subjectivity, one power of which is that of producing new individuals out of itself by going to seed. In reproduction, the individual plant unconsciously supersedes its finitude by giving itself over to future generations. Yet it does this "only externally," Hegel emphasizes, without an inward consciousness of its significance. In the comparison of the fruit swollen with seeds to the womb swollen with child, Goethe evidently wants to establish the formal affinity between the reproductive processes of plants and human beings. Hegel recognizes the affinity in form but not in substance. The individual plant, he says, is capable of producing the two sexes needed for reproduction in a single individual. Human beings, on the other hand, require two distinct individuals, one with male and one with female organs, in order to reproduce the species. The *Bildung* of life in its human iteration, then, is always already a social phenomenon that partly involves bringing males and females together into a sexually binary union that serves as the basis

Trieb, sich erhebend, erneuet,/Knoten auf Knoten getürmt, immer das erste Gebild./Zwar nicht immer das gleiche; denn mannigfaltig erzeugt sich/Ausgebildet, du siehst's,/immer das folgende Blatt..."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 2–3.

¹⁰⁵ Hegel, PN, §345.

¹⁰⁶ I suspect Goethe the poet overstates the case of Goethe the botanist, and that Goethe the botanist would concede Hegel's point.

¹⁰⁷ Hegel, PN, §343.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, §345.

for higher-order social relationships. The simplest version of the reproductive union is when two adult individuals, having gone through their complementary sexual *Bildung*-processes,¹⁰⁹ come together in intercourse to produce a child. The highest version is when an entire group of individuals fulfilling diverse roles works to reproduce a social world of its own making, as happens in the political community.

It is evident from Hegel's commentary on Goethe that the former is receptive to the latter's idea that the *Bildung* of living nature foregrounds human *Bildung*. Hegel's commentary on Blumenbach is so much more evidence of this fact. Blumenbach's scientific writings¹¹⁰ deal with at least two conceptual quandaries that were debated mainly among French- and German-speaking biologists of the later Enlightenment. The first was how to explain the sustained self-forming activity of organisms across their lifespans. Many biologists, Blumenbach included, doubted that this activity could be satisfactorily modeled in terms of classical (Newtonian efficient-causal) mechanics. The second problem was how to explain the apparently miraculous transformation of inorganic matter into organic matter during the reproductive stage of life. In mammalian¹¹¹ sexual reproduction, for example, embryo formation begins when the seminal fluid of a male animal fertilizes the ovum of a female animal of the same species. Before this fertilizing contact, the sexual matter of reproduction – the semen and the egg – is still “inorganic,” that is, not yet animate with new life. After fertilizing contact, whereby the female animal becomes pregnant with an embryo, a process of vitalization commences that, over time, transmutes the inorganic, seminal-ovular material into organic, self-developing material. Many biologists developed non-mechanistic causal models to explain this mysterious transmutation of matter during embryogenesis.¹¹² In his theory of *Bildung*, Blumenbach models the natural genesis (*Epigenesis*) of organisms in a way that touches upon both of these conceptual problems. Specifically, Blumenbach formulates *Bildung* as the “formative drive” or *Bildungstrieb* that guides the growth, conservation, and reproduction of the organism's form from embryogenesis until death.¹¹³

Blumenbach's 1789 treatise, *On the Formative Drive and Procreation*, contains his definitive treatment of the concept. The first section is a polemic against so-called “preformationists” who believe that the organism's life-process is an unfolding of a divinely

¹⁰⁹ This is my interpretation of a remark of Hegel's in which he seems to suggest that males and females undergo separate *Bildung*-processes.

¹¹⁰ For a comprehensive account of the birth of modern biology out of *Naturphilosophie* at Göttingen, see Timothy Lenoir, “The Göttingen School and the Development of Transcendental *Naturphilosophie* in the Romantic Era,” *Studies in History of Biology* 5 (1981): 111–205.

¹¹¹ I am using mammalian sexual reproduction as an example, not a paradigm. The same question extends to non-mammals, plants, and nonsexual reproduction, even if the description of the reproductive process would have to be different for each.

¹¹² My summary of Blumenbach's scientific context is indebted to numerous scholars: Robert Richards, “Kant and Blumenbach on the *Bildungstrieb*: A Historical Misunderstanding,” *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Biology and Biomedical Science* 31, no. 1 (2000): 11–32; Robert Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Timothy Lenoir, “The Göttingen School and the Development of Transcendental *Naturphilosophie* in the Romantic Era”; Brandon Look, “Blumenbach and Kant on Mechanism and Teleology in Nature,” in *The Problem of Animal Generation in Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Helbig and Nassar, “The Metaphor of Epigenesis: Kant, Blumenbach, Herder”; Helmut Müller-Sievers, *Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy, and Literature around 1800*, Writing Science (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997); Blumenbach, *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*; Blumenbach, *Über den Bildungstrieb*.

¹¹³ J.F. Blumenbach, *Über Den Bildungstrieb und Zeugungsgeschäfte* (Göttingen: Johann Christian Dietrich, 1789), 20.

performed germ (*vorgebildete Keim*) that contains the fully articulated adult form in miniature.¹¹⁴ Blumenbach rejects this view in favor of an “epigenetic” theory that maintains that the organism’s form is not preordained in the embryo but is instead the developed byproduct of a special vital force that acts upon the seminal-ovular mixture after insemination.¹¹⁵ He demonstrates this with experiments on nonhuman organisms of increasing complexity. He starts with a simple, semi-transparent water plant “in which no preformed germ can be seen,” describing how an invisible action of forces empowers the plant to grow, propagate, and repair itself when injured. Next, he observes the same action in a more complex, semi-transparent aquatic animal called a polyp, again concluding that no preformed germ can be detected during the animal’s reproduction cycle, while the continuous action of a formative drive (*Bildungstrieb*) is manifestly at work. Summarizing his findings, Blumenbach writes:

[T]hat unorganized matter of generation, after being duly prepared, and having arrived at its place of destination takes on a particular action, or *Trieb*, which *Trieb* continues to act through the whole life of the animal, and that by it the first form of the animal, or plant, is not only determined, but afterward preserved, and when deranged, is again restored. A *Trieb*, which therefore seems to depend on the powers of life, but which is as distinct from the other qualities of living bodies, as from the common properties of dead matter.¹¹⁶

This summary indicates that living matter is both something formed (*gebildete*) by antecedent causes and also something self-forming (*bildende*) through the action of its *Bildungstrieb*.¹¹⁷ As such, it is a unity of mechanical and teleological principles, a fact which Immanuel Kant, an admirer of Blumenbach’s treatise, notes in a discussion in his *Critique of Judgment*.¹¹⁸ Of course, Blumenbach does not fully explain how the two principles come together in the living organism. For him, the *Bildungstrieb* “depends on the powers of life” but is not itself the cause of life. Rather, the formative drive, “like the [forces of] attraction, gravity, etc.,” ought to serve “no more and no less, to signify a power whose constant effect is recognized from experience and whose cause...is for us a *qualitas occulta*.”¹¹⁹ That Blumenbach places this Kantian limit on his theory’s explanatory scope demonstrates, I think, that he is less concerned about explaining how inorganic matter transmutes into organic matter during embryogenesis than how living organisms develop, conserve, and reproduce their forms over against an inorganic world.¹²⁰ It is almost as if he is saying that life itself is a perpetual embryogenesis wherein even

¹¹⁴ Preformationism was also called evolutionism (*Evolution*) in its time. This is not to be taken in the Darwinian sense of the evolution of species, but as the evolution (in the sense of an unfolding or an articulation) of the preformed parts of individuals. A minority of preformationists were “animalculists,” holding that the germ was passed into the female egg via the male sperm. Müller-Sievers argues that the “ovism” of most preformationists rendered their views on gender roles in reproduction more egalitarian than their animalculist and epigenesist counterparts. See *Self-Generation*, starting at page 26.

¹¹⁵ Some theorists postulated this vital force as mechanistic, a generative *vis essentialis*, that operated like other mechanical forces such as gravity. This was Carl Friedrich Wolff’s highly influential, pre-Blumenbachian view. See Philip R. Sloan, “Preforming the Categories: Eighteenth-century Generation Theory and the Biological Roots of Kant’s A Priori,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 40, No. 2: 229-253.

¹¹⁶ Blumenbach, *Über Den Bildungstrieb*, 20.

¹¹⁷ I am indebted to Brandon Look for this helpful splicing of *gebildete* and *bildende*. See “Blumenbach and Kant,” 371.

¹¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For Kant, teleology is a heuristic for scientific inquiry about organic objects, not a resident cause within nature—a point he takes Blumenbach also to have worked out in *Über den Bildungstrieb*.

¹¹⁹ Blumenbach, *Über den Bildungstrieb*, 20.

¹²⁰ As Christian Girtanner, a pupil of Blumenbach’s argues, it also reflects Blumenbach’s Kantian leanings with regard to teleological judgments. See Girtanner, *Über das Kantianische Prinzip*.

the adult organism constantly converts inorganic into organic substance. This aspect of his empirical biology fits well into Hegel's account of life as the resolution ad infinitum of the contradiction between a living form and its outer world.

Curiously, when Blumenbach's name appears in §365 of *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel says that the Göttingen biologist uses the concept of the *Bildungstrieb* principally to talk about the reproductive moment of natural genesis.¹²¹ It is true that Blumenbach developed his concept within the context of a debate between preformationists and epigenesists over embryogenesis; yet he also clearly thinks that the *Bildungstrieb* captures something essential about the life-process from embryogenesis to death. Indeed, one of Blumenbach's principal conclusions about the *Bildungstrieb* is that its activity is inversely proportional to the organism's age, being most active at the beginning of life and least active at the end. So, Hegel misrepresents Blumenbach's work as narrower in scope than it really is. At the same time, Hegel sees something in the *Bildungstrieb* that Blumenbach does not see or at least does not explicitly name. Whereas the biologist presents the *Bildungstrieb* as the immanent self-formation of the organism over-against an outer world, Hegel maintains that this activity, in the case of certain animals, must additionally be a "building out (*Einbildung*) of the form of the organism into the outside world."¹²² An example of this would be a bird assembling a nest to shelter its hatchlings or a spider weaving its web to catch its prey. Such outward-directed activity is essential to these creatures' immanent self-formation, and in the spider's case, it does not regularly eat unless it impresses itself upon the outer world. Hegel likens the *Bildungstrieb* of certain animals to a *Kunsttrieb* or "drive of art," a concept that has its own rich history in late-Enlightenment science.¹²³ The animal's drive to render its innerness as outerness is a natural precursor to the human being's species-specific need to render the world as its own work. The difference is that a nonhuman animal's *Kunsttrieb* is fitted to the particular sphere (*Sphäre*) in which it lives – a tree, a grassland, a river – and beyond this limited sphere is relatively impotent. Human animals, by contrast, have no determinate sphere of efficacy and can subdue most natural environments to their purposes.¹²⁴ And while for nonhuman animals the *Kunsttrieb* is affixed to a particular sphere, for human animals it is radically underdetermined. Hegel describes the human *Kunsttrieb* as the necessity that breaks through to freedom in the activity of the artist who self-consciously externalizes themselves in their artwork.¹²⁵

Goethe and Blumenbach's scientific works contribute much to Hegel's conceptualization of *Bildung* as the process of epigenesis that foregrounds the genesis of second nature out of first nature. With this general definition in place, I will now examine in detail the three essential moments that Hegel ascribes to life – *Gestalt*, *Assimilation*, and *Gattung* – and explain how they foreground, without fully actuating, determinate moments in the *Bildung* of human beings.

III.

¹²¹ Hegel, PN, §365.

¹²² Ibid. The use of *Einbildung* is cognitively evocative here, given its connection to the German word for "imagination" (*Einbildungskraft*).

¹²³ J.G. Herder makes liberal use of this concept to talk about animals' orientation to their environment. See J.G. Herder, "Treatise on the Origin of Language," in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael Forster (Cambridge University Press, 2002): 78. Herder imports the concept from Samuel Reimarus, a theologian and philosopher of nature. See Samuel Reimarus, *Allgemeine Betrachtungen über die Triebe den Thiere, hauptsächlich über ihre Kunsttriebe* (Hamburg, Germany: Johann Carl Bohn, 1760).

¹²⁴ Hegel, PN, §359.

¹²⁵ Ibid. There is a direct conceptual path pointing from Blumenbach's *Bildungstrieb* to the Absolute Spirit division of *Philosophy of Spirit*, the ultimate culmination of Hegel's philosophical system.

(1) *Gestalt* is living form or activity that attains its self-unity through self-differentiation. It is the first moment in the *Bildung* of life and, because it is the effect of itself as well as the cause, it is likewise the final moment. Like Aristotle's soul, life has no other end but itself. In this respect, all organisms are the same, and *Gestalt* can be said to be the fundamental, unconscious activity of nonhuman as well as human life. But to say that all living things are immediately self-referring forms is still quite abstract. For Hegel, the concrete difference between the forms of plants and animals, the two kingdoms of organisms featured in the Organics division of *Philosophy of Nature*, show in their respective part-to-whole relationships and in the degree of complexity of their unities. What can be said of animal *Gestalt* in general can also be said of the human *Gestalt* in particular. It will not be the entire picture, however, for as I will explain in Chapter Two, there are features of human *Gestalt* that must be analyzed with an eye to the cognitive activity that distinguishes it from unconscious animality.

As Hegel says in his commentary on Goethe, any part of the plant can become the whole plant. Any branch can be cut off, replanted, and regrown as a new individual. A stalk severed from its roots and placed in a jar of water can grow new roots, and the roots from which it was severed can produce new stalks and branches. Moreover, when a plant grows, it grows from a seed that does not contain its completed form in miniature, successively articulating new parts until it arrives at its final bud. A plant is a "simple bursting forth," a self-externalizing form that achieves its unity outside itself. It relates itself to itself, but because every part is severable into a new and vital whole, it does not achieve the more complex unity in which the part depends upon the whole for its livelihood. Hegel likens the plant's unity to the fragility of a mental representation of an object. Just as a mental image is succeeded by another, equally fleeting image, so the unitary plant-form is succeeded by the addition of new parts and/or the severance of extant parts into new wholes. As Goethe says, the plant's *Gestalt* is but a fleeting moment in its overall *Bildung*.

Animal *Gestalt* is comparatively more complex. "If a finger is cut off," Hegel says, "it is no longer a finger,"¹²⁶ emphasizing that the differentiated parts of the animal do not function without reference to the whole. Unlike the plant that adds new parts as it grows, the animal increases the magnitude of already articulated parts. Each part's reference to every other generates a "self-feeling" or sensitivity that the plant, having formal but no substantial unity among its many severable parts, does not generate. Self-feeling is self-consciousness in the form of intuition; it corresponds to, but is not yet, the "I" that thinks itself. From self-feeling follows "irritability" toward what is outside itself. Because it lives in a world of sensations, the animal feels its individual parts in themselves and in their contact with an inorganic world outside it. To a greater degree than the plant, the animal stands opposed to this inorganic world as to a determinate other. Indeed, while the plant is nutritively connected to the outer world via its moisture-absorbing roots and light-absorbing leaves, the animal is a living negation of the rest of nature and so is able to feel itself as existing over against it. The animal moves itself from place to place, indifferent to where nature finds it at any given moment, unlike the plant, which cannot move itself from its rootedness except when it spreads seeds or separates a part of itself from the whole.¹²⁷ The plant reproduces itself individualistically, then, without self-movement, the sexual organs separating out

¹²⁶ Ibid, §350.

¹²⁷ Hegel uses Albrecht von Haller's schema of sensibility-irritability-reproduction as the three essential determinations within animal *Gestalt*.

of the same flower, while the animal, moving about in the world, must join with another moving form with the opposite sexual organs in order to reproduce.¹²⁸

It is crucial to note that, at this level of first-natural *Bildung*, human beings share a great deal with nonhuman animals, and for that matter, other non-animal life-forms. *Gestalt* is the most abstract moment of natural genesis, the immediate self-causing and -effecting of life, and at such a level of abstraction, human beings are not as distinct from nonhuman animals as at other moments of their *Bildung*. Here, like any unconscious beast or insect, the human being is a self-feeling form that exhibits some unconscious aspects to its activity, such as the brain-stem operations that happen automatically and are all-important for conserving life. In *Gestalt*, to be sure, resides the material basis for self-conscious life, but that domain of human life-activity must be looked at with a more complex conceptual framework than living nature by itself offers.

(2) *Assimilation* is the moment of natural genesis in which the organism endures and resolves its contradictions with inorganic nature. Plant and animal alike experience this contradiction as a need (*Bedürfnis*) for an inorganic object outside it and a drive (*Trieb*) to be rid of the need. *Gestalt* requires inorganic matter for its subsistence; it reproduces itself by way of its interaction with this other. What is active in all organisms during *Assimilation* is the nutritive power of the soul, the minimum condition for being alive. Organisms differ substantially in the manner of their interactions with inorganic objects. In the plant's "soul" or life-principle, no other power but the nutritive is operative; in the animal's, the nutritive and sensitive powers (and if a human animal, the thinking power, too) are operative. Higher needs beyond the nutritive ones arise concomitantly with these higher powers of soul, such that certain animals are driven to leave a trace of their subjective activity on the outside world, e.g., the bird that sings for aesthetic enjoyment or the human being who paints. As the moment of natural genesis that subjectifies the objective and objectifies the subjective, *Assimilation* foregrounds the cognitive dimension of human natural genesis to a greater degree than does *Gestalt*.

As *Gestalt*, the plant is a self-externalizing unity that does not attain the substantial, interdependent unity of part and whole that the animal does. Every part of the plant is the whole plant, and every transition from seed to flower draws the whole further out of itself through the articulation of new parts. In *Assimilation*, it is evident that inorganic nature plays a major role in this generative process. On the one hand, the plant is completely immersed in the earth, receiving constant inputs from soil minerals and groundwater. On the other hand, aboveground, the plant is similarly immersed, converting air, water, and light into its own organic substance. This assimilative relation, while simpler than the animal's, at least has the form of speculative identity. Hegel emphasizes light's absolute power to draw the plant's *Gestalt* out of itself. The plant, he says, follows light toward a "second self" that lies outside it, language which clearly alludes to the human animal's second nature:

Just as a human being in his relationship to the State, which is his ethical, substantial nature, his essence and the absolute power over him, becomes in this very identity independent and for himself, a mature and substantial being, so too does the plant in its relation with light give itself its particularity, its specific and robust quality.¹²⁹

The potato plant that grows toward the cellar window is just like the citizen who grows toward the laws. The plant's dependency on light, indeed its compulsion to grow toward it as

¹²⁸ Based on Hegel's description of sexual development as *Bildung*, it is reasonable to surmise that for him there are really two animal *Bildung*-processes, the male and the female, and that animal *Bildung* in general is just the process of sexual differentiation.

¹²⁹ Ibid, §347.

toward a second self, is just like the self-conscious freedom actuated in the citizen's dependency on the state. It is significant that Hegel draws a direct connection here between the most basic assimilative activity of life, the intake of nutrition, and the highest cognitive activity of life, its education into political subjectivity. To live freely within the political state is to be surrounded by nutriment, material and intellectual, at all times. Hegel's affirmation of the plant-likeness of developed political subjectivity, as in the case of the potato plant, draws a sharp contrast to his condemnation of the plant-likeness of corrupted human subjectivity, as in the case of the severed cabbage heads mentioned above. In the first case, the human being follows the potato plant's example of bending toward the "light" of the state, letting their inner life become wholly cultured by that outer nourishment. In the second case, the human being brazenly defies life's model of *Bildung*, becoming less-than-human precisely through the misuse of what is most essentially human, the power of thinking. Severed by abstract reason from its concrete sources of nutriment, the cabbage head rolls off the vine to rot. Still, a question emerges from these passages that will eventually have to be addressed: If Hegel thinks that fully developed (*gebildete*) political subjectivity resembles the plant's total immersion in its nutritive environment, then what is the status of self-conscious thought amid that immersion? What does it mean to "think" in the manner of a vegetable that does not think at all?

As a unity of parts which do not depend on the whole for their existence, the plant can be said to have a kind of external continuity with the inorganic nature in which it is nutritively immersed. The animal, by contrast, as a self-feeling unity of interdependent parts, "exists for itself over against non-organic nature" and so does not have the same nutritive continuity with its world.¹³⁰ What this means is that nutrition, while an essential function of animal *Assimilation*, is not its primary function. Instead, it is self-feeling that mediates the animal's relationship to the inorganic. Hegel divides this relationship into its "theoretical" and "practical" moments. The theoretical moment consists in the animal's feeling of being "this" particular something standing opposed to some other particular something – an experience that all sentient beings have. Sentience involves not only self-feeling but also the feeling that the inorganic is something that affects the self. To the animal confronting it, an object feels hard or soft, warm or cool, dangerous or benign. Hegel describes feeling as a mode of "idealization" in which the animal makes the felt object its own: "The object which is hard, warm, etc. exists independently outside of me: but equally it is immediately transformed, made ideal, a determinateness of *my* feeling; the content within me is the same as the content outside me."¹³¹ It is ideal because the animal posits what is external to it (the fire, say) as something subjective (something that gives it the sensation of hotness) and brings it into unity with itself through that sensation. "[I]n being related to an external object, I am at the same time for myself," Hegel continues. This identity of subject and object is more or less an affective *Assimilation*; the subject has not actively identified with the object that affects it. That active identification occurs in the practical relationship. Practically speaking, the animal feels its contradictory relationship to inorganic nature as an affect-laden need that must be gotten rid of. Consider hunger: when it has not eaten for a long time, the animal feels weak and angry and so desires to be rid of its discomfort. To do so, it once again posits the inorganic world as something assimilable to its organic subjectivity, this time appropriating it as a nutritive object which it processes through digestion. Yet unlike the plant, which lives fully ensconced in the nutritive elements of soil, water, air, and light, the animal does not live immersed in its nutriment. Existing over against the world, it must move from place to place in order to alleviate its hunger. And it

¹³⁰ Ibid, §357.

¹³¹ Ibid, §358, my emphasis.

must do this again and again, as long as it lives, for its need is a lack instantiated by its contradiction with the inorganic. Satisfying my animal need, then, is satisfying *this-here* determination of my need, *this-here* affective disturbance of hunger, thirst, etc., ad infinitum.

The animal's practical struggle with the world evidences that it consumes what is not-itself and converts it into itself without conquering its fundamental dependence on the inorganic other to determine its ends. The unfreedom of this condition extends to every aspect of the animal's existence, even to its power of self-movement, which must obey life's unrelenting call to rid itself of need. Hegel's word for this being-determined-from-within-toward-without is *Trieb*. "An urge (*Trieb*) in a particular animal is wholly determinate," he explains; "each animal has only a restricted sphere (*Sphäre*) for its non-organic nature, which exists for that animal alone and which it must seek out by instinct from its complex environment."¹³² Outside the sphere to which its drives are fitted and in which its nutriment is contained, the animal is relatively impotent. A crab flourishes on a beach but not in a desert; a bee in a hive but not in a stream. There is one notable exception to this rule, of course: human beings have drives that are not wholly restricted to a particular sphere (about which more in Chapter Two). Human animals fashion their own spheres of activity for themselves, and this ability to make virtually any inorganic environment satisfy their basic needs is one of the naturalistic expressions of their freedom.

If theoretical *Assimilation* involves an affective identification that keeps the object at arms' length (I feel it but I do not do anything to it), and practical *Assimilation* involves an active appropriation of the object (I use up the object to be rid of my need), then their synthesis would be an activity in which I work to use up the object while letting it persist in its existence. Following Blumenbach, Hegel calls this theoretical-practical *Assimilation* the *Bildungstrieb*. The *Bildungstrieb* involves the building out (*Einbildung*) of the animal into the inorganic world and letting the constructed object stand over against the subject as something inorganic. Sometimes, the constructed object serves as a means to nutrition, as the web does for the spider, or to shelter, as the dam does for the beaver. Other times, it serves as a means for the self-feeling animal to settle accounts with the world, so to speak, bringing it into aesthetic harmony with what lies outside it. In the latter case, the animal's affect in relation to the object is quite distinct from the simpler nutritive affect. "The animal is satisfied when its hunger and thirst are appeased," Hegel says, its anger toward the nutrition-imparting object now having been assuaged. But building something or singing a song gives the animal a "specific feeling of self" that does not come from getting rid of a lack but from shaping the surrounding environment in its own likeness. The *Bildungstrieb* raises self-feeling above theoretical aloofness and practical deprivation to ideal self-enjoyment. Such enjoyment is not exclusive to human beings. Birdsong is as much a byproduct of the *Bildungstrieb* as symphonic music. Still, for Hegel, the human being's expansive cognitive powers are nascent in this ideally real activity, which, at this natural stage, is experienced as an externally imposed need. In the nonhuman animal, the *Bildungstrieb* is a "consciousless overseer" (*bewußtlose Werkmeister*), a taskmaster of pleasure, while in the human artist, the formative drive already points the way to the self-conscious self-enjoyment that comes from expressing one's inner life in the outer world.¹³³

Hegel's remarks on the animal's drive to objectify its subjectivity make his remarks on the plant-likeness of developed human subjectivity even more puzzling. Whereas plant *Assimilation* bends toward the inorganic sources of nutrition, animal *Assimilation* at least partly reconstructs the inorganic world in the animal's likeness. Hegel thinks that the *Bildung* of human beings

¹³² Ibid, §359.

¹³³ Ibid, §365.

includes both of these activities, so the question now becomes: how does self-conscious thought, following the model of *Bildung* imparted by living nature, achieve total nutritive immersion in a world of its own making?

(3) A preliminary answer to this question lies in *Gattung*, the moment of natural genesis in which *Gestalt* and *Assimilation* culminate. Here, the three kinds of organisms Hegel analyzes – vegetal, nonhuman animal, and human animal – disclose the limits and possibilities of their first-natural *Bildung*. This happens because *Gattung* enjoins the individual organism to fulfill its destiny as the kind of organism that it is, producing another one of its kind before dying off. In reproduction, the synthesis of *Gestalt* and *Assimilation* finds its most immediate form in the plant, for which the male and female organs stand in opposition to each other within the same flower. In animals of all kinds, the synthesis is much more mediated, the self-feeling individual opposing itself to another self-feeling individual of the same species via sexual intercourse. But it is in their orientation toward death that organisms show what they fundamentally are. In death, the plant becomes the animal's nutrition, and the animal sacrifices itself to the survival of its species. What separates a human from a nonhuman animal, Hegel says, is the former's ability to experience its species-unity self-consciously. The nonhuman animal sacrifices itself without knowing wherefore it sacrifices, dying for its species without ever fully comprehending its own sacrifice. Not so for human animals. In their case, a markedly protracted period of reproduction and childrearing produces a form of sociality held together by strong natural (affective) and non-natural (conceptual) bonds. *Gattung*, then, is the moment of natural genesis when the cognitively limited scope of nonhuman life-activity, as well as the limitations of representing the *Bildung* of human beings solely within the form-constraints of living nature, become visible. A more expanded conceptual framework is needed to understand human *Bildung* than what living nature in general is able to provide. Still, *Gattung* can be viewed as the immediate, first-natural foregrounding of human social life in which thought begins to show its difference from unconsciousness.

The sexual contradiction between male and female is the basis of Hegel's account of the genus-process, starting with plants, which show a simple analogue of sexual difference in the stamen and pistil. According to Hegel, however, the unity of the two sex organs in the individual plant is but an "immediate" unity. Sexual difference is fully developed in the animal organism whose entire habit (*Habitus*¹³⁴) is bound up with its sex.¹³⁵ Hegel says that the formation (*Bildung*) of the sexes is rent in two; the male and the female are formed separately over against each other such that each relates to the other as to a lack in itself. The animal needs sexual intercourse in order to unite itself with the species, for as a sexually differentiated, self-feeling *Gestalt*, it is but a dependent part of the whole to which it belongs. Hegel describes the two sexes as drives (*Triebe*) toward their other, and sexual intercourse as a mode of *Assimilation*, a making-mine of an inorganic other that happens to be of my own kind. Like other assimilative modes such as eating, intercourse resolves a contradiction only to have it reemerge after the initial resolution has passed. Death renders sex an infinitely recurring need in every animal species. By dying, animals achieve their species, giving their individual lives to be superseded by the next generation's. The salmon that dies just after spawning, or the male spider that dies after copulation, are extreme illustrations

¹³⁴ The word *Habitus* translates as "habit" here, so the meaning is more like that of the general bodily constitution of the animal. In the Anthropology division of *Philosophy of Spirit*, "habit" will more often be the rendering of *Gewohnheit*, which has more to do with subjective activity than bodily makeup.

¹³⁵ Hegel, PN, §348.

of this principle. Less extreme examples are available in any animal that lives for far less time after its reproductive prime than before it.¹³⁶

Species-unity is one of the more complicated concepts in Hegel's discussion of the *Gattung* moment of life's *Bildung*. What makes it complicated is that it does not have a concrete, particular referent in the same way that, say, *Gestalt* does. A species is the unity of its individuated members, the universal relation that holds the concrete particulars together. Species is prior to and posterior to individuality: prior, insofar as it materializes itself as a determinate need with a corresponding drive that constitutes the individual's sexual *Habitus*; posterior, insofar as it survives the individual intergenerationally through its progeny. Human beings mark themselves out from nonhuman animals by orienting themselves self-consciously to their species-unity. That is to say, they are able to achieve their genus in the medium of thought without necessarily having to die for it.¹³⁷ Other animals achieve their species unconsciously through death, at most attaining a feeling of their species-unity during their lifetimes (as in the case of some primates that have long maturation periods and complex communal structures). But even the primate that lives a long time after sexual reproduction and invests a great deal of labor in rearing its offspring is, according to Hegel, nothing more than a "satire on man... which it must amuse [man] to see if he does not take himself too seriously but is willing to laugh at himself."¹³⁸ I suspect that what Hegel thinks man should be laughing at is the primate's uncanny affinity with him, on the one hand, and its underdeveloped social consciousness, on the other. A chimpanzee or bonobo resembles man in form and activity, even partaking to a great degree in his intelligence. And yet, for all its tool-making and strategizing, for all its organized social interactions, it never sublimates its unconsciousness into consciousness of its destiny within its species. "Life [without self-consciousness] is capable of the most diverse modifications of its *Bildung*," Hegel remarks; "[yet] the universal powers of nature always retain their complete mastery."¹³⁹ Falling short of thinking the genus, in other words, is falling short of having self-determining power over one's *Bildung*, a point that gets reiterated again in §396 of *Philosophy of Mind*, where Hegel states that even animal life exhibits *Bildung* "implicitly," though it cannot fulfill this process genuinely by actualizing the genus within itself.¹⁴⁰

Because the conceptual constraints of the *Philosophy of Nature* prohibit Hegel from analyzing self-consciousness beyond its structural homology with living nature in general, he can do little more than assert that human animals are distinguished from nonhuman animals by their self-determining, self-conscious *Bildung*. Still, by characterizing the *Bildung* of living nature as an implicit "satire" on human *Bildung*, Hegel signals that it is the naturalistic concept through which we can most systematically track the difference between nonhuman and human life-forms. To have nature as master over one's *Bildung* is to have all one's needs and drives, and by extension all the ends of one's life, determined by forces outside oneself. The natural genesis of *Gestalt*, the need-satisfying activity of *Assimilation*, and the reproductive process of *Gattung* are, for nonhuman life-forms, prolegomena of a more genuine, self-determined actuality that they will never attain. Part of what renders human beings free is their activity of mastering their own needs, and by implication, their own ends. Obviously, having mastery over one's needs does not entail that one can simply negate them. On the contrary, the natural *Gestalt* of the animal body is fully integrated into the

¹³⁶ Darren P. Croft et al., "The Evolution of Prolonged Life after Reproduction," *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 30, no. 7 (July 1, 2015): 407–16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2015.04.011>.

¹³⁷ Hegel *PM*, §381.

¹³⁸ Hegel, *PN*, §370.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, §369.

¹⁴⁰ Hegel, *PS*, §396.

human life-form, just as are the processes of *Assimilation* and *Gattung*. The difference is that human beings have determining power over the manner in which they satisfy their first-natural needs and over the second-natural needs that emerge out of their ever-evolving species-life. *Gattung* will reappear in *Philosophy of Mind* as the political life of the state, at which point the concept of *Bildung* assumes its full connotation as political education. The necessity of being educated into a second nature above and beyond natural child-rearing is the distinguishing mark of self-consciousness. Self-guided *Bildung* is the most essential mediation in the natural life of human beings, superseding the natural genesis of life in general. As Hegel writes in the *Science of Logic*: “Religion, ethical life are instances of immediate knowing, belief, that are absolutely conditioned by a mediation that is called *Entwicklung, Erziehung, Bildung*...It is thoughtlessness not to know that to admit the necessity of education is precisely to express the essentialness of mediation.”¹⁴¹

Two periods in the natural genesis of human individuals foreground the essentialness of *Bildung* in this more genuine sense. The first is the protracted period of child-rearing that builds strong, affective bonds between children and their guardians. Human beings have this in common with many other social animals, yet the length of time it takes to get a person “up and running,” so to speak, is something scarcely seen in nature. The second is the lengthy period of senescence and death. As Hegel hints, death is a different experience for human animals. Whereas nonhuman animals die from the mere “habit of life,” losing their ability to respond to external stimuli, human animals can die from the habit of bodily living as well as the reification of their mental activity. When the mental habits acquired through education cease to develop, and the person is no longer capable of existing in tension with their reality, subjectivity can be said to have merged fully with objectivity, and a kind of “death” to have overcome the individual. This coincidence of bodily decay with mental decay indicates that thought is both a liberation out of nature and also an exposure to a new danger. Because it is possible for mental habits to ossify in the middle of life (this is one of the pernicious effects of ideology on thinking), then the human being can “die,” in a nontrivial sense, in the midst of their bodily life.

IV.

Chapter One has made the case that Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature* contains an unreconstructed account of natural genesis that is distinct from, yet dialectically related to, the account of political education in *Philosophy of Mind*. I drew on the text’s philological context to stipulate that the *Bildung* of living nature should be interpreted as the natural genesis of the living organism from embryogenesis to death. Then, I showed how the three interlocking moments of the life-process (*Gestalt, Assimilation, Gattung*) foreground moments of the species-specific *Bildung* of human animals. *Gestalt* is the *Bildung* of living form that foregrounds self-consciousness materially in the embodied animal; *Assimilation* is the “drive to *Bildung*” that, like self-consciousness, simultaneously appropriates and reshapes the inorganic world surrounding it; *Gattung* is the intergenerational reproduction of the species brought about through the *Bildung* of the biological sexes into their respective habits. In *Gattung*, I argued, the limitations of natural genesis as a satire on political education become visible. Nonhuman creatures never master their needs and so do not have ultimate determining power over their *Bildung*. Human animals master their needs by way of thought, and because of this, acquire certain needs of second nature that never stir in the hearts of the unconscious.

¹⁴¹ Hegel, *SL*, §67.

Nevertheless, Hegel finds it necessary for human beings to pass through this satirical, first-natural *Bildung* as part of the genuine actualization of their second nature through political education. The aim of satire, like all fiction, is to disclose truth in the medium of falseness. Unlike realism, however, satire's essence is not verisimilitude but ruthless caricature. Whatever truths a satire discloses about its object are mediated by an irony that mocks as it criticizes. For this reason, satire's effects on its audience tend toward the extremes. Either it destroys the legitimacy of its object by mocking its naked form, or it edifies its object by providing a context for critical reflection. In any case, nature is not to be viewed as an ultimate refuge for humanity; even those who follow it faithfully must endure its ridiculing act. A philosophy like Hegel's, which views life as thought's starting point, on one hand, and thought's satire, on the other, holds as much destructive potential as the "enlightened" philosophy that divorces itself from nature altogether. The difference is that, with Hegel, thought's self-effacing journey through life may also yield productive outcomes. Hegel would have been familiar with the words of his Romantic rival, Friedrich Schlegel, who, aping a line of Edmund Burke's, once described the French Revolution's repression of natural law as a "monstrous human tragicomedy."¹⁴² Schlegel's tragicomic take on the founding political event of German Idealism makes explicit what Hegel's "satire on man" remark leaves largely implicit: If negating the laws of life turns human animals into human monsters, then the goal of man's self-conscious journey through life is to abort such monsters before they can ever be born.

¹⁴² Schlegel, *Fragments*, AF 424.

Ages of Life: The *Bildung* of the Thinking Animal

“Even merely animal life in its way exhibits [*Bildung*] implicitly. But...it does not have the power genuinely to actualize the genus within itself...The genus genuinely actualizes itself...[only] in mind, in thinking...”
-*Encyclopedia*, §396

I.

Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature* asserts that the natural genesis (*Bildung*) of the human life-form cannot be fully accounted for within the form-constraints of living nature. Life is the form that self-consciousness takes, yet self-consciousness is something other than life. Life’s *Bildung* is “implicit” or “satirical” when held up to the “genuine” example of humanity, which, in addition to the essential moments of the life-process, contains the essential moments of thought’s self-determination. The Subjective Mind division of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind* attempts to describe human natural genesis in this fuller sense, pushing through the conceptual boundaries of *Philosophy of Nature* into the world of self-conscious life or “mind” (*Geist*). As in *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel does not stipulate a coherent definition of *Bildung* in *Philosophy of Mind*, although the word’s frequent mentions, particularly throughout the “Anthropology” chapter, evidence that Hegel views *Bildung* as a concept through which the unity-in-difference of the natural and mental sides of human development can be grasped. Specifically, *Bildung* captures how thinking, which is at once both natural and more-than-natural, moves apace with unconscious life as it sublimates it into self-conscious mind. It will not be enough, therefore, simply to conserve the definition of *Bildung* as the natural genesis of life. Mind’s self-impelled journey through life, and the novel needs of second nature it generates, require a philosophical description of their own.

Since Hegel’s account of the human form of *Bildung* rests on the fundamental distinction between nature and mind, it is important to have a clear sense of what these terms mean before reconstructing what *Bildung* means in this context. Hegel conceives of human beings as a “unity-in-difference” of nature and mind.¹⁴³ In his view, mind, like the animal soul, is not a “thing” but a thinking activity that permeates the animal body. Mind presupposes its material existence in the ensouled animal body, while nature develops itself through the ensouled animal body toward mind. The soul, recall from Chapter One, is the organizing principle of the body, the unity of all the different parts that, in their holistic interaction, conserve the animal’s life. The soul’s activity is “negative,” which, in Hegel’s terminology, means that it posits a distinction between itself and what lies outside it, converting what lies outside it into life. A straightforward example of this is eating. When the animal eats, it assimilates an outside object into itself, converting the object into energy for its various bodily operations. Mind operates on its objects in a similar “negative” manner as the natural soul, but on a more complex level. Whereas the natural soul acts on the distinction between itself and some external object, whether that object is a morsel of food or the body itself, mind makes a distinction, not only between itself and an external object, but between itself and itself. That is, mind takes itself up, inwardly, as its own object, distinguishing between the “I” that does the thinking and the “I” that is the object of that thinking.¹⁴⁴ The natural soul lacks

¹⁴³ Hegel is a non-dualist regarding the mind-nature relationship, meaning that he does not treat the two as if they were separable, independent substances, as in the so-called “mind-body” problem of classical metaphysics (see Hegel, PM, §379-80). He is highly critical of the “old metaphysics” (Cartesianism and its rationalistic offshoots) for treating mind and the matter of nature as if they were separable, independent “things.”

¹⁴⁴ PM §413.

the same self-consciousness when it treats the body itself as an external object, yet even so, Hegel says that the soul is the “absolute foundation of all...the activity of mind” and that mind “finds [in the soul] all the stuff of its determination.”¹⁴⁵

The difference between the outward-facing soul and the doubly outward- and inward-facing mind shows in their respective capacities for thinking and feeling. The soul’s capacity for self-feeling arises out of the reciprocal referencing of the body’s outward-facing organs. When the body encounters fire, for example, the soul feels warmed by the heat. The feeling of being warmed exists for the soul only in its relation to the particular fire in front of it. By comparison, mind’s capacity for thinking arises from the joint operation of its outward- and inward-facing functions. When mind encounters fire, it encounters not only *this* fire, this object that confers the warm feeling to the soul, but also fire generally, the universal concept that issues from thought. This is what Hegel means when he says that mind raises the soul’s activity to a higher level: it imbues the soul’s natural content (its feeling of being warmed by *this* fire) with the universality of concepts. So, just as the soul distinguishes itself from the external body while remaining one with it, so mind distinguishes itself from the ensouled body while remaining one with it. The ensouled animal body is immanent in but not identical to mind; feeling is immanent in but not identical to thinking.

Hegel’s terminology regarding the relationship between nature and mind indicates that mind operates within, yet also an order apart from, nature. “Mind that is in and for itself is not the mere result of nature,” he writes in §381, “but is in truth its own result.” Although mind bears the natural soul within itself, it cannot be said to result from nature, if to result means to proceed as an effect from a cause. Nature stimulates mind, to be sure, offering objects fit purposively for cognition, yet mind’s activity cannot be explained solely in naturalistic terms, since mind is essentially the self-relation that unifies thinking with what is thought. Mind can thus be said to be its own result, for it reproduces itself infinitely through this self-relating activity.¹⁴⁶ As Hegel states, “Mind does not arise naturally out of nature,” and “the determinations of nature are in the mind in a radically different way than they are in nature itself.”¹⁴⁷ Such statements stress how mind works within nature while creating another world wherein its thinking activity redounds back upon nature, converting it into thought, and also back upon itself, organizing itself into a second nature (*zweite Natur*) of its own making. By contrast, Hegel maintains that unconscious life subsists in an externally determined relation to nature. Mind, then, although it permeates the ensouled animal body in its human shape, is the only form in which life can attain a second nature.

Bringing nature and mind together into a synthetic description is a complex task. As should now be clear, Hegel thinks that nature and mind are simultaneously one and not-one in the human animal, for even in unity, each maintains its distinctiveness from the other. Nature, Hegel says, is a domain of externality, “external not only to mind but also to itself.” What he means is that everything in nature is finite, spatiotemporal, and opposed to everything else. Even animals, the most developed of all natural objects, relate to nature in this external manner, revealing their finitude through their repetition of the same circular life-cycle ad infinitum. The human being is the only animal in nature that can establish the inward self-relation, the “I am I” who thinks, that Hegel calls self-conscious life. The human being’s mindedness empowers it to imbue everything it finds in nature with thought’s peculiar mental stamp. It makes *this* particular fire to which it

¹⁴⁵ PM §389.

¹⁴⁶ Hegel is not, in my reading, the idealistic mentalist of Charles Taylor’s *Hegel*. I do not think he believes that reality is reducible to pure mind. His metaphysical views concerning reality are much closer to Kant’s, but whereas Kant is substance dualist regarding mind and world, Hegel sees the two as distinct but unified elements of a single substance.

¹⁴⁷ PM §381.

relates externally into the universal fire, knowledge of which can then be harnessed to cook food, forge tools, enact sacred rituals, perform chemical experiments, and so on. But just as mind abstracts the universal fire from the particular fire, so it abstracts its own universality from its own particularity. This inward self-abstraction is what Hegel calls mind's infinity; it is what enables mind to re-posit itself in countless variations. "When we say *I*, we indeed mean an individual," Hegel writes;

but since everyone is I, we thereby say something only entirely universal. The universality of the I enables it to abstract from everything, even from its life... This being-together-with-itself of the I in its differentiation is the infinity or ideality of the I... When the I grasps it, this material is at once poisoned and transfigured by the universality of the I, loses its independent, individualized subsistence and receives a spiritual reality.¹⁴⁸

Infinite mind is not some disembodied mental substance but rather the inward, self-relating activity that works through the human animal's bodily activity. It assumes a finite, spatiotemporal form in the individual, and at the same time, creates an infinite, universal existence in which all individuals partake. Despite being limited to one human body, then, finite mind bears the inward self-relation of self-consciousness within itself, and through that relation, participates in the infinite life of the species. Similarly, despite being more than its finite body, infinite mind works through the form of that finitude in order to become something actual in nature.

Hegel's challenge in the Subjective Mind division of *Philosophy of Mind* is to describe human life-activity as this unity-in-difference of nature and mind while attending to the finite-infinite distinction within mind itself. Mind is integral to finite nature and also something infinite and thus more-than-nature. On its unitary side, the nature-mind relation requires a philosophical description of the natural soul in its human guise. To do this, Hegel cannot simply duplicate the description of the natural soul from the *Philosophy of Nature* because the conceptual scope of that work does not encompass mind. Instead, Hegel has to re-describe the natural soul in a way that accounts for mind's permeation of it, revealing the "peculiar mental stamp" that thinking imparts upon bodily life. Meanwhile, on its differentiated side, the nature-mind relation requires a description that follows infinite mind through its lifelike process of self-determination. Self-determination, recall from Chapter One, is the difference between lacking and having mastery over one's needs. Whereas nonhuman life's destiny is overdetermined by the needs foisted upon it by nature, mind, which is self-conscious life, attains mastery over natural needs, organizing them into a subjective system that Hegel calls second nature. Once organized, mind's system of needs decreases its overall dependency on nature, enabling it to posit a new destiny for itself in which it prioritizes the satisfaction of the mentally mediated needs that arise directly out of its thinking activity.

In this chapter, I argue that the concept of *Bildung* is the glue that holds these two descriptions – of life's natural genesis and mind's more-than-natural genesis – together. As in Chapter One, I take a mixed philological and hermeneutical approach to stipulating what *Bildung* means in the context of human subjective development.¹⁴⁹ Starting with the "Anthropology"

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ I will consider what *Bildung* means in the context of human objective development, i.e., the normative social world, in Chapter Three. Doing so, I follow Hegel's own method in the *Enzyklopädie*. Hegel acknowledges that it is somewhat artificial to discuss the subjective and objective elements of mind separately, as if the subjective could develop properly without the objective and vice versa. Moreover, he recognizes that it may be misleading to discuss subjectivity before objectivity, since giving something priority in explanation can indicate priority in significance. The Subjective Mind and Objective Mind divisions within *Philosophy of Mind* could be discussed in the opposite order, he insists, and still come to the same results. In taking up Subjective Mind first, then, I give no undue priority to the

chapter of the Subjective Mind division, I examine the natural genesis of the human being with special attention to mind's inchoate activity within the ensouled body. Here, I focus on those aspects of human natural genesis that Hegel uses to distinguish it from the natural genesis of life in general, namely, first-natural activities in which the thinking power exerts some control over the operation of the sensitive and nutritive powers. I stipulate that human natural genesis is a species-specific form of *Bildung* in which mind discloses itself nascently through ensouled animal corporeality. Next, I zoom in on the section titled "The Ages of Life" (*Lebensalter*), wherein Hegel describes the full course of human natural genesis from embryogenesis to death, including childhood (*Kindheit*), youth (*Jugend*), and adulthood (*Mannesalter*).¹⁵⁰ My interpretation of this section rests on the observation that, in describing the naturalistic side of human *Bildung*, Hegel foregrounds finite mind's journey through the various stages of corporeal development. By observing this, we can begin to stipulate the relation between the body's natural genesis and mind's more-than-natural genesis. Mind's activity during childhood, youth, and adulthood directly corresponds to the moments of subjective self-determination sketched in the "Anthropology," "Phenomenology," and "Psychology" chapters, respectively. That is to say, the ages of life refer both to the spatiotemporal, naturalistic moments of finite mind and the universal, conceptual moments of infinite mind. The concept of *Bildung* captures this homology of finite and infinite mind, showing the latter to be modeled after life. Consequently, each age in the life of infinite mind, like those of finite mind, should be viewed as generating an emergent need of second nature that has to be satisfied. In the "Anthropology" chapter, the need in question is that of superseding the natural world into a second nature of its own making; in the "Phenomenology" chapter, it is the objectification of subjectivity in the human social world and the restitution of objectivity with subjectivity; in the "Psychology" chapter, it is the genuine actualization of the genus via thinking. Looking backward, these ages of human natural genesis supersede the moments of first-natural genesis discussed in Chapter One. Looking forward, they find their objective complements in the moments of human sociality outlined in Chapter Three.

At chapter's end, after explaining how the concept of *Bildung* captures both life's natural genesis and mind's self-determining journey through life, I will have to address a conceptual puzzle that emerges in the course of my interpretation. Let us call it Hegel's "paradox of self-determination." The paradox is just this: If superseding natural need through *Bildung* merely introduces a higher-order system of needs, then has mind achieved a freedom that is worthy of the name? In other words, if all life, even self-conscious life, is just about the satisfaction of needs, then is self-determination anything more than the power to choose the master one serves?

II.

The "Anthropology" chapter of *Philosophy of Mind* is a philosophical anthropology that describes the natural genesis of animal corporeality in its human shape. Here, Hegel lets the general features of animality described in *Philosophy of Nature* fade into the background in order to let the particular features of human animality, which in addition to corporeality encompasses finite mind, come into the foreground. According to Hegel, the natural genesis of human animality is a process that is always already shot through with mental activity. The ensouled animal body is

subjective element of mind. Rather, I follow Hegel in placing it first because of its continuity with the discussion of animal subjectivity in *Philosophy of Nature*.

¹⁵⁰As in the Objective Mind division of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel uses a masculine-gendered framing to talk about the various stages of human *Bildung*. In Hegel's German, *Kindheit* and *Jugend* come across more like "boyhood" than "childhood" and "youth," and *Mannesalter* clearly refers to a mature adult male.

mind's natural content, and it is through thinking that human beings actualize themselves as the kind of animals they are. Within Hegel's neo-Aristotelian framework, thinking subsumes the sensitive and nutritive powers into itself, imbuing the ensouled body's natural activities with its "peculiar mental stamp." Hence, it is possible to distinguish nonhuman from human natural genesis by cataloguing the differences that thinking makes on the realization of natural ends. I will catalogue four differences in this section that are of importance to Hegel, all of which have to do with how the human animal conserves its natural soul: 1. a difference in the relationship human animals have with the inorganic world; 2. a difference in how they experience self-feeling; 3. a difference in the basic activities by which they satisfy their natural needs; 4. a difference in the overall form of their species-life. This catalogue is not meant to be exhaustive but representative. Through it, I mean to show how thinking absorbs the naturalistic animal functions under itself in order to grow, conserve, and reproduce the human animal's *Gestalt* or living form.

To begin to answer the question of how nonhuman and human animals compare in respect of their natural geneses, we must recollect what Hegel says about animals in general in the "Organics" division of *Philosophy of Nature*. Animals in general are ensouled bodies, i.e., complex unities of differentiated parts, that have the capacity for self-movement and self-feeling. Their life-process is a series of activities that temporarily resolve the recurring contradiction between their organic bodies and the inorganic world surrounding them. Animals must eat, drink, move about, take shelter, and copulate in order to vitalize their bodily existence. Moreover, their bodily activities must conform to their local environments such that they can respond appropriately to surrounding stimuli. In these respects, human animals are like every other animal and must act as other animals do. Hegel revisits some of these general features of animality in his philosophical anthropology, particularly in his descriptions of the "natural soul." The natural soul is the link between the human being and its "universal planetary life" and is imbued with certain drives for satisfying its basic needs. Variations of climate, geography, and season influence the manner in which human beings fulfill their natural souls, just as they would affect a bird or a deer. The human being living in the desert, for example, has a radically different diet than the one who lives on the coast. Similarly, the equatorial savannah-dweller has different physical features, such as higher concentrations of melanin in the skin, than the northerly highland-dweller who is far less exposed to direct sunlight. Variations of temperament might also obtain between human individuals. One individual might be naturally excitable while another is naturally sedate, just as one cat might have more playful or lethargic tendencies than another. The susceptibility of human and nonhuman animals alike to diverse external variabilities points to their underlying vitality as organisms. As ensouled bodies, they do what they must, within their physiological and environmental constraints, to actualize their genus.

But human beings are animals naturally endowed not only with ensouled bodies but also with minds, meaning that their first-natural activity as ensouled bodies is always already shot through with the mental activity that generates their second natures. Thus, there are likely to be certain aspects of humanity's natural constitution that manifest the nature-mind relation in a basic form. One of these is the relationship that human beings have to the inorganic world from which they draw nutrition. Hegel, following many later-Enlightenment philosophical anthropologists, identifies the unique geographic underdetermination of human animals – their universal planetary diaspora – as at least one aspect of their naturalness that is thoroughly mediated by thinking. Hegel's discussion of humanity's broad geographic dispersion bears a strong resemblance to accounts like J.G. Herder's from the *Treatise on the Origin of Languages*. In that work, Herder establishes the distinction between humans and nonhumans via the concept of spheres of efficacy

(*Sphäre*, a term Hegel uses, too). “Each [nonhuman] animal has its [sphere of efficacy],” Herder says, “to which it belongs from birth, into which it immediately enters, in which it remains all its life, and in which it dies.”¹⁵¹ The instincts and “drives of art” (*Kunsttriebe*, another term used by Hegel) of nonhuman animals are relative to these natural spheres. A bee’s sphere of efficacy is its hive, a spider’s its web. Beyond these limited spheres, their instincts are relatively impotent. Herder observes an inverse proportionality between an animal’s sphere of efficacy and the specialization of its natural drives. The smaller the animal’s sphere of efficacy, the more specialized are its drives; the larger, the less specialized. A chimpanzee capable of climbing, walking, and tool-building throughout the forest is less specialized than a hermit crab that scuttles stiffly along the beach. Similarly, a butterfly with a proboscis tailored for a single flower is more specialized than an elephant with a multipurpose trunk. What distinguishes the human animal from these others, Herder claims, is that it lacks a determinate *Sphäre* altogether. Or perhaps better put, the entire habitable Earth, excluding the most extreme polar and equatorial climates, is humanity’s sphere of efficacy. A human being “has no [...] uniform and narrow sphere where only a single sort of work awaits him,” says Herder. “His senses and organization are not sharpened for a single thing...His forces of soul are distributed over the world.”¹⁵² Because its proper sphere of activity is underdetermined, the human animal has no geographically overdetermined drives of art.¹⁵³ Untethered to a single hive or web, the human being is free to invent “a sphere for self-mirroring,”¹⁵⁴ a sphere, that is, in which it uses its mental powers (*Kräfte*) to develop and refine its second nature independently of nature’s dictates.

For Herder, as for Hegel, the mental activity of creating self-mirroring or second-natural spheres is integral to human nature. To be sure, Herder and Hegel do not share the same conception of what these mental powers involve.¹⁵⁵ But, although they differ on what exactly self-consciousness and reason are, they at least agree that human beings, wherever they reside, are

¹⁵¹ J.G. Herder, “Treatise on the Origin of Language,” in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael Forster (Cambridge University Press, 2002): 78.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁵³ Without an evolutionary account of how animal *Triebe* get fitted to their respective *Sphäre*, Herder’s account risks circularity. It is unclear in the text whether the *Sphäre* originally determines the *Trieb*, or vice versa, or whether the two should be understood as having taken shape reciprocally through one another. Nevertheless, the concept of *Sphäre* adds a further determination to the concept of *Trieb* that is lacking in many of Herder’s scientific contemporaries. Herder critiques Samuel Reimarus in particular, whose influential treatise, *Über die Triebe den Thiere* (1760), explains animal drives to art [*Kunsttriebe*] in mechanistic terms. Reimarus overlooks the reciprocal interaction of drives and spheres and so posits the former as “blind determinations” and one-sided compulsions, rather than instinctual activities fitted reciprocally to a particular sphere of efficacy. Samuel Reimarus, *Allgemeine Betrachtungen über die Triebe den Thiere, hauptsächlich über ihre Kunsttriebe* (Hamburg, Germany: Johann Carl Bohn, 1760).

¹⁵⁴ Herder, “Treatise,” 83.

¹⁵⁵ Although Herder attributes a common mental power [*Kraft*] to all human beings, he takes care not to overdetermine its form and content. Rather, he postulates a non-innate, naturalistic cognition, calling it variously “awareness” [*Besinnung*], “thought” [*Denken*], and “reason” [*Vernunft*] throughout his writings. Naturalistic reason is a necessary substitute for the determinate instincts and drives that first nature originally lacks. Herder contrasts his own account of naturalistic reason with rationalistic or transcendental accounts that describe reason as a superadded or non-empirical element of the soul. On his view, reason is a natural *Kraft* that takes on a more determined shape via *Bildung*. It determines itself in keeping with its local geography (desert, plain, or coast) as well as its local form of life (herding, agriculture, or fishing). “There are blooms that grow only under certain skies,” writes Herder. Although Hegel would appreciate Herder’s critique of Kant, Hegel’s conception of self-conscious reason is an attempt to synthesize the one-sidedness of naturalistic accounts like Herder’s and transcendental accounts like Kant’s. Hegel places certain a priori form-constraints on self-conscious thought that resemble pure reason, yet, as Karen Ng notes in her recent book, those form-constraints are drawn from life itself. (See Karen Ng, “Chapter One,” *Hegel’s Concept of Life*, Oxford University Press, 2019).

minded beings, and that it is this mindedness which enables them to convert the entire habitable Earth into their own *Sphäre*. In other words, geographical underdetermination and mental self-determination go hand-in-hand. Still, geography does influence human development to some extent, including mental development. On Herder's view, human individuals and societies inevitably mirror their local geographies. The first- and second-natural lives of the Bedouin and the Incan – their physiques, languages, political-economic institutions, etc. – would not be what they are had they put down roots in other places. The action of nature's exigencies upon cognition, and cognition's reciprocal action upon nature, ends up generating, across time and space, a plurality of mental varieties that cannot be reduced to something like Immanuel Kant's pure reason.*

Another difference between nonhuman and human animals emerges in respect of the natural soul's "self-feeling" activity. While Hegel acknowledges that nonhumans and humans share this sensitive power, in human beings, thinking permeates sensitivity to such an extent that a distinction can be made between outer or bodily sensations and inner or psychological sensations. Bodily sensation is the relation between the organism's sensory apparatus and the world, and its process is one of converting the outer stimulant, the fire, into something ideal, the feeling of being warmed. Inner sensation, by contrast, externalizes mind's inner relation to itself, converting psychological currents into physiological feelings, such as when the individual's anger at being socially slighted expresses itself as a tightness in the chest, pressure in the temples, bile in the belly, etc. On one level, the individual's anger at being slighted is indeed equivalent to the bodily sensation; on another level, it is not entirely equivalent, for the anger involves a conscious perception of having fallen into an ethical mis-relation to one's peers,¹⁵⁶ implying an inner source of distress grounded in self-consciousness.

Everything that happens in mind has its source and origin in these anthropological sensations, Hegel says, yet to remain fully immersed in sensation is to live in a "darkness of mind" and "derangement" that cannot properly be called thinking. This is because sensation is an unconscious relation between the soul and the outer and inner worlds. As self-determining beings, human animals have some conscious control of the overall outer conditions that affect their natural souls. One might choose, for example, to run away from the wildfire, to take shelter from the midday sun, and so on. Similarly, human beings have some conscious control over whether they expose themselves to the causes of certain inner sensations. One can elect to end the toxic friendship or prolong the loving one. However, the human being fully immersed in sensation lives in darkness and derangement because they submit themselves completely to the immediate, unconscious aspects of their subjectivity. In other words, despite being minded, they live no differently than animals do, failing to raise their particular sensations to the universality of thought.¹⁵⁷ The self-feeling aspect of the human soul, like the natural soul in general, is thus

¹⁵⁶ Hegel, PM §401. In the Anthropology division, which deals only with the human being as a natural soul, Hegel is more concerned with the first level of inner sensation, the bodily-expression level, than the second level, which he calls "psychological."

¹⁵⁷ There is another limit to subjective sensation that I will address in greater detail in the next chapter, namely, its radical particularity. Individuals have idiosyncratic sensory responses to their outer and inner stimulants that cannot be universalized with the same reliability as thought. To illustrate the insufficient rationality of sensation, Hegel often draws on the example of the emotional arguer. When someone offers their emotional conviction as their decisive reason for holding a certain view about an objective problem, they make an appeal to a subjective experience in which their interlocutors cannot partake. I will return to this consideration when I discuss the psychological dimension of public opinion in Chapter Three.

positioned between the immediacy of nature and the mediacy of thinking. It discloses that mind is operative in sensitivity without necessarily guaranteeing that mind always prevails over it.

A third natural difference between nonhuman and human animals can be found in the degree of systematicity of their natural activities. As Herder explains and Hegel affirms, it is integral to human nature to engender a second nature through which it satisfies its basic animal needs. According to Hegel, the soul's transition from first-natural to second-natural activity occurs through "habit" (*Gewohnheit*). Habit is the "unconscious foundation of consciousness" and is to self-feeling what memory is to consciousness. That is to say, habit is bodily memory, a systematization of recurring experiences – eating, drinking, moving about, making waste, etc. – into desensitized patterns that enable the human soul to disengage from its immediate sensory immersion in nature and transition to higher-order mental activity.¹⁵⁸ Habit, while automatic, is nascent mental activity insofar as it anticipates the unity-in-difference of self-conscious mind. When the soul streamlines first-natural bodily feelings into iterable, second-natural ones, it posits a distinction between itself and the body of which it is the organizing principle. This same self-positing happens at an even higher level when the self-conscious mind realizes that it is both the subject that thinks and the object of that thinking. Indeed, thinking is nothing but this habitual dialectic of self-negation and self-identification, unconsciously at first, then increasingly consciously.¹⁵⁹ Yet it is not only through the soul's negation and re-identification with the body that habit raises sensory experience into thinking. What follows from the hardening of sensory experience is a certain indifference to it, a "liberation from [satisfaction]," as Hegel puts it, that keeps urges and desires in their natural place, preventing them from controlling the individual's will. Habit, then, is a form of natural self-disciplining that is necessary for the development of what Hegel calls "freedom," an activity that is rooted in first-natural needs at the same time that it is self-determining. What makes an activity self-determining is its organization of natural need into a coherent system. Whereas in sensation the soul finds itself overdetermined by natural stimuli, unable to put up a resistance to them, in habit, the soul regulates those stimuli, converting them into patterned, iterable sensations, thereby beginning to act in a manner apart from nature. Eventually, this habituated activity enables the ensouled body to attend to higher, purposive ends, e.g., music, sport, visual art, writing, cooking, and so on.

Consider the jazz percussionist who has the capacity to improvise virtuosic solos within structured time-signature constraints. Much of the percussionist's solo happens by sheer habit. Their music is an amalgam of recollected muscle movements, rehearsed rhythms, and years of musical sense-making with other players. The solo's improvised elements, such as its singular combination of phrasings and dynamics, is completely dependent upon the player's past efforts of learning to manipulate the drum brushes, to syncopate within the time-signature, to reply to the

¹⁵⁸ Italo Testa points out that humans are not yet fully distinguishable from non-human animals by virtue of having habits. Rather, he interprets Hegel as saying that non-human animal habits are less idealized than those of human beings. Admittedly, this is still somewhat obscure, but I take Testa to be saying that most animals' habits do not disengage them from sensation to the extent needed to develop thought, while human habit does. See Italo Testa, "Hegel's Naturalism," in *Essays on Hegel's Subjective Spirit*, edited by David Stern (SUNY Press, 2013), 19-36.

¹⁵⁹ Recently, Hegel commentators have characterized Hegel's notion of habit as "corporeal thinking" (Italo Testa), "a corporeal necessity" that is a precursor to self-conscious thinking (Simon Lumsden, "Between Nature and Spirit," in *Essays on Hegel's Subjective Spirit*, 121-137), and "a liberation from first nature" (Andreja Novakovic, *Hegel on Second Nature*, Chapter One). Such accounts stress the bodily basis of thinking against more idealistic interpretations of Hegel (Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, and Robert Brandom are often the targets of this criticism, as in the 2012 special issue of *Critical Horizons*, Vol. 13, No. 2, edited by Heikki Ikäheimo) that seem to prioritize mind over body to such an extent that the naturalistic basis of thinking often gets forgotten.

provocations of the band, and so on. Without having cultivated their body's musicality to an almost mechanical degree, the percussionist would have no freedom to project their subjectivity onto the solo. Examples like this illustrate that, for Hegel, habit is a quasi-mechanical kind of activity that makes the highest expressions of freedom possible.¹⁶⁰

Habit and second nature have an objective dimension in addition to the subjective.¹⁶¹ Although Hegel places these concepts within his account of Subjective Mind, they will remain relevant throughout his account of Objective Mind, both in the *Encyclopedia* and in *Philosophy of Right*. I will address the objective dimensions of these concepts more fully in Chapter Three; for now, I will just flag two respects in which habit takes shape through a subject-object dialectic. First, subjective habit is determined in large part by the objective context in which individuals live. The people, places, and activities amid which individuals are socialized determine their bodily and psychical development to a huge extent. So, while Hegel thinks that individuals are implicitly free, their freedom can become explicit only within a world in which they have been sufficiently socialized. Second, human sociality itself can be thought of as a kind of habituated second nature that bears a family resemblance to subjectivity. Like the habituated individual, institutions are by definition desensitized to the radical particularities of experience, dealing exclusively with the most iterable elements of individual subjectivity. Moreover, institutions are indifferent to random activities, prioritizing systematicity over subjective inclination. And finally, institutions are, like the skilled jazz player, purposively oriented toward freedom (even if only the freedom of the ones who control them). These affinities of subjective and objective regimes of habit clearly indicate that the one cannot be conceptualized without the other.

As bodily recollection with both subjective and objective dimensions, habit is a precondition for freedom but is not freedom itself. "Therefore although, on the one hand, by habit man becomes free, yet, on the other hand, habit makes him its *slave*."¹⁶² Habit liberates an individual from their natural derangement, yet it also enslaves an individual, an institution, or an entire people by ossifying their living relationships to their worlds. In other words, the second nature that arises out of habituation can regress into an artificially constructed first nature and itself become indistinguishable from mere animality. Eventually, for Hegel, the "habit of living" becomes a synonym for "death by natural causes," for death occurs when the organism can no longer maintain the contradiction between itself and its world. Because habit tends inexorably toward death, it must be considered as a naturally determined bodily phenomenon that is nascently but not fully free. It therefore marks the frontier between the merely natural, self-feeling soul – a

¹⁶⁰ Testa, when he discusses Hegel's conception of habit, makes a distinction between lower-order and higher-order habits. The distinction allows us to think of the immediate first nature/habituated second nature distinction as more of a continuum than an opposition, since nonhuman animals observably acquire patterns of activity that could also be called habits. Still, examples like the practiced jazz player indicate that the human capacity for purposive second-natural activity is an order apart from, for example, the morning routine of a squirrel. (See Testa's chapter in the Stern volume cited above.)

¹⁶¹ There is still some debate among Hegel commentators as to whether concepts like habit and second nature have an objective dimension in addition to the subjective. Simon Lumsden (in the Stern essay volume) argues that Hegel meant second nature to describe a subjective process and that it cannot be applied to objective entities like institutions. Testa understands second nature as both an individual and social phenomenon, encompassing individuals' subjective capacities and the objective institutions within which they live, a position he calls "social naturalism" (Italo Testa, "Criticism from within nature: the dialectic of between first and second nature from McDowell to Adorno," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 33, Issue 4, doi/10.1177/0191453707077019). Novakovic seems to exist somewhere between Lumsden and Testa, focusing mostly on the subjective side of second nature while situating it within a rich social context.

¹⁶² Hegel, PM §410.

level of ensoulment that nonhuman as well as human animals attain – and the distinctively “anthropological” or mentally infused soul that Hegel calls the “actual soul.” The actual soul is the level of ensoulment at which the human being starts to raise itself toward self-conscious thought, pushing past the outer limits of its first nature. Hegel writes:

[We] recall how the [actual] *human* soul, in contrast to the *animal* soul which remains sunk in the individuality and limitation of sensation, has raised itself above the limited content of what is sensed, a content that contradicts its implicitly infinite nature [as thinking animality], has posited this content ideally, and particularly in *habit* has made it into something *universal, recollected, total*, a being.¹⁶³

A few sentences later, Hegel refers to this habituated being, this fully actualized natural soul, as an “image of freedom.” What makes the actual soul an image of freedom is the relationship it instantiates between the soul and the animal body. The human soul that organizes its body’s impulses into a well-regulated system of needs develops into a free mind that emerges within a body yet wills an existence beyond its bodily form-constraints. By contrast, the individual whose body dominates their soul becomes a slave to their natural condition and never actualizes their full potential. “If I want to actualize my aims [as a free, thinking being who is not overdetermined by his first nature],” Hegel says, “then I must make my physical body capable of carrying over [my] subjectivity into external objectivity.” But, he adds, “[my] body is not by nature fitted for [such activity]; on the contrary, it immediately does only what is appropriate to animal life.” Thus, to make one’s bodily functions serviceable to the higher projects of the mind, the natural soul must organize its bodily activity into a subjective system of needs:

Whereas in animals the body, in obedience to their instinct, immediately accomplishes everything [necessary], man, by contrast, has first to make himself master of his body by his own activity. At the beginning, the human soul pervades its physical body only in a quite indeterminately universal way. For this pervasion to become a determinate pervasion, *Bildung* is required.¹⁶⁴

The *Bildung* that Hegel invokes here is a distinctively anthropological necessity. That is to say, it is the first-natural genesis of the human-animal soul that, on the one hand, is always already shot through with mental activity, and, on the other hand, is the *sine qua non* of all mental activity. The natural necessity of mentally mediated *Bildung* stems from the fact that the human being cannot actualize itself as a thinking animal unless the soul succeeds in negating its immediate unity with the body, disciplining it into a subjective system of needs.¹⁶⁵ The soul’s simultaneous unity with, and negation of, the body is the natural basis of self-consciousness, and self-consciousness is the mental version of the soul’s self-identification and self-disidentification with the body.

These natural and mental processes are inseparable. Nature and mind are dialectically entwined, and because they are so, the habituated or “actual soul” that comes about via human natural genesis manifests mental activity in observable ways. For example, Hegel attributes the dexterity of human hands and the expressiveness of human faces to the creature’s mental complexity, noting how bodily gesticulation constitutes a kind of proto-language prior to spoken language.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, he construes the modulated human voice as the essential medium of mental activity, communicating mind’s inner dynamism through its ranging tones and moods.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ My choice of the phrase “subjective system of needs” is a deliberate allusion to the “objective system of needs” that I discuss in Chapter Three.

¹⁶⁶ A note about the bonobos.

These embodied semiotic systems are exhibited in human animals to an extent not seen even in the more intelligent nonhuman animals. Echoing passages from *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel says that, “On his purely bodily side, man is not greatly different from the ape; but by the mind-pervaded aspect of his body he is distinguished from that animal to such a degree that a smaller difference obtains between the appearance of an ape and a bird than between the body of a man and that of an ape.” Mind’s permeation of the soul infuses a semiotic element into first-natural human experience. Bodily gestures, vocal modulations, and facial expressions are more developed expressions of the natural *Bildungstrieb*, one aspect of which, recall from Chapter One, is the animal’s drive to objectify its subjective activity in the inorganic world. Further, they are the natural media of human sociality, evidence of an emergent need to partake in the species-life on a level that supersedes the first-natural activity of sexual reproduction. While sexual reproduction is obviously part of human species-life, the medium in which humans actualize their genus is self-conscious thinking and its subsidiary operations in the soul. “Even merely animal life in its way exhibits [*Bildung*] implicitly,” Hegel says. “But...it does not have the power to genuinely actualize the genus within itself...The genus genuinely actualizes itself...[only] in mind, in thinking...”¹⁶⁷

We can now venture a working definition of *Bildung* or human natural genesis as the process in which mind discloses itself nascently through the natural genesis of ensouled corporeality. Mind’s permeation of the natural soul is what distinguishes the human animal from its nonhuman counterparts. The difference mind makes can be seen in the human animal’s relation to its inorganic world, its experience of self-feeling, its manner of satisfying its basic needs, and its unique form of sociality, among other things. Ultimately, it is by actualizing its genus in thought that the human animal realizes its own natural genesis, raising itself out of its first-natural, anthropological existence into the second-natural, infinite existence that Hegel calls spirit.

III.

The foregoing section established that the human life-form can be distinguished from nonhuman ones by examining the various ways in which mind fundamentally alters the ensouled body. Mind journeys through all the stages of corporeal development en route to the genuine actualization of the human genus in thought. This section recounts step-by-step what this journey looks like in the life of the finite individual, offering a commentary on the passage in Hegel’s philosophical anthropology titled “The Ages of Life.” Hegel’s description of the natural ages of a human life is significant for how it combines the corporeal and mental aspects of natural genesis in a narrative format. Yet because it falls within the “Anthropology” chapter, Hegel limits his description to the spatiotemporal correspondences of nature and mind, saving considerations of mind’s supersession of life for the “Phenomenology” and “Psychology” chapters. Still, despite their finite scope, I argue that the natural ages of life provide the model for understanding how infinite mind journeys *through* life, modeling itself after it even as it supersedes it. I stress how, on its finite side, mind for the most part moves apace with corporeal progress. Then, I show how the essential subjective moments of infinite mind – Anthropology, Phenomenology, and Psychology, Hegel names them – correspond exactly to the formal structure of the ages of finite mind – childhood, youth, and adulthood. The homology between finite mind, which expresses itself through embodiment, and infinite mind, which, by consciously thinking itself, supersedes the body’s finitude, confirms that mind’s freedom, i.e., its mastery over its natural needs, is not a story of abolition so much as systematization. The needs emergent in finite mind – to realize a second nature that is consonant with first nature, to reconcile subjectivity and objectivity, to

¹⁶⁷ PM §396.

partake intellectually in the species-life – are just the logically necessary moments of infinite mind as it actualizes its more-than-natural existence. The subjective system of needs emerges in addition to the basic natural needs of ensouled corporeality, and because it is a self-determining system, takes priority over them. By developing a higher system of needs, human animals decrease the degree to which they rely upon nature to determine their ends for them and thereby increase their freedom.

Hegel's exposition of the ages of life – childhood (*Kindheit*), youth (*Jugend*), adulthood (*Mannesalter*), old age (*Alter*) centers the mental side of human natural genesis from the outset. Combined with what we already know about animal corporeality from *Philosophy of Nature*, we can build a robust account of the *Bildung* of finite mind:

[The ages of life begin] with the child, the mind wrapped up in itself. The next step is the developed opposition the tension between a universality which is still subjective (ideals, imaginings, moral demands, hopes, etc.) and immediate individuality, i.e., both the existing world, which fails to meet the ideals, and the position in it of the individual himself, who, in his current state, still lacks independence and intrinsic maturity (the youth). Next there is the genuine relationship: recognition of the objective necessity and rationality of the world as we find it, a world no longer incomplete, but able, in the work which it accomplishes in and for itself, to afford the individual a share and confirmation for his activity. This makes the individual somebody, with actual presence and objective value (the man). Last of all comes the completion of the unity with this objectivity: a unity which, while in its reality it passes into the inertia of deadening habit, in its ideality gains freedom from the limited interests and entanglements of the external present (old age).¹⁶⁸

These four essential stages¹⁶⁹ of the individual's lifespan are, for Hegel, logically necessary steps toward the actualization of the human life-form. The life-process in general is a function of the contradiction between the singularity of the individual organism and the universal formal constraints of its species-life. Starting at embryogenesis, the individual organism grows toward the fully actualized form of its species,¹⁷⁰ passing through various stages of maturation en route to sexual maturity, at which point it becomes capable of producing more individuals like itself. In *Philosophy of Nature*, where the object of description is the ensouled body, sexual reproduction is the apex of natural genesis. In the above passage, Hegel describes human natural genesis in view of mind's journey through life toward the realization of its genus. "What the genus is in life as such," he says, "rationality is in the realm of mind." The connection here between genus and rationality should come as no surprise, since what it is to be human is to be a thinking animal. Hegel surmises that the empirical correspondence of the physiological and mental ages of life roughly tracks the correspondence of genus and rationality. With some notable exceptions (such as intellectually precocious children), body and mind undergo important developmental advancements at more or less the same times.¹⁷¹ The ages of life, then, track the actualization of the genus or rationality in the individual. "The actualization of the universal [genus] in the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Five, if we count embryogenesis inside the maternal womb as part of the life-process, which Hegel considers doing at one point in §396.

¹⁷⁰ Recall from the *Philosophy of Nature* that, for Hegel, to be fully actual as a member of the species is to be fully ensconced in a male or female sexual *Habitus*, a view that implies not only the conflation of gender and sex but the sexualized division of social roles.

¹⁷¹ Hegel will not say that the empirical development of mind and body perfectly correspond with the formal relationship between genus and rationality because he wants to maintain the priority of mind over body.

individual” is the process to which Hegel ascribes the word *Bildung*.¹⁷² Here, on the side of human natural genesis, *Bildung* is already starting to take on the fuller connotation it will have as education. In my English edition of *Philosophy of Mind*, the translator chooses to render these mentions of *Bildung* as “education” instead of the more generic “formation” or “development” that we get throughout *Philosophy of Nature* and earlier sections of *Philosophy of Mind*, indicating that Hegel’s referent here is that first-natural genesis which is dialectically entwined with the self-consciously guided formation called education.¹⁷³ This further emphasizes the fact that *Bildung* as education is a necessity of first nature, even as it consciously aims to craft a second nature, and that everything said about human subjectivity finds its complement in human objectivity.

The natural ages of life are spatiotemporal appearances of the logically necessary moments of infinite mind. One notable feature of Hegel’s account is how it gradually shifts from mostly physiological description (the embryo and the small child) to mostly psychological description (the youth’s alienation from the social world and the adult’s reunification with it). The physiology draws on the groundwork laid in *Philosophy of Nature* and earlier sections of *Philosophy of Mind*. The psychology anticipates what is yet to come in the “Phenomenology” and “Psychology” chapters, which give an account of mind’s supersession of nature into a subjective world of its own making. At a certain point, Hegel explains, it is impossible to distinguish between the various stages of human natural genesis without referencing the more-than-natural aspect of infinite mind. Yet we must take care not to conflate “the development of the individual associated with anthropological development, where the faculties and powers [of mind] are regarded as successively emerging and presenting themselves in existence,” with the development of infinite mind.¹⁷⁴ On the finite level, the *Bildung* of mind is indeed a temporal process that moves apace with the bodily ages of life. Still, if this were our entire conception of mind, then we would be construing it one-sidedly, confining it entirely within physiology instead of regarding it as the more-than-natural, self-determining activity that it is. In other words, we would be treating the ages of life as mere epiphenomena of natural forces, rather than logically necessary moments in mind’s self-realization. Life, remember, realizes its ends within the spatiotemporal form-constraints of nature, which are issued from outside it, while mind realizes its purposiveness in the more-than-natural, universal realm of thinking, which issues from mind itself. The ages of life do not gain their properly mental content from nature, then, but from infinite mind’s self-positing (hence, again, why human natural genesis cannot be adequately described without reference to mind’s more-than-natural activity).

Childhood, youth, and adulthood unfold in a narrative sequence that discloses mind’s conceptual moments from least to most developed. This sequence mirrors the ordering of the chapters of the Subjective Mind division – Anthropology, Phenomenology, and Psychology:

(1) “Childhood,” Hegel says, “is...the time of natural harmony, of the peace of the individual with himself and the world – the oppositionless beginning...” By “oppositionless,” Hegel means that there is no mediated opposition, i.e., no reconciled contradiction, between the natural and mental sides of human life-activity, such that the child’s ensouled body and its nascent mind exist together without mutual resistance, the mind having not yet attained mastery over the body through a habituated reorganization of needs. A preview of the child’s harmonious existence is found in embryogenesis, where the developing embryo lives in total nutritive immersion inside

¹⁷² PM, §396.

¹⁷³ In the next chapter, I will divide this consciously guided formative process into its constitutive moments of *Erziehung*, *Pädagogik/Unterricht*, and second-natural *Bildung*.

¹⁷⁴ PM §442.

its mother (much like the plant lives off the soil and air). Childhood properly begins with birth, when the infant exits the womb and attains an individual existence apart from its mother. As an individual organism, a unity of part and whole, it engages in self-feeling and self-movement. Hegel places significance on the human infant's protracted period of physical dependency on its mother, taking it as a sign of the human animal's complexity relative to other animals. The infant's instinct to vocalize its needs through modulated cries further suggests that it is in the process of developing a rich inner life that it cannot yet intelligently express. Childhood is the age of greatest mental growth in an individual's life; it is *Bildung* within a context of almost complete material and intellectual dependence on others. The unity of nature and mind in the child is thus an immediate, underdeveloped unity of the individual with its genus.

Signs of the child's nascent self-sufficiency can be found in its acquisition of the habit of speech. Speech, Hegel says, "enables man to apprehend things as universal, to attain to consciousness of his own universality, to the enunciation of the I." Verbality in general, and saying "I" in particular, are touchstones of the child's entry into higher conceptual thinking. Having language empowers the child to transition from ideas based in simple representational correspondences to abstract ideas that require time and effort to comprehend.¹⁷⁵ The child journeys through the field of language in search of its full self-concept. Its encounters with complex ideas and the adults who deploy them nudge it toward the insight that it is "not yet what it ought to be" and must grow up. Upon discovery of the imperative of growing up, the child begins striving for education (*Erziehung*).¹⁷⁶ The child's educators are the influential adults in its life who stand in as representatives for the social world that the child recognizes as its own but which it does not yet understand. Hegel sometimes likes to say that the child in the midst of its *Erziehung* has the feeling (*Gefühl*) of rationality without yet having comprehended it. Pedagogically speaking, what a human child needs is self-discipline (to gain regulative control over its animal urges), obedience to authority (to habituate it toward unselfishness), and social deference (to postpone its full entry into the social world until it is mentally mature enough to participate). In short, the norms of the social world must be imposed upon the child from a young age so that it learns to habituate its conduct according to universal standards.¹⁷⁷

The moment of infinite mind to which childhood corresponds is Anthropology. Anthropology, we already saw, is concerned with the human natural soul, or mind in its simple unity with nature. What makes this underdeveloped relation a logically necessary moment of

¹⁷⁵ In his remarks on vocalization and speech, Hegel resembles Wilhelm von Humboldt (whom he cites in §459 of Subjective Spirit). According to Humboldt, the human voice forms, develops, and reproduces the species' mental life through spoken language. It does this primarily through what Humboldt calls the "sound-form." The sound-form is the audible objectification of inward subjective experience. An inner sensation adopts a sound-form through vocalization and then returns back to the speaker's ear as a sense-impression from the outer world. In other words, speech returns thought to the thinker as a natural sound-form, and it is by this dialectical process of mentalizing the natural and naturalizing the mental, Humboldt theorizes, that human *Bildung* takes place. This process is not only rational but aesthetic, cultivating mature conceptual thought alongside cultural sensibilities. Hegel recognizes an aesthetic dimension of language at least where written script is concerned, discussing the differences between learning alphabetic and hieroglyphic scripts. Hegel and Humboldt agree that human *Bildung* is possible only through language, the sonic and written medium of inner life. As Humboldt writes in §9 of his study of the Kawi language, "Only language can make thought objective without compromising subjectivity (even in silence)." (Wilhelm Humboldt, *On Language*, edited by Michael Losonsky, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁷⁶ *Erziehung* in German can mean formal education but also carries the connotation of rearing.

¹⁷⁷ In Chapter Three, when I return to childhood's significance within the context of Objective Mind, this activity will take the form of public schooling (*Unterricht*), the first place outside the home where the child is not just loved and accepted by adults but critically judged by them.

mind's self-development is how it establishes mind's material basis in nature. With this basis, mind has a finite medium through which to become something real in the world. Like the child, mind at this stage is increasingly sentient yet overdetermined by external forces, and its potential for freedom appears but inchoately in certain aspects of its bodily activity. And just as the child starts to feel the urge to grow up, striving after further guidance and discipline, so is mind at this level impelled to organize its needs into a second-natural system over which it is to become master. The need to create a second nature through the medium of first nature is foreign to nonhuman forms of life and is the signature difference that mind makes in human natural genesis. Indeed, human animals cannot conserve their *Gestalt* or living animal form without continually satisfying this mental need that arises in the course of their *Bildung*.

(2) Youth follows childhood and is the age of life during which the individual "opposes himself to the universal such that he feels his own independence" over against the social world. The physiological transition that initiates youth is that from prepubescence to puberty, while the corresponding mental transition is that from being materially and intellectually dependent on adults to being increasingly independent in both these respects. Hegel says that "the life of the genus" begins in puberty, confirming the direct connection between first-natural sexual maturation and the maturation of self-conscious thought.¹⁷⁸ Such remarks recall what Hegel says in *Philosophy of Nature* about the biological development of the male and female sexes. A postpubescent animal lives fully in the "habit" (*Habitus*) of its sex, its biological trajectory diverging from the opposite sex in a pronounced yet complementary way. Italo Testa relates Hegel's account of sexual difference to the social-recognition process, calling the sexual process a form of first-natural proto-sociality in which animals come to recognize other individuals of their species.¹⁷⁹ For Hegel, one's natural capacity for thought has a dialectical connection to being a sexually mature member of a species.

The turn toward the life of the species during puberty is also a turn toward rationality. Alongside the youth's exponential emotional development, what this turn entails is a burgeoning concern for the universal affairs of the species. Yet the youth's lack of experience in the world of adults limits their understanding of such questions, coloring everything in a personalized, subjective light. To the extent that the youth's worldview clashes with its objective social world, the former feels at odds with the latter and wills that the world conform to its own subjective ideal. Indeed, the youth feels qualified to repair the ailing world with their own normative prescriptions, not yet understanding that the world is actually a rational domain in which they will one day have the freedom to participate fully. What the immature youth in their budding subjectivity cannot yet appreciate is that the objective world *does* allow room for their subjectivity to express itself, just not in the way they initially imagine. In the meantime, nature makes use of the youth's sense of alienation from the social world (a feeling that is no doubt connected to their emergent sexual needs) by exploiting their growing desire to change the world, forming it into a will to *Bildung*.

It is worth noting that Hegel's language about the youth's subjective experience strongly resembles his earlier language about mental derangement. The deranged mind mistakes its subjective perception of the world for something objective, and that is exactly what the youth does during puberty and the postpubescent years. Youthful derangement is a necessary step, then,

¹⁷⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* similarly stresses the intellectual and emotional importance of puberty. According to Rousseau, sexual maturation is the moment of greatest emotional transformation in an individual's life. Concomitantly with this emotional transformation, there is a great leap forward in the individual's ethical capacities. (See Rousseau, *Emile*, 16-17.)

¹⁷⁹ Italo Testa, "How does recognition emerge from nature?", *Critical Horizons*, Vol. 13, No. 12, 181.

toward well-adjusted adulthood. But if the youth fails to complete its *Bildung* and remains in a state of subjective alienation from reality, then they become a deranged adult, settling into a genuine state of pathology that can become a general social problem. This is why Hegel writes of the natural and, for that matter, normative necessity that the youth successfully transition to adulthood:

It is necessary above all things that the *Bildung* of the youth into manhood be completed...Yet mere *Bildung* alone does not make him a completely mature man; he becomes this only through his concern for temporal interests, just like those peoples who come of age only when they are not excluded by paternalistic governments from looking after their material and spiritual interests.¹⁸⁰

Hegel's analogy of the deranged youth to a submerged people excluded from looking after their material and spiritual affairs is striking. It foreshadows a major theme that will come up in Chapter Three, namely, that the development of individuals is a function of the relations that link them to their objective social order. Where individuals systematically appear arrested in their development, failing to push past their juvenile derangement to complete their *Bildung*, there will we also find a deformed society in which adults are treated as children, i.e., as dependents or delinquents who are incapable of tending to their own affairs without the intervention of some higher authority.

In terms of infinite mind, youth equates to Phenomenology, the moment of mind's difference from nature and from itself. This dual differentiation is logically necessary insofar as it affirms mind as something self-determining and therefore more-than-natural. It is an unreconciled difference, standing in direct opposition to the simple unity of mind and nature that we find in Anthropology. Like animal *Assimilation*, mind's process of differentiating itself from natural objects goes on ad infinitum, its desire for reunification reemerging as soon as it is sated. (This can be seen in the ordinary, mundane movement of conscious thought from one fleeting mental image to another.) As self-relating, on the other hand, mind is now both that which thinks and that which is thought, and as in its relation to natural objects, perceives its lack of unity with its "I" and desires to be reunited with it. But to unite thinking and thought, subject and object, mind cannot rely upon itself alone but must receive confirmation from another "I" like itself. This is because to say "I" is to say something entirely universal; it by no means confirms the concrete particularity of the one who says it. Phenomenological mind therefore marks mind's self-conscious entry into social awareness and all the trappings and possibilities this involves. The more-than-natural need that arises here is dual in character: on one hand, mind needs objective confirmation of its subjective unity; on the other hand, it needs to see its subjectivity mirrored in objectivity. The dual desires to be recognized and to attain mastery over oneself and others emerge concomitantly. As mind struggles against the natural and social aspects of its world, it alternately experiences moments of mastery, in which it wills to reshape the world in the image of its own subjectivity (much as the lord wills the bondsman's subjugation in the famous allegory), as well as moments of subjugation, in which the world breaks its will and shows it the "nullity of egotism."¹⁸¹ Hegel refers to mind's awareness of intersubjectivity as "universal self-consciousness," or mind's formal, subjective entry into a universal world beyond nature. Because such awareness is shot through with contradictions, phenomenological mind can be said to lack objective corroborations of its intersubjective consciousness. To affirm theoretically the universality of mind, the objectivity of subjectivity, is not the same as to enact that awareness practically through concrete activity. Just

¹⁸⁰ Hegel, PM §396.

¹⁸¹ PM §434.

as the youth stands in moody contradiction with their social world, resisting the compulsion to become a conforming member of society, so does phenomenological mind resist the very restitution with reality that it seeks. Even so, the attainment of universal self-consciousness at least shows an abstract grasp of the human genus and forms the subjective basis of mind's eventual restitution with its world.

(3) The adult who is substantially connected to their material and spiritual affairs is the fulfillment of human natural genesis and is the pinnacle age of life. What distinguishes the adult from the youth is their sense, drawn from the concrete relations that bind them to the universal order, that they do not need to remake the world in their own image but are better off contributing to it as it exists. An adult understands that the social order conditions their subjectivity while also making room for their self-actualization. Thus, their orientation to their world is one of active conformity in which they work to fortify and improve the social order without radically undermining or reshaping it. Hegel cites the adult's increasing involvement in political-economic affairs as the main driver of this psychological transition. Whereas the youth may disparage the pettiness of having vested material interests, the adult reconciles themselves to the necessity of earning a living and shaping their life around their particular interests. What this amounts to, in Hegel's terms, is a shift from seeking restitution with universality through the abstract thinking of "universal self-consciousness" to seeking it through socially meaningful, particularized labor. The adult who never grows up to embrace the objective constraints on their subjectivity suffers from a "derangement" and a "hypochondria" that makes flourishing impossible. Note again that Hegel characterizes subjectivism as a mental pathology. "In this diseased mood," he writes, "the man will not give up his subjectivity...and by this very fact resides in a state of relative incapacity which easily becomes an actual incapacity." Hegel continues: "If, therefore, man does not want to perish [physically and mentally], then he must recognize the world as an independent, essentially complete world, accept the conditions set for him by it and wrest from its obduracy what he wills to have for himself."¹⁸²

The well-adjusted adult is rationality – the genus – embodied. Having reached maturity, they no longer persist in youthful fantasies of redesigning the world in their own selfish image but strive to actualize their interests in a world they accept as rational overall. When the adult makes room for others, they find that there is also room for themselves, and when they begin to view the objective constraints upon them as part of the natural life-process, they are able to come alive and to flourish within those constraints. According to Hegel, the social world is not an intransigent other to the rational individuals who populate it. On the contrary, the social world is responsive to their particular activities and itself undergoes a kind of development through them. By simply preserving itself, the world advances, and it is in this dialectic of conservation and progress that humanity's essential work consists. "What is true in [the adult's] ideals," Hegel says, "[will be] preserved in the practical activity." In other words, the world makes plenty of room for those aspects of subjectivity that translate themselves into objectivity. This is not to suggest that the adult lives in perfect harmony with their social world. As Andreja Novakovic points out, individuals can take up informed critical orientations to their societies when things start to fall out of joint. So long as the rational basis of these criticisms is a learned endorsement of the general order of things, such internal criticism of society can even keep adults mentally sharp and protect them from falling into lazy mental habits.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Andreja Novakovic, *Hegel on Second Nature in Ethical Life*, Chapter One.

It is when the adult starts to lose their active mental relation to the social world that old age sets in. For the first time since their youth, the aging adult finds themselves in a period of major physiological change, this time toward the deterioration of its body, rather than the progressive actualization of it. Mental deterioration often accompanies this physiological decline, yet it is a sign of the mind's priority over the ensouled body that human animals can remain cognitively vital long after their bodies have started to fail them. What causes the mind to atrophy is the habit of living in a certain way for a long time and failing to adapt to changing circumstances. As Hegel puts it, the elderly person's practical activity reaches a point of vital saturation, becoming so fused with the objective world that it actually loses its ability to resist it. "Thus by the habit of mental life," Hegel says, "as well as by the dulling of the activity of its physical organism, the man becomes an old man." The dulling of body and mind together reverts life back to childhood, reunifying nature and mind at the end of a full life. The reunification of nature and mind nudges the individual into senescence and finally death.

Adulthood corresponds to Psychology, the moment at which mind establishes a mediated unity-in-difference of the natural and social aspects of its world. Above, Hegel tracks this unity-in-difference in the finite individual's commitment to working out a particular life within a universal normative context, no longer vying, like the youth, to bend the world to their own deranged will, but rather growing their will toward its rational form-constraints (the "space of reasons,"¹⁸⁴ as John McDowell calls it). Here, infinite, psychological mind exhibits its absolute mastery of living nature, presiding over a subjective system of needs or second nature in which thought has converted everything first-natural into its own content. It conserves the self-feeling soul within itself and raises the natural drives and underdeveloped desires into thought-infused volitions. According to Hegel, psychological mind is comprised of "theoretical" and "practical" elements. On its theoretical side, it is the cognitive activity of subsuming objects subjectively, organizing experience into a system in which sensory intuitions are experienced not as random responses to external stimuli but as recollections (*Erinnerungen*) of the familiar. The surest sign of an educated man (*gebildeter Mann*), Hegel says, is that he experiences his feelings as if they were memories.¹⁸⁵ On its practical side, psychological mind is the activity of willing one's subjectivity into objectivity and grasping its fit therein. Unlike the animal *Bildungstrieb*, psychological mind's practical willing involves self-consciousness and is the outcome of reflections on how to reconcile subjective desires and interests with objective constraints. Synthesizing the theoretical and practical elements yields the higher activity of self-knowing that Hegel calls "driveless being" (*trieblose Sein*).¹⁸⁶ The systematization of natural drives, which correspond directly to needs of the ensouled body, confirms psychological mind's supersession of nature through thinking. Furthermore, it confirms mind's satisfaction of its subjective need to actualize the human genus, for its path to self-actualization travels through its relationship to the natural and social aspects of the surrounding world.

Hegel's analysis of the ages of life shows that, over the course of human natural genesis, mind multiplies the human animal's overall set of needs, generating novel needs of second nature that diminish the power that first nature has over its subjective ends. Mind's essential moments are therefore just more developed iterations of life's: the anthropological need to realize a second nature by way of the first is a higher version of the need to conserve the organism's *Gestalt* or living form; the phenomenological need to entwine subjectivity with objectivity is a higher version

¹⁸⁴ John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 87-8.

¹⁸⁵ Hegel, PM §454.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, §482.

of *Assimilation*; the psychological need to actualize the genus raises *Gattung* up from mere sexual reproduction into fully socialized reproduction. Like first-natural needs, the needs of second nature have to be satisfied in order for human natural genesis to fulfill itself. This raises what I earlier called Hegel's "paradox of self-determination": human animals are "free," and yet the measure of their freedom is the degree to which they satisfy a novel set of needs that they generate for themselves. Is this a freedom worthy of the name?

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a reliable foil to Hegel on questions of nature, freedom, and education, would claim it is not. "Freedom," Rousseau writes in *Emile*, "is wanting to do only what one can and doing as one pleases." Since nature determines all that one can do, then to be free is to just to negate all desires that do not come from nature and to affirm only those that do.¹⁸⁷ Ensuring that nature alone guides the natural genesis of the individual is the method by which freedom is conserved. On this naturalistic view, freedom is both a gift and a task. Men are born free, Rousseau asserts, but they do not necessarily remain so. Society poses an ever-present threat to freedom, "making man weaker not only in taking from him the right he had over his own strength, but above all, in making his strength insufficient [for meeting his needs]."¹⁸⁸ Rousseau would let Hegel have the point that the multiplication of human needs through social intercourse does decrease humanity's dependency on nature for determining its ends. But he would add that it concomitantly increases humanity's dependency on society's distribution of ethical goods, a process that even Hegel admits is plagued with pathologies. To place freedom's destiny in society's hands is to impose a bourgeois master where a natural shepherd would have done. Thus, a child undergoing education should only know natural necessity and its satisfaction until it reaches cognitive adulthood, whereupon it can confront society's corrupting elements with rectitude. Necessities imposed by human artifice should never enter this educational process (indeed, to prevent this from happening is the teacher's sole task), for if the child perceives that the laws that bind them are alterable, they will never develop true regard for them but instead will learn to manipulate them to their advantage. "All the instruments have been tried in *l'education* except one," says Rousseau: "well-regulated [natural] freedom."¹⁸⁹ Such a freedom, once it ripens to rationality, consists entirely of the activity of sating naturally given desires and comprehending them as both necessary and sufficient for self-actualization.

Does Hegel have an answer to Rousseau, whose account of freedom places negative value on the multiplication of human needs through social intercourse? Hegel can respond to the main challenges, at least. Regarding the question of nature versus second nature, Hegel can say that the former is immanent in the latter. Through thinking, human animals reject nature as their taskmaster and take on a self-guided existence that is not a rejection of nature but a conservation and supersession of it. Hegel's phrase, "*trieblose Sein*" (driveless being), is his most evocative term for this activity. To multiply one's subjective needs is to decrease the degree to which any given natural need overdetermines one's ends, thereby liberating one to set the form-constraints within which they live. Despite its intrepid adventure into a world of its own making, however, this driveless being remains ever lifelike, following life's model of *Bildung*. Rousseau's naturalistic account of freedom relies upon the assumption that the needs of second nature are wholly

¹⁸⁷ Rousseau rejects the idea that nature imbues human beings with "bad" desires. Desires are natural phenomena; evil originates in society's repression of the naturally sufficient human constitution, a process that rearranges and multiplies desires.

¹⁸⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, 84.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

“unnatural,” constructing an antinomy of first and second nature where in fact a complex dialectic obtains.

Relatedly, the needs of second nature do not multiply haphazardly or uncontrollably but in accordance with the subject’s systematization of its first nature. As I showed earlier in my analysis of the ages of life, the needs of second nature have a logical structure, the internal necessity of which is homologous to natural necessity. This counters Rousseau’s implicit assertion that needs of second nature have little to no basis in first nature and are by virtue of that fact inherently corrupting.

Finally, Hegel can respond to Rousseau’s worry that multiplying human needs, although it decreases one’s dependency on nature, increases one’s dependency on society to the point of pathology. In raising this worry, Rousseau stresses the many moral dangers that society poses to natural freedom, including toxic forms of codependency. Hegel, by contrast, argues that dealing with dangerous social pathologies must be part of freedom’s process. Human animals experience moments both of bondage and mastery as they organize their natural needs into a system. Mind’s self-liberation out of nature exposes it to the novel danger of self-enslavement, a tyranny of mind over itself. This, remember, is how Hegel construes the “abstract self-consciousness” of the leading actors of the French Revolution, who (Hegel says) could not hold on to anything they built together and so deprived themselves of a structured social world in which to fulfill their liberation. By adhering to the model of life, however, mind mitigates its own self-enslaving potential and enacts the freedom of building an enduring world. Mind must face down this danger of self-subjugation – must venture its own life, so to speak – in order to be able to reflect upon and refine its freedom. That the concept of freedom has any value at all is because the erroneous and evil can prevail over the true and the good.¹⁹⁰

IV.

Chapter Two has shown that the Subjective Mind division of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind* contains an unreconstructed concept of *Bildung* that refers to the species-specific natural genesis of human animals. I started by plumbing Hegel’s philosophical anthropology for signs of mind’s inchoate activity in the ensouled body in attempt to show the fundamentality of thinking to human animality, revealing it to be the main driver of human *Bildung*. Then, turning to Hegel’s narrative of the ages of a finite human life, I discussed how mind’s journey through living nature discloses the logically necessary moments of mind’s self-development, arguing that the concept of *Bildung* is the glue that holds the finite and infinite aspects of the human life-form together. In the course of that analysis, I discovered that to each of life’s ages corresponds a nascent need of second nature that, like any need of first nature, has to be satisfied in order for human natural genesis to fulfill itself. Moreover, in the course of explaining how the satisfaction of these second-natural needs amounts to genuine freedom, I made numerous references (following Hegel’s lead) to an “objectivity,” a “social world,” a “a space of reasons” that has yet to be adequately described. There as here, the concept of *Bildung* will have a systematic meaning that will have to be carefully reconstructed. The logically necessary moments of human natural genesis – childhood, youth, adulthood, in their literal and figurative meanings – can be thought of as the subjective criteria that the objective aspect of human *Bildung* must meet in order to be fulfilled.

¹⁹⁰ Hegel, PR §139.

*Appendix: Hegel on the Five Racial Varieties

Hegel, reflecting on the same themes as Herder, takes the stronger, biological view, held by Herder's friend J.F. Blumenbach, that geography determines the unitary human species into distinct "varieties" or "races." He draws from Blumenbach's mature theory of race, *De generis humani*, to explain the geographic causes of racial differentiation in human beings.¹⁹¹ Blumenbach's treatise defends the monogenetic thesis that human beings, although divided into at least five distinct varieties¹⁹² (*Rassen*, as Kant called them in 1777¹⁹³), comprise but one species. Notably, Blumenbach departs from the scientific consensus of his time by not making the generation of fertile offspring the base criterion of specieshood.¹⁹⁴ Instead, he conjectures that agreement of "form and constitution" among the different varieties—e.g., their erect posture, flat pelvis, two hands, and close-set teeth—are better indicators of specieshood than fertile offspring.¹⁹⁵ Additionally, Blumenbach identifies adaptability to diverse geographies and "unlimited liberty of diet and locality"—what Herder earlier referred to as humankind's original spherelessness—as definitive properties of the species.¹⁹⁶ The empirical conjecture that humankind's original geographic condition is underdetermined is the cornerstone of Blumenbach's epigenetic account of racial difference. Like Herder, he views this original underdeterminedness of human beings as the reason for their greater susceptibility, as compared to other animals, to the natural phenomenon of "degeneration" (*Ausartung*). Degeneration is the process by which external stimuli such as climate, diet, and mode of life effect alterations upon the process of natural genesis, the first-natural *Bildung*, of a species.¹⁹⁷ The marked differences in skin color, hair texture, and facial formation between Caucasians and Americans, or between Ethiopians and Mongolians, result from the unrelenting external pressures of climate and diet sustained over thousands of years.¹⁹⁸

Blumenbach famously equates the original *Stamm* with the Caucasian race, resting his case on his personal aesthetic judgment that their exceptional beauty must entail their biological priority.¹⁹⁹ Here it should be noted that nothing in what Blumenbach has thus far proposed compels him to pick out an extant example of "original" humanity. Indeed, it is entirely commensurable

¹⁹¹ Blumenbach's first theory of race, which he completed for his doctorate at Göttingen in 1775, was a preformationist theory. But after rejecting preformationism in favor of epigenesis, Blumenbach retrofitted his account of the causes of racial differentiation to his new theory.

¹⁹² Some philosophers of race are reviving the Blumenbachian classification of races into Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. See Quayshawn Spencer, "A Radical Solution to the Race Problem," *Philosophy of Science* 81, no. 5 (2014): 1025–1038.

¹⁹³ Immanuel Kant, "Of the Different Human Races," translated by John Mark Mikkelsen, in *The Idea of Race*, edited by Robert Bernasconi (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000).

¹⁹⁴ Following the consensus, Blumenbach acknowledges that members of the different varieties are able to beget offspring with one another that are themselves fertile. Contra the consensus, however, he does not think that reproduction is a *sufficient* proof for the unity of a species, for he thinks that there may yet be counterexamples to this rule, such as a chimpanzee and an orangutan having a fertile offspring together, that have not been discovered because of the diffuse distribution of these animals across the world. See Blumenbach, "Natural Varieties," 189.

¹⁹⁵ Blumenbach, *ibid.*, §1-5.

¹⁹⁶ Blumenbach, *ibid.*, §18. Like Herder, Blumenbach thinks that reason makes human beings freer than other animals, yet by reason he does not mean pure reason, but something like what Herder means, i.e., the ongoing determination of the mental powers in relation to their geographic environment.

¹⁹⁷ Blumenbach, *ibid.*, §34-36.

¹⁹⁸ Robert Bernasconi notes that Kant views racial differentiation as supporting the postulate of natural purposiveness, since it shows how nature alters the human form to enable it to survive in local conditions. "Kant's and Blumenbach's Polyps," in *The German Invention of Race*, ed. Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 83.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, §81.

with his theory to conjecture that the original, non-degenerated human beings have vanished from the earth as a result of the incessant action of *Ausartung* upon natural genesis from time immemorial.²⁰⁰ And if this were the case, then every human being on earth could be considered biologically racialized without thereby implying anything about their proximity to the pre-racial original. Still, Blumenbach's aesthetic bias toward Caucasians leads him to ask a critical question that sheds additional light on his conception of human *Bildung*. In his *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte*, Blumenbach considers the claim of some of his scientific contemporaries that Negroes from Africa, on the basis that they do not display certain (European) markers of "civilization," belong to a different humanoid species than Caucasians from Europe. He judges this kind of inference to be false, not only because the physiological data support monogenesis, but also because—and this is his main point—Negroes have acquired (European) civilization through cultural education. "[T]here is no so-called savage nation known under the sun which has so much distinguished itself by such examples of perfectibility and original capacity for scientific culture, and thereby attached itself so closely to the most civilized nations of the earth, as the Negro." The statement indicates that Blumenbach's conception of natural genesis encompasses both the natural degeneration of the *Bildungstrieb* as well as a kind of second-natural, formal education that shapes one's inner culture.

Hegel, for his part, adheres to the same Caucasian prioritarianism as Blumenbach, although it may be more appropriate to call Hegel's view a kind of eurocentric racialism, given its connection to his philosophy of world-history. For example, Hegel says that "Americans" (a term that refers to the pre-Colombian indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America) are "feeble" and "savage" for having died in large numbers after contact with the biological contagions and imperial war-machines of their European invaders. "Negroes" from sub-Saharan Africa, meanwhile, are inferior for "let[ting] themselves be sold into slavery" and lack an "inner drive toward culture (*Kultur*)." Hegel's descriptions of "Mongolians" and "Malays" are somewhat less pejorative but no less racist. With "Caucasians," however, the racial group comprised mainly of peoples who espouse the Abrahamic faiths, "mind attains absolute unity with itself," i.e., develops itself to its full rational capacities. But this really only happens among the Christian peoples of Europe, Hegel thinks, for Mohammedans and European Jews supposedly remain ensconced in theological abstractions that prevent them from realizing their full rational capacities. Importantly, Hegel's eurocentric racialism does not mitigate his universalism regarding the human capacity for thought. Throughout the *Enzyklopädie*, he speaks of the "implicit rationality" of all human beings, and with regard to racial differences in particular, he rejects the notion that its supposed racial priority entitles the Caucasian race to dominate other races, or that non-Caucasian races are somehow not capable of or entitled to a fully developed rational existence. Rather, he implies that becoming rational and cultured (*gebildete*) is the fate of all peoples who contact Christian Europe. For example, according to Hegel, the self-emancipated black people of the Haitian Republic found their way to revolution and independence out of slavery via their exposure to the French principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.²⁰¹ Such a view illustrates that Hegel, like just about all of his major philosophical contemporaries except Herder, viewed *Bildung* as having an implicit racial teleology that pointed toward the europeanization of the entire human world. The justifications for colonialism, imperialism, and the other forms of political domination of which Hegel often speaks can be traced directly to this mindset.

²⁰⁰ Lenoir, "The Gottingen School," 132.

²⁰¹ I will critically evaluate Hegel's views on Haiti and revolutionary political struggle in the concluding chapter of this dissertation; for now, I am just reporting them.

A Solar State: The *Bildung* of Human Sociality²⁰²

“*Bildung*...is therefore liberation and work towards a higher liberation...”
-*Philosophy of Right*, §187

I.

Up to this point, Hegel’s account of the human form of *Bildung* has alluded to, without fully elaborating upon, the existence of a bounded social world within which the human life-form grows, conserves, and reproduces itself. In *Philosophy of Nature*, this world appears in broad outline as a form of animal species-life that is thoroughly permeated by thinking. Yet because thinking imbues animality with a more-than-natural character, Hegel limits what can be said about human species-life as a strictly natural phenomenon. In the Subjective Mind division of *Philosophy of Mind*, the human social world appears in much sharper outline as the totality of objective institutions and normative practices within and against which an individual’s progress through the “ages of life” (*Lebensalter*) can be measured. Here, the *Bildung* of human subjectivity is a function of one’s alienation from and restitution with their natural embodiment, on the one hand, and their alienation from and restitution with their sociality, on the other. The “needs of second nature” that emerge in the course of this *Bildung*-process are socially mediated from the get-go. The individual’s investment in their social world – their desire, specifically, to be recognized by its objective institutions and normative practices – shows them to be byproducts of that world, crafted in its image. The same holds for sociality in its relation to individuality. The social world evolves apace with its individual members, organizing their diverse and often contrary activities into a “universal will” with a determinate constitution and purpose.

The Objective Mind division of *Philosophy of Mind* and its companion volume, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, attempt to demonstrate precisely how the social world emanates from the wills of its individual members, undergoing its own *Bildung*-process in relation to them. In these works, Hegel presents a historical case study of “modern ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*)²⁰³, a world of bourgeois family, civil society, and political state that vaguely resembles Friedrich Wilhelm II’s Prussia.²⁰⁴ Hegel’s presentation of modern ethical life hearkens to Aristotle’s presentation of the Greek *polis* in Book I of the *Politics*. There, Aristotle divides the *polis* into the three nested spheres of patriarchal household, village, and political state, wherein the political state is the “highest” of these and aims at the good of justice.²⁰⁵ Aristotle argues that political states, like the families and villages that comprise them, are natural organizations and that human beings are naturally political animals.²⁰⁶ Material need brings human beings into political intercourse, and the administration of justice, the highest of all goods, binds them together intergenerationally. Because the political community seeks the highest of all goods, Aristotle views it as being conceptually prior to villages,

²⁰² Significant portions of this chapter have been adapted from my 2018 article, “Education as Absolute Transition in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. 46, No.3, 237-258.

²⁰³ Terry Pinkard puts this form of social organization in its historical context, showing that Hegel idealizes certain aspects of it in order to present it as a synthesis of monarchical, aristocratic, and proto-democratic elements. See Terry Pinkard, “Ethical Form in the External State: Bourgeois, Citizens, and Capital,” *Crisis & Critique*, Volume 4, Issue 1, 293-330, 2017.

²⁰⁴ See Allen Wood, “Introduction,” in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*.

²⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, in *Collected Writings of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1984), 1252a5; 1253a35.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 1252b25-30.

families, and even individuals, “since the whole is of necessity prior to the part” and “if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand.”²⁰⁷

Hegel’s account of modern ethical life follows Aristotle’s account of the *polis* on nearly all of these counts. The triad of bourgeois family, civil society, and political state is a redux of the classical framework, conserving the basic structure of natural (read: patriarchal) kinship, economic interdependence, and purposive community in updated forms. Moreover, Hegel accepts Aristotle’s premise that the political community aims at the highest good (for European “moderns,” this is the administration of justice *with freedom*) and so is conceptually prior to the economic and familial spheres. Hegel’s most significant break from Aristotle concerns thought’s contribution to human sociality. Although Aristotle acknowledges thought’s role in the formulation of laws and ethical practices, he submits it nevertheless to naturalistic analysis. Hegel, by contrast, argues that thought’s law-making function raises human beings out of living nature into a world of their own making and so should not be reduced to naturalistic categories alone. So, whereas Aristotle views human beings as naturally determined political animals whose ends are posited by nature, Hegel views them as self-determining political animals who posit and pursue their own ends.

Still, despite its break with classical naturalism, Hegel’s idealism highlights the social world’s homology to living nature, describing it as an organic body of reciprocally responsive parts.²⁰⁸ This has led commentators to interpret *Philosophy of Right* as a “social ontology”²⁰⁹ or “ontology of sociality”²¹⁰ that discloses the processual structure of human sociality in general via the historical form of Prussian modernity in particular. According to Frederick Neuhouser, Hegel’s social ontology is a philosophical account of “self-conscious life” (*selbstbewusstes Leben*, Hegel’s term for the unity of human individuality and the human genus). Like unconscious life, self-conscious life is organized around the principle of self-reproduction and posits the ontological priority of the genus over the individual. Unlike unconscious life, however, self-conscious life is free, and as Neuhouser states elsewhere, “freedom does not come naturally to [it]” but comes about via a *Bildung* shaped by thinking.²¹¹ What this means is that self-conscious life must first of all satisfy the needs imparted to it by nature while additionally positing novel ends for itself. In other words, self-conscious life has the dual purpose of fulfilling and sublimating nature. (Objective institutions are concrete expressions of its ongoing attempt to do this.)

Neuhouser’s interpretation of Hegel’s social ontology holds that human societies liberate themselves – i.e., sublimate nature into freedom through *Bildung* – by adhering to the model of the organic body and its parts. Michael Thompson develops this ontological line further by trying to articulate the content of the organic unity of individual and society. According to Thompson, insofar as the political community is free, it provides conditions under which the individual “knows that his freedom is functionally dependent on the ontology of social relations that constitute him.”²¹² What every individual member of the free political community knows, Thompson says, “is not that he is negated by the social whole, but rather that, qua individual, he is an integral part of a sociality that shapes him [and which] he helps to shape and constitute.”²¹³ What grows out of the individual’s grasp of the ontological structure of human sociality is the “unity and

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 1252b15-20.

²⁰⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §302, §324.

²⁰⁹ Neuhouser, “Hegel on Social Ontology,” 31.

²¹⁰ Michael Thompson, “Freedom and Universality: Hegel’s Republican Conception of Modernity,” *Critique & Crisis*, Volume 4, Issue 1, 2017.

²¹¹ Frederick Neuhouser, *Hegel’s Social Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 149.

²¹² Thompson, “Freedom and Universality,” 418.

²¹³ Ibid, 415.

interpenetration of individuality and universality,”²¹⁴ a cognitive life in which universal norms provide the content of one’s habits, beliefs, and actions. Thompson concludes that Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* points to a “post-liberal” form of political community in which the state is not merely a reconciler of competing individual interests, as in liberal-capitalist societies, but a generator of common aims, as in classical republicanism. Hegel’s modernized republicanism, according to Thompson, requires more than the “recognition of others and their [ethical] statuses.” Indeed, it requires that political subjects grasp “the totality of [their] social relations and interdependencies as an ontological structure that has constitutive powers over [their] lives.”²¹⁵

By focusing so much on how individuals cognize their social relations, Thompson paints a picture in which conscious reflection on the ontological structure of social reality is the ultimate guarantor of human freedom. While this ontology-centered reading of *Philosophy of Right* is not necessarily incompatible with a history-centered one, it nonetheless leaves much unsaid about the actual historical conditions that enable – or for that matter, get in the way of – the rational cognition of human interdependency. Attempting to supersede ontology-centered readings like Thompson’s, Terry Pinkard argues that Hegel’s primary project in *Philosophy of Right* is to reflect on whether European modernity – a historical form of life in which individuals live together yet “at a distance” in their familial, commercial, and political relationships – has the capacity to instill consciousness of the deep sociality Thompson describes.²¹⁶ Pinkard ultimately argues that the emergent commercial relations of civil society, in which people have to interface regularly with strangers in order to secure their own livelihoods, furnishes the formal conditions under which the rational cognition of human sociality becomes possible. Initially, this cognition emerges out of one’s abstract recognition that others have the same individual rights and moral standing that they do. It becomes more concrete as they convert that abstract recognition into an affirmation of their solidary purpose to bring about the highest good for all (justice with freedom). So, instead of thinking about how to use civil society solely as a means to their selfish ends, individuals start to reflect on how their political community guarantees their very livelihoods, becoming, as it were, “personally devoted to civic improvement, progress, personal and social advancement, the correction of crude mores, elevation to the finer things – in short, to all the elements of classical *Bildung*.”²¹⁷

By attempting to explain how the rational cognition of human solidarity emerges out of modern historical conditions, Pinkard has to construe Hegel’s account of the transition from civil society to the political community in rather idealized terms. Yet, according to Pinkard, Hegel is keenly aware of the pathologies plaguing modern ethical life, including its systematic immiseration and disfranchisement of the poor, the colonized, and the enslaved, whose various struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and European supremacy haunt *Philosophy of Right* from start to finish. That said, Pinkard’s (not to mention Neuhaus’s and Thompson’s) reading of Hegel propounds a critical Hegelian faith in the possibility that a “true,” which is to say free and equal, state could grow immanently out of the alienating conditions of European modernity. The *Bildung* of selfish burghers into solidary citizens is central to every story about this possibility. Whether one identifies with an “ontological” or “historical” Hegel makes little difference in the telling.

In this chapter, I seek to build a bridge between these two interpretations of Hegel’s theory of human sociality by focusing on where they converge, namely, in their reliance upon *Bildung* as

²¹⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258.

²¹⁵ Thompson, “Freedom and Universality,” 409.

²¹⁶ Pinkard, “Ethical Form,” 308.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 323.

a central process in the actualization of human freedom. My method, as in earlier chapters, starts by stipulating what Hegel means by *Bildung* in the context in question. Here, the context is the Objective Mind division of *Philosophy of Mind* and *Philosophy of Right*, two texts that elaborate Hegel's theory of human sociality through the analysis of Prussian modernity. I stipulate that, in these texts, *Bildung* is the formation of universal dispositions and modes of thinking out of emergent concrete relations between individuals and their social institutions. My shorthand English term for this process will be "political education." Then, I argue that, via the lens of *Bildung*, Hegel catches a glimpse of the conditions under which democratic forms of self-consciousness and sociality, ones that genuinely achieve "the interpenetration of individuality and universality," emerge out of modern ethical life. At the same time, however, Hegel's account of the *Bildung* of democratic self-consciousness and democratic sociality reveals structural obstacles within modern ethical life that preclude their full actualization. Although I could point to numerous examples that corroborate this thesis, I will zoom in on Hegel's analysis of "public opinion" (*öffentliche Meinung*), a permanent crisis of rationality that reveals the stringent epistemic constraints that modern political communities foist upon their citizens. Such constraints, I argue, make it challenging for citizens to actualize their freedom in relation to their political states, and conversely, for political states to evolve apace with their memberships.

II.

How does Hegel present the basic structures of human sociality in general and modern ethical life in particular, and where does the concept of *Bildung* fit into this presentation? Hegel's conception of human sociality in general mirrors his tripartite conception of human subjectivity, distinguishing three essential moments in its basic structure. The first of these is what Hegel calls the "immediate unity of nature and mind." As human subjectivity, recall, this relation takes the form of a thinking animal body in which the need to posit and realize a second nature for itself is nascent. As human objectivity, the immediate unity of nature and mind assumes an organized social form held together by the need for the affective bond of "love."²¹⁸ Love is the feeling of one's intrinsic sociality, the pre-cognitive sense that one is a recognized member of a whole (as such, love is not a *concept* of the unity of the genus but an *intuition* of it). According to Hegel, in modern ethical life, the organized form of love is the bourgeois family, the society of father, mother, and child whose unity derives from shared feelings of mutual recognition and service. Importantly, the family is not just an organization of reciprocal affects but also of material holdings. The members have a common household to maintain, and each contributes to the preservation of the collective property on which their material survival depends.

The second moment of human sociality is the formal intersubjectivity in which individuals come into contact with others outside of their immediate kinship structure. This is the objective complement to subjectivity's "universal self-consciousness," wherein it becomes aware of the abstract fact of human interdependence. Lacking the love that holds kin together, formal intersubjectivity is the affectively impoverished relation that obtains among acquaintances and strangers. Yet the absence of deep affective bonds does not imply that there is no material basis for this relation. The individual's desire to meet others outside their immediate circle – to increase their access to economic resources, to find friends and sexual partners, etc. – necessitates it. Nature thus provides the material basis for wider-reaching human solidarities, even if some additional thought is required to establish them. In modern ethical life, Hegel names this moment the

²¹⁸ Hegel, PR, §158.

“spiritual animal kingdom,”²¹⁹ also known as “civil society,” wherein the family’s love dissolves into a world of self-interested individuals who view their nascent cooperation merely as a means to satisfying their private needs. And because individuals view their particular interest as the impetus of their entrance into society, they live under the misapprehension – the subjective “derangement,”²²⁰ we would rightly call it – that their particularity has priority over universality.

The third moment of human sociality encompasses the normative institutions that redress the alienating effects of formal intersubjectivity. Where love fails, law prevails. Hegel recognizes two kinds of law: “laws of nature” and “laws of right.” The former are “valid as they stand” because they come from a source external to mind; the latter are “something laid down [by thought]” and so are not validated by the mere fact of their existence.²²¹ It is the latter kind of law that has priority for self-conscious life. Thought is the author of the laws of right, and it is thought that passes ultimate judgment on them. The subjective complement to objective law is the “driveless being” (*trieblose Sein*) that results from mind’s systematization of the body’s natural drives. A human being that has superseded natural need into driveless being is one who determines their existence through an entirely volitional intelligence. Similarly, law-governed sociality determines its existence through collective willing, constructing an institutional framework through which constituents connect epistemically to their community. To connect epistemically with one’s community is to participate in its actualization and know with certainty that it is not some external imposition but a manifestation of a people’s inner willing. In modern ethical life, Hegel proposes, this moment finds its objectification in the constitution of the political state. The state makes official what civil society cannot, transforming the formal relations of interdependence into objective customs, practices, and laws that make binding claims on all who fall within their jurisdiction.

Hegel maintains that the human social world organizes itself partly unconsciously. “In this sense,” he writes, “[Sophocles’] Antigone proclaims that no one knows where the laws come from.”²²² That is to say, the laws arise naturally out of human life-activity; no society thrives and reproduces itself without them. Laws are to sociality what habits are to subjectivity. Just as habit emerges through the soul’s disidentification and reidentification with nature, replacing the bodily drives with a self-conscious, driveless being, so law emerges out of the genus’s concerted effort to organize itself into a reproducible shape, substituting universal practices where unregulated instincts once ruled. The resemblance of habit and law shows the entwinement of the subjective and objective sides of human *Bildung*. Hegel describes the individual’s natural bond to their society as a “relationless identity,”²²³ one more intimate, even, than faith or trust, which are relations mediated by reflection. Law is the “actual living principle of self-consciousness,”²²⁴ the first steward of human freedom that imprints itself upon subjectivity as a second nature.²²⁵ Still, the concerted mental activity out of which law emerges is not only an unconscious, naturalistic process. It is, additionally, the objective side of mind’s more-than-natural, self-conscious activity. Within this world of self-posed constraints, human sociality differentiates itself from nature and

²¹⁹ Hegel, PhG, §397.

²²⁰ Recall my analysis of the youth’s derangement in Chapter Two.

²²¹ Hegel, PR, Preface, 13-14.

²²² Hegel, PR, §144.

²²³ See Andreja Novakovic’s illuminating discussion of this relationless identity in the first chapter of *Hegel on Second Nature in Ethical Life*.

²²⁴ Hegel, PR, §147.

²²⁵ Novakovic argues that relationless identity is the “embedded starting point” of modern ethical life that philosophy aims to describe. See the Introduction of *Hegel on Second Nature*.

determines its own ends. Only an underdetermined, negative notion of human freedom could view the organized social world as an obstacle to its ends, therefore. By contrast, a positive notion of freedom as the activity of setting one's own ends within a determinate legal framework views the organized social world as the precondition of its flourishing as well as the product of its willing.

That there can be such discordant notions of freedom entails that there must be some educative process by which individuality and universality are brought (or not brought) into relationless identity with one another. Hegel's term for this process is *Bildung*. In §187 of *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel stipulates that *Bildung* is

the absolute transition to...ethical life, which is no longer immediate and natural, but spiritual and at the same time raised to the shape of universality...[It] is through this work of *Bildung* that the subjective will attains objectivity even within itself...; and, since it is from particularity that universality receives both the content which fills it and its infinite self-determination, particularity is itself present in ethical life as free subjectivity which has infinite being-for-itself.²²⁶

The *Bildung*-process described here has subjective and objective sides. Its subjective side should already be familiar: it is the process by which individuality (the finite person) grows toward universality (the genus) through the natural ages of life. Subjective *Bildung* is "work" because it requires discipline to organize the natural drives into a rational system of habits, and it is "universal" because it must be consonant with the social world in which it unfolds. An individual's system of habits reflects their degree of understanding that the laws are the precondition of their freedom. But just as objectivity impacts on subjectivity, so does subjectivity impact on objectivity. Organized society transforms space with its constituents' evolving orientations to it, recording their progress in its laws and institutions as an adult might record a child's increasing height with notch-marks on the wall. In other words, society undergoes *Bildung* along with its constituents, taking the protean shape of their willing. When examining a historical form of human sociality such as modern ethical life, therefore, the institutions that comprise it must be viewed not as static objects but as the organic byproducts of the human *Bildung*-process, relating to their constituents as living bodies do to their parts.

Hegel helpfully contrasts his organicist theory of *Bildung* with theories of social contractarianism and utilitarianism. Of these foils Hegel writes:

The ideas of the innocence of the state of nature and of the ethical simplicity of uncultured [*ungebildeter*] peoples imply that *Bildung* will be regarded as something purely external and associated with corruption. On the other hand, if one believes that needs, their satisfaction, the pleasures and comforts of individual life, etc. are absolute ends, *Bildung* will be regarded as merely a means to these ends. Both of these views show a lack of familiarity with the nature of mind (*Geist*) and with the end of reason.²²⁷

The state-of-nature or contractarian view posits a hard-and-fast distinction between nature and human artifice and so misunderstands how infinite mind takes on a finite shape in nature in order to supersede it. On such a view, objective institutions and norms necessarily appear as coercive and dominating, when in fact, they ought to be viewed as having arisen out of the activity of the people who produce them. The utilitarian, meanwhile, views *Bildung* merely as a means to the realization of hedonic (first-natural) pleasures. Such a view fails to see how mind transforms nature into a system of habits and thereby determines its own ends for itself. The organicist view of *Bildung*, by contrast, takes nature as its starting point and emulates it, discovering along the way

²²⁶ Hegel, PR, §187.

²²⁷ Ibid.

that nature is but a satire of mind and must be rationally organized. By managing nature, self-conscious life posits novel ends for itself, while nature conspires with mind toward the latter's emancipation.

Another noteworthy predicate of Hegel's concept of *Bildung* is "absolute transition" (*absolute Durchgangspunkt*, literally, "absolute passing-through point"). To make sense of this predicate, it is helpful to recall Hegel's analysis of life and death. What makes a living thing vital is the constant tension it sustains with its surroundings. The natural soul satisfies one need, then another, then another; the mind posits one end, then another, then another. When a human being loses their capacity to sustain contradictions with their natural and social environments, they cease to be the kind of thing that can support life. That is to say, one's *Bildung* is tethered to one's capacity to withstand a certain degree of alienation from nature and society. The growth, self-conservation, and self-reproduction that comes about through *Bildung* is a function of being able to posit differences between oneself and one's natural and social others. When this capacity withers, so does life, and death quickly follows. This principle obtains as much in the second-natural as the first-natural order. Just as maladapted behaviors can threaten a nonhuman creature's survival, so can inflexible habits threaten a human being's survival. "Human beings even die as a result of habit," Hegel observes, "[for] they are only active in so far as they have not yet attained something and wish to assert themselves and show what they can do in pursuit of it."²²⁸ Thus the formation of habit must remain purposive toward freedom if it is to be an enlivening force. Only as an incompletely realized being, striving for something as yet unattained, does the individual remain mentally alive. Should they fall out of this absolute "passing-through point" from first to second nature, their mind shuts down and their will atrophies, resulting in a loss of vitality and, at the extreme, mental death. Such an event happens when the individual begins to view their subjective consonance with society as something granted, rather than as an achievement of their own free will. Societies experience an analogous atrophy when they rigidify their external form, making themselves impervious to reforms that restore faith with their constituents. As Hegel writes: "[The] unity of the [social] body is essential to the [body's] health, and if its parts grow internally hard, the result is death."²²⁹

The social relation that has the greatest bearing upon this organic *Bildung*-process is that between the individual and the political state. According to Hegel, *Bildung* cannot fulfill itself when considered one-sidedly as a process of mere natural genesis. In §153 of *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel cites an apocryphal conversation between a Greek father and a follower of Pythagoras concerning best practices for bringing up children: "In response to a father's question about the best way to educate (*zu erziehen*) his son in ethical matters, a Pythagorean replied: 'Make him a citizen of a state with good laws.'"²³⁰ To the Pythagorean's dictum Hegel adds this criticism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

Those pedagogical (*pädagogischen*) experiments in removing people from the ordinary life of the present and bringing them up in the country have been futile, because one cannot successfully isolate people from the laws of the world. Even if young people have to be educated in solitude (*Wenn auch die Bildung der Jugend in Einsamkeit geschehen muß*), no one should imagine that the breath of the spiritual world will not eventually find its way into this solitude and that the power of the world spirit is too weak for it to gain control of

²²⁸ Hegel, PR, §151.

²²⁹ Ibid, §324.

²³⁰ Ibid, §153.

such remote regions. The individual attains his right only by becoming a citizen of a good state.²³¹

For Hegel, a *Bildung* disconnected from the political state is inconceivable because it negates the fact that the political state and law in general are natural outgrowths of human activity and so are requisite for freedom. *Bildung*, then, insofar as it is natural genesis, must also be political education. While the image of the “breath of spirit” pursuing the individual to the ends of the earth may sound mystical to some ears, the same point can be put more plainly. Hegel is saying that the state inevitably contacts the child wherever they are, if not through the physical force of its institutions, then in the persons of their guardians, whose ideas about childrearing bear the indelible markings of their socialization.

Another thing to observe about this passage is that it contains a rough taxonomy of the moments of political education as they unfold within modern ethical life. Three distinct terms for educative activity appear in close proximity: 1. *zu erziehen*, the nominative equivalent of which is *Erziehung*, or child-rearing; 2. *pädagogischen*, the adjectival form of *Pädagogik*, which is the art of school-based instruction; and 3. *Bildung*, Hegel’s word for the process of political education in general. These three terms, I want to show, map structurally onto the three moments of modern ethical life. *Erziehung* is the main theme of Hegel’s account of child development within the bourgeois family; *Pädagogik* (and its cousin, *Unterricht*) refer to the formal-vocational learning that takes place within civil society; *Bildung*, finally, captures the citizen’s formative interactions with the political state and vice versa. In the upcoming section, I reconstruct what each of these concepts means in its particular sphere and show how together they track the social *Bildung*-process toward the “interpenetration of individuality and universality.” Although the content of these moments of *Bildung* reflects the historical context of modern ethical life (specifically, in the ways that *Erziehung*, *Pädagogik*, and *Bildung* are practiced in a society that prioritizes freedom), the structure of the political-educational process itself is of a more general, ontological purport. Hegel’s linking in the above passage of ancient-Greek and modern-European sensibilities toward the educative power of the political state is evidence for this. Hence, what I have to say hereafter can be received equally well by both “historical” and “ontological” Hegelians, insofar as each begins with *Bildung* in order to explain freedom’s actualization.

III.

The first stage of modern ethical life is the bourgeois family, which Hegel defines as “spirit’s feeling of its own unity,”²³² a bond of father, mother, and child held together by natural love and private-property holdings. *Erziehung*, or the rearing of children, is the formative activity that takes place within the bourgeois-family structure. In the account of the ages of life, Hegel

²³¹ Ibid. To be fair, Rousseau is not so extreme a naturalist with regard to freedom that he denies the state’s role in actualizing it. Indeed, for him, “[t]he state is the actualization of human freedom” (see Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory*, 56). As Frederick Neuhouser contends, Rousseau’s ultimate justification of the state resides in the idea that “[the] state plays an indispensable role in constituting human beings as bearers of free wills and is therefore essential to the fulfillment of their true nature as free beings.” Rousseau’s declaration that man is born free yet everywhere is in chains is not meant to imply that human society as such has to be a shackle on the freeborn will. On the contrary, Rousseau insists that human beings must pursue society as one among a host of natural needs. His despair over humanity’s self-imprisonment is less a rejection of society itself than a comment on a society that has developed unnatural needs by way of *amour-propre*. In consideration of this, *Emile* is less a book about a young boy’s education in nature as it is about the reader’s un-education in the corrupted opinions and mores of modern society.

²³² Hegel, PR, §140.

observes that children have a natural “striving” (*Streben*) for *Erziehung*. His account of political education links this natural striving to a “right” (*Recht*). The basis of the child’s right to *Erziehung* is that human beings do not attain their social existence by natural instinct but by a conscious combination of individual and concerted effort. That is to say, because children, at a certain point, begin to strive naturally for *Erziehung* but cannot fulfill it on their own, they are entitled to receive organized guidance from adults, so that they may one day be able to participate in the world beyond the household. *Erziehung* has the dual goal, then, of affirming the child’s immediate connection to the adults in their family and offering them glimpses of the wider world of adulthood. Such glimpses awaken the child’s feeling for the universal order while they are still being shielded by the family’s love.

Children have to be initiated into habit formation by way of external discipline. The purpose of imposing such discipline “is to break the child’s self-will in order to eradicate the merely sensuous and natural.” Discipline happens entirely on the basis of arbitrary parental discretion. Parents do not owe their children reasons for disciplining them (although their hidden reason, so to speak, is always to help their children become socially well-adjusted beings), while children owe their parents obedience by virtue of the former’s natural authority over them. Hegel unequivocally affirms the intense feeling of subordination that pervades childhood, noting that, without it, the child would not develop the “longing to grow up.”²³³ The arbitrariness of parental discipline awakens children to their dissatisfaction with their merely natural being. Children in turn develop a desire to belong to the adult world “whose superiority they sense.”²³⁴ This perceived superiority is linked in the child’s mind with social relations in which the uneven distribution of authority seems rationally justified. Adults do not wield the same paternalistic power over one another that they wield over children. While hierarchies may obtain among adults, “because I said so” is not a sufficient reason for one adult to exact something from another. An *Erziehung* properly conducted enables the child to *feel* – but not yet to *think* – the rationality of this adult practice of giving and receiving reasons for their behavior.

On Hegel’s account, the right to *Erziehung* is largely an entitlement to formative discipline and requires mandatory services to the family’s material holdings. Hegel stresses the difference between the situation of a well-reared child and that of a slave. “The services which may be required of children should therefore contribute solely to the end of their upbringing; they must not claim to be justified in their own right, for the most unethical of all relationships is that in which children are slaves.”²³⁵ The specific sense in which household services might contribute to a child’s upbringing without being exploitative is in checking²³⁶ and redirecting the child’s undisciplined energies into socially valued labor. The toiling of a slave, by contrast, is based entirely on exploitation, specifically that of being forced to work by a master who pretends to be an independent authority. Hegel adds later that the legal position of Roman children as slaves is one of the institutions that “most tarnishes the Roman legal code,” revealing its tendency toward a cold legal formalism that negates the unifying power of familial love in favor of one-sided, exploitative domination.²³⁷ This is further evidence that what is chiefly at stake for Hegel in the

²³³ Ibid, §174.

²³⁴ Ibid, §175.

²³⁵ Ibid, §174.

²³⁶ Hegel, PhG, §195. “Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence. Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing.”

²³⁷ Hegel, PR, §175.

so-called right to *Erziehung* is the child's introduction to responsibly handled social authority. Parents have a duty to find the fragile equilibrium between rearing and subservience in the services they exact from their children. Services rendered by an enslaved child do not necessarily have to contribute to their social development or include them as a participant in the emotional economy of the home. Services rendered by the well-reared child, on the other hand, must nurture the child's sense of membership in the family as well as their desire for a self-sufficient future.

Hegel does not expect *Erziehung* to nullify children's natural drives but to help them begin to order them into a rational system. Good parents affirm what is natural in their children without allowing them to find a permanent home in nature. They show their young ones that only a second-natural existence is a worthwhile one, bestowing on them the feeling that the social order in which they live is justified. An *Erziehung* thus undertaken leads to the dissolution of the familial household in two respects. The first concerns the child's relation to universal law: the child ages naturally into formal legal recognition as a free personality capable of owning property and managing a household independently of their parents. The second concerns their particular economic livelihood. Little by little, the child's longing for self-sufficiency begins to alienate them from their feeling of dependency on their parents and nudges them out of the house into civil society. At this point, their parents cease to be their rightful guardians and sole connection to the world. This twofold dissolution of natural love into formal intersubjectivity reveals the compulsory element of *Erziehung*; the child has both the *right* and the *duty* to grow up. Here is Hegel explaining compulsory formal schooling, a new institution of modern Prussia, in §239:

In [its] character as a universal family, civil society has the duty and right, in the face of arbitrariness and contingency on the part of the parents, to supervise and influence the *Erziehung* of children in so far as this has a bearing on their capacity to become members of [civil] society, and particularly if this *Erziehung* is to be completed not by the parents themselves, but by others. Insofar as communal arrangements can be made for this purpose, it is incumbent upon civil society to make them.²³⁸

This gradual handing over of educative activity from the family to civil society begins while the child is still dependent on their parents. Civil society's shared expectation that the generation coming of age will one day cease to be active members of their immediate families and become active members of the "universal family" establishes its interest in the upbringing of everyone's children. Of course, in earliest childhood, it is still the parents who are charged with nurturing their children, "giving them the means and skills [they] require in order to earn [their] living from universal resources."²³⁹ But given that children's livelihoods will eventually have to be gained from cooperative interactions with others outside the family, it becomes desirable—indeed compulsory—that they should receive at least some of their educational provisions from civil society in the form of public instruction (*Pädagogik/Unterricht*).

The second moment of modern ethical life is civil society, the social sphere, according to Hegel, "in which all individual characteristics...are liberated, and where the waves of all passions surge forth."²⁴⁰ Hegel describes civil society as a world in which the natural love of the family has dissolved into a world of self-interested adults who view society as a means to satisfying particularistic needs. Despite its internal dividedness, however, civil society is rational insofar as it organizes an objective "system of needs" in which individuals work cooperatively, albeit unwittingly, to take care of their animality. As the "spiritual animal kingdom" that mediates

²³⁸ Ibid, §239.

²³⁹ Ibid, §238.

²⁴⁰ Hegel, PR, §182.

between the familial household and the political state, civil society's rationality is underdeveloped and constitutes a "world of appearance"²⁴¹ in which individuals interact in a formally universal sense that does not yet reflect the concrete universality of the political state. As formal intersubjectivity, civil society reiterates the moment of human natural genesis in which mind multiplies its needs and the means of satisfying them. It enacts this multiplication of needs and means through concrete analysis, sorting them into different categories and ranking their priority based on its own prudential judgment. "In the end," Hegel says,

it is no longer need but opinion that has to be satisfied, and it is a distinctive feature of *Bildung* that it resolves the concrete into its particulars. The very multiplication of needs has a restraining influence on desire, for if people make use of many things, the pressure to obtain any one of these which they might need is less strong, and this is a sign that necessity in general is less powerful.²⁴²

The process of mastering natural need by exercising judgment over it is an inherently social process. Satisfying even the most basic human needs requires the cooperation of many individuals who make their own subjective judgments. Political economy is the social process by which these differences are workably reconciled. Such a process lacks all the warmth of the family's love; indeed, it can be a cold, ruthless, and materialistic experience. Nevertheless, the proliferation of needs gives priority to thought over nature and thus to self-determination over natural determination. So, while civil society is, in one sense, an objective system of needs, it is also, in another sense, a sphere of self-liberation.

Still, the love lost in the transition from the family to civil society is a major regression for the affective side of human sociality, one that must be repaired through concerted educative activity.²⁴³ Within Hegel's taxonomy, this reparative stage is called *Pädagogik* (alternatively, *Unterricht*) and is comprised of rigorous theoretical and practical learning in the form of public schooling and trade apprenticeships. In §151 of *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel says that "*Pädagogik* is the art of making human beings ethical: it considers them as natural beings and shows them how they can be reborn, and how their original nature can be transformed into a second, spiritual nature so that this spirituality becomes habitual to them."²⁴⁴ As the art of habit-formation, *Pädagogik* is a self-conscious intervention into human natural genesis, an attempt to organize the needs of first nature into a rational system that has a self-determining end in view. At this stage, the end in question is that of repairing the affective alienation into which the individual is thrown after graduating from the familial household. Hegel starts to explain how *Pädagogik* heals the loss of concrete social bonds in §187, where he says that individuals are private persons

who have their own interest as their end. Since this end is mediated through the universal, which thus appears to the individuals as a means, they can attain their end only in so far as they themselves determine their knowledge, volition, and action in a universal way and make themselves links in the chain of this continuum. In this situation, the interest of the Idea, which is not present in the consciousness of these members of civil society as such, is the process whereby their individuality and naturalness are raised, both by natural

²⁴¹ Ibid, §181.

²⁴² Ibid, §190.

²⁴³ I borrow Andrew Buchwalter's interpretation of the "reparative" function of civil society. See "The Ethicality of Civil Society: Bifurcation, *Bildung*, and Hegel's Supersession of the Aporias of Social Modernity," in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right: A Critical Guide*, ed. David James (Cambridge: CUP, 2017).

²⁴⁴ Hegel, PR, §151.

necessity and by their arbitrary needs, to formal freedom and formal universality of knowledge and volition, and subjectivity is educated in its particularity.²⁴⁵

That the universal appears to the individuals of civil society as a mere means indicates that they are under a misapprehension that their particular ends have priority over the universal ends of the community. It is the task of *Pädagogik*, as the transitional stage between child-rearing and political education, to correct this misapprehension and to start to present the universal ends of the community as primary, indeed as the very basis of the possibility of taking care of one's natural needs. Individuals participate in this corrective stage by studying the economic terrain around them and by shaping their economic activity in such a way that "subjective selfishness turns into a contribution toward the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else."²⁴⁶ Inasmuch as this self-fashioning is not consciously but instinctively done (I am under the misapprehension that my own needs are paramount), it is a natural activity that generates a formal relation only—that of mutual interdependence. Still, such formal interdependence or formal freedom is already a more complex expression of nature than is unmitigated self-interest. Hegel regards it as already starting to "eliminate the immediacy and individuality in which spirit is immersed, so that this externality (of ethical appearances) may take on the rationality of which it is capable...By this very means the form of universality comes into existence for itself in thought."²⁴⁷

The young adult's loss of their concrete feeling of being held by a community is in some sense a regression to a childhood without parents. A cold, materialistic society, ungrounded in the reasonless rationality of the family's love, views the individual's selfish particularity as something to be corrected. *Pädagogik* corrects the individual's misapprehension that their particularity has priority over the common good. It transforms the natural instinct of self-preservation into the habit of thinking of other's wellbeing as tied to one's own. Now, if this theoretical side of *Pädagogik* teaches individuals to grasp the "complex and general relations" that hold civil society together (that is, to begin to "think the genus" conceptually and to cancel the illusion of their social alienation), then its practical side has more directly to do with the concrete details of labor itself, namely, how to discipline oneself such that one's labor is directed at the satisfaction of others' needs in addition to one's own. Habit-formation is again paramount here. "Practical education through work," Hegel writes,

consists in the self-perpetuating need and habit of being occupied in one way or another, in the limitation of one's activity to suit both the nature of the material in question and, in particular, the arbitrary will of others, and in a habit, acquired through this discipline, of objective activity and universally applicable skills.²⁴⁸

Notice how seamlessly Hegel passes from the thought of learning to adjust one's efforts to the nature of outward objects, to that of learning to yield when appropriate to the wills of others. A practical education through work implants a need within the individual to follow through with their work in a doubly purposive manner that keeps their mind and hands occupied at all times with tasks that are objectively relevant. Once implanted, this need and habit of being occupied is, like life itself, self-perpetuating. Over time, it raises itself above the natural instinct of taking care of oneself into the ethical disposition to work cooperatively with others toward the preservation of all. Individual work ethic thus says more about an individual's objectivity than their subjectivity;

²⁴⁵ Ibid, §187.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

indeed, it shows to what degree they have come to see that they are most useful to themselves when they cultivate their own talents as a general resource.

Pädagogik encompasses a systematic program of public schooling and labor apprenticeships that prepares individuals to function self-sufficiently inside the objective system of needs. The formal adjudication of material conflict, too, has an educative influence on individuals. Through it, they begin to recognize that positive law is necessary for cooperative economic enterprise and that others have as much a right as they to preserve themselves. Once individuals are able to grasp the thought of their formal interdependence, it is not a great intellectual leap for them to see that a system of laws has to be in place to guarantee everyone's particular right to protect what they gain from civil society. "It is part of *Bildung*, Hegel says, "that I am apprehended as a universal person, in which respect all are identical."²⁴⁹ Beyond legal recognition, there is additionally the educative influence of the corporations of civil society, which, in organizing the interests of particular industries and representing them to the central government, acts as a "second family" to individuals, offering them job training and material support whenever they need it.²⁵⁰ Andrew Buchwalter points out that these trade union-like corporations contribute to the ethical development of individuals by restoring their sense of belonging to an ethical body, in this case a corporate body of co-workers that recognizes them as having a universally valued skill.²⁵¹ Individuals return the favor to the corporations by recognizing the latter as the legitimate organized expression of their particularity.

As the most organized element of civil society, the corporation is the institution through which the objective system of needs transitions into the political state. Its precise educative function, according to Hegel, is to transform the "unconscious necessity" by which individuals act in cooperation with others into a "knowing and thinking [part of] ethical life."²⁵² As Buchwalter summarizes: corporate membership fashions "wider normative commitments as matters of custom and habit."²⁵³ Moreover, it is in the corporation that the individual's misapprehension that they are an economic solipsist is corrected once and for all. No longer can they view their initially self-interested calculus as appropriately adjusted to society's aims. Rather, it is in their solidary identification with others who belong to their corporation that they come to endorse the systematic organization of civil society as the most prudent means of attaining everyone's – not just their own – ends.

Nevertheless, the corporation is also the institution in which the educative limits of civil society's theoretical and practical *Pädagogik* are made apparent. Buchwalter stresses that the corporation applies "only to membership in a particular vocational entity, not society generally," and its notion of commonality "derives from the inherent likeness of its members."²⁵⁴ The corporation is not yet modern ethical life in its concrete actuality – is not the universal political community as such – even if it brings its members a long way toward repairing the social alienation they feel upon leaving the familial household.

The third moment of modern ethical life, the political state, unifies the objective will of the social totality (as worked out in its customs, norms, and laws) and the subjective will of the individual subject (as worked out in their habits, dispositions, and actions). "Union as such is itself

²⁴⁹ Ibid, §209.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, §253.

²⁵¹ Buchwalter, "The Ethicality in Civil Society," 129.

²⁵² Hegel, PR, §256.

²⁵³ Buchwalter, "The Ethicality in Civil Society," 131.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 133.

the [state's] true content and end," Hegel writes,²⁵⁵ and it is the aim of the state to ensure that its citizens experience this union in their ethical dispositions. *Bildung*, political education, is the process by which the citizen acquires the universal ethical disposition – "patriotism" (*Patriotismus*), Hegel calls it – that brings them into unity with their political community. Moreover, *Bildung* is the process by which the constitution responds to the particularity of its citizens, evolving intergenerationally to fit their emergent needs and aims.

Patriotism is so important to the basic functioning of the political state that Hegel includes it under the chapter heading of "Constitutional Law":

The political disposition, i.e. patriotism in general, is certainly based on truth (whereas merely subjective certainty does not originate in truth, but is only opinion) and a volition which has become habitual. As such, it is merely a consequence of the institutions within the state, a consequence in which rationality is actually present... This disposition is in general one of trust (which may pass over into more or less educated insight), or the consciousness that my substantial and particular interest is preserved and contained in the interest and end of an other (in this case, the state), and in the latter's relation to me as an individual. As a result, this other immediately ceases to be an other for me, and in my consciousness of this, I am free.

In every respect, patriotism looks like it should be the culmination of the citizen's political education. As Hegel says, it is a knowledge based in "truth," i.e., objectively actual institutions, as well as a volition become habitual, which is to say a fully formed second nature. While Hegel says that patriotism is a consequence of the political state, it is likewise the state's sustainer, furnishing the "basic sense of order"²⁵⁶ that holds the entire social organism together. Joseph O'Malley emphasizes that the habit of patriotism does not gainsay political knowledge. Indeed, the patriotic citizen is one who is as aware about the nature and function of state institutions as he is about the civil-societal institutions closer to him.²⁵⁷ Of course, citizens who are not directly involved with the management of the state will not have the same technocratic knowledge of its inner workings as those who are. Political knowledge, in this context, refers to the citizens' justified trust, validated by their first-personal experience, that when all the members of the political body work in concert with one another and fulfill their local duties within the overall, the state reproduces itself as a necessity that is more valuable than any single human life. Patriotic citizens thus strike the delicate balance between trusting the state as the basis of their private livelihoods and holding its ends as higher than their own.

At once the source and recipient of this patriotism, the state reflects the epistemic confidence of its members, willing itself "through the form of *Bildung*."²⁵⁸ O'Malley argues that the state's willing of its *Bildung* is just its awareness that it has its substance "in the self-conscious and free spiritual individual who has [also] passed through the forming process of [political] education."²⁵⁹ The state is sovereign over individuals without thereby subordinating them to ends which they have not themselves come to will in the course of their political education. Far from uncritically exalting the state, then, patriotism is the ethical expression of the state's accountability to the subjective wills of ordinary citizens. Indeed, patriotism is what prevents the state from

²⁵⁵ Hegel, PR, §258.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, §268.

²⁵⁷ Joseph O'Malley, "Hegel on Political Sentiment," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, Vol. 41, Issue 1 (January–March 1987): 75-88.

²⁵⁸ Hegel, §PR, 270.

²⁵⁹ O'Malley, "Hegel on Political Sentiment," 86.

degenerating into a regressive form of paternalism that treats its subjects with the same one-sided, external authority that characterizes a bad parent's treatment of their child. Having already passed through the moments of *Erziehung* and *Pädagogik*, the citizen undergoing their *Bildung* is not to be viewed as a ward of the state, then, but as a liberated participant.

The foundation of the citizen's patriotism lies in the trade corporations of civil society, which, once gaining legal recognition as organized economic interests, take on a public spirit that prioritizes universal ahead of particular interests. The corporations make direct contact with the state by electing deputies to represent their interests in the Estates, a blended political body that combines the insights of private citizens employed in essential industries with those of professional bureaucrats. The purpose of the Estates is to mediate the relationship between the citizens and the political state so that the former do not confront the state as a mob of unorganized opinion but as organized, determinate interests that partake of the public spirit. The citizen's political education toward this universal disposition is a direct function of the epistemic contact between the corporations and the Estates. Indeed, the entire *Bildung*-process of individuality toward universality, and of universality toward individuality, is a function of the formation, sustainment, and reproduction of concrete, epistemically substantial relationships in every sphere of modern ethical life.

In order to nurture the public spirit, the Estates open their proceedings for all who wish to attend them. During these proceedings, the organized particular interests of each estate are given a universal hearing, showing the citizens who belong to them that the state takes their concerns seriously. For Hegel, the Estates are a theater of public participation,

permitting public opinion (*öffentliche Meinung*) to arrive for the first time at true thoughts and insight with regard to the condition and concept of the state and its affairs, thereby enabling it to form more rational judgments on the latter. In this way, the public becomes familiar with, and learns to respect, the functions, abilities, virtues, and skills of the official bodies and civil servants. And just as such publicity provides a signal opportunity for these abilities to develop...so also does it constitute a remedy for the self-conceit of individuals and of the mass, and a means...of educating them (*Bildungsmittel*).²⁶⁰

According to Hegel, the Estates are of outstanding political-educational value, not only for the state itself, by putting it into direct contact with the "wider implications of public opinion," but also for the people, who come to see that good government is hard work that requires a form of expertise surpassing what they are able to bring from their particularized spheres of work. The education of public opinion raises the subjective arbitrariness of individual judgment toward the objective rationality of genuinely political judgment. The aim of opening the Estates is to encourage citizens, as far as they are able, to think *as if* they were officials (even though, due to their provinciality, they will never rise to the same level of expertise).

Hegel's account of public opinion—"the unorganized way in which the will and opinions of the people make themselves known"²⁶¹—envisioning it going wrong at two different extremes. Either public opinion can reject the educative import of the publicized legislative sessions, thereby lapsing into subjective arbitrariness, or it can renounce its right to criticize the civil servants, thereby lapsing into an ossified patriotism (it could also go wrong in both extremes at once). The former error resembles the youth's navel-gazing derangement, while the latter resembles the degeneration of mental habit into lifelessness. Hegel is keenly aware of both failures and so cautions his reader that public opinion deserves to be respected as well as despised: respected

²⁶⁰ Ibid, §315.

²⁶¹ Ibid, §316.

because it is a sign that particularity is formally united with universality, despised because this unity stems from subjective arbitrariness, having no basis in actual legislative experience. That something as expressive of the state's unity as public opinion, which can only arise from a highly educated citizenry, warrants mixed feelings indicates that it is epistemically unstable and does not ever rise to genuine rationality. Hegel's scattered critical remarks on public opinion corroborate this point. In §318, for example, he writes that public opinion "contains no criterion of discrimination and lacks the ability to raise its own substantial aspect to [the level of] determinate knowledge," and that "every kind of falsehood and truth is present in public opinion."²⁶² Earlier, in §301, Hegel observes that ordinary citizens *en bloc* do not know their own will; indeed he defines the "people" (*hoi polloi*) as "that category of citizens who do not know their own will." "To know what one wills," he adds, "and even more, to know what [reason] wills, is the fruit of profound cognition and insight, and this is the very thing which 'the people' lack."²⁶³

Hegel has public opinion's epistemic instability in mind when he states that the truth in opinion is not in its outer content, i.e., what it actually means, but in its inner content, i.e., how it signals the unity of the particular and the universal. In its actual content, public opinion resembles the ravings of the deranged youth who mistakes his subjective ideas as having objective actuality. It deceives itself outwardly in the things it says about matters of state, yet because it intuits a real relation between itself and the universal, it has the capacity, Hegel argues, to be educated toward rationality. Precisely here, amid the mounting tension between subjective delusion and objective rationality, the patriotic disposition becomes the supplement to the citizen's insufficient universality of thought. As deep trust in the state's constitution, patriotism supersedes public opinion's epistemic instability. The publicized Estates all but ensure this. Once the individual has their say in the Estates, Hegel thinks, "his subjectivity is satisfied and he will put up with a great deal. "In France," he observes,

freedom of speech [and opinion] was always regarded as less dangerous than silence, for if people remained silent, it was feared that they were keeping their opposition to something to themselves, whereas argument gives them an outlet and some degree of satisfaction, which also facilitates the progress of the matter in question.²⁶⁴

Implicit in this remark is the idea that public opinion carries within it an emergent subjective need for psychic discharge that can be given "some degree of satisfaction" in a universal setting. There is reason to doubt, however, that public opinion can be fully satisfied after being given a procedural hearing in the Estates. Hegel acknowledges its intransigence when he says that "the substantial cannot be known from public opinion itself, but the last thing which this opinion can be made to realize is that its seriousness is not serious at all."²⁶⁵ In other words, the last thing which public opinion can be made to realize is that a formal democratization of public deliberation and decision-making is not where the citizen's political education has been tending. All the earlier encouragements to become independent from one's parents, all the inducements in civil society to become a self-sufficient cooperator, and now, all the recognition from the state of the hard work it takes to become educated: all this must yield, with patriotic deference, to the profounder insights of the civil servants for whom politics is a professional occupation. The citizen indeed gets their hearing at the Estates, but what they actually have to say is not heard as fully rational.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid, §301.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, §317.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

IV.

The phenomenon of public opinion reveals the ordinary citizen's epistemic alienation from the knowledge required to make rational judgments about public affairs. To express one's opinion objectively and have it taken seriously is, on Hegel's view, an emergent need of second nature that arises in the course of the citizen's experience of their union with the political state (*"In the end it is not only need but opinion which has to be satisfied."*) Still, public opinion's misapprehension of its right to be heard and recognized is premised on the fact of the individual's mere membership in the state, rather than a more determinate, concrete relation. For Hegel, the satiation of public opinion at the Estates is supposed to appease a distinctively *democratic* form of sociality. Democratic sociality thinks that, since everyone undergoes political education, everyone can be a deliberator and decision-maker, regardless of their level of expertise. Yet what makes the political community rational, according to Hegel, is its organic systematicity. Like a living thing, it is a whole (the constitution) that is articulated into interdependent, particularized parts (the trade corporations, the Estates, etc.). In this arrangement, individuals are rights-bearing citizens in a very general sense, but their substantial contact with the state – of which, again, their *Bildung* is a direct function – obtains not through their possession of abstract rights or subjective opinions but of organized material interests that give them a stake in the common weal. When the citizen unites with the state not only as a bearer of subjective opinions but as a self-conscious mind aware of its concrete determination within the whole, they grow out of their desire for vulgar self-expression and embrace the more refined disposition of patriotism. To be patriotic is to trust that the professionals who belong to the universal estate of government – Hegel calls them the *Bildungsbürger*, literally, the “educated citizens” – will make judicious decisions that seek the good of all.

Hegel is clear-eyed enough, however, to understand that patriotism does not follow *necessarily* from the social relations of modern ethical life. What makes the ordinary citizen entrust all political judgment to the *Bildungsbürger* at the very moment when their own ideas are inchoate? Karl Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* points out that the *Bildungsbürger* are in the unique position of relying directly on the state for their material livelihoods. Their particular interests lie in occupying posts where political judging and decision-making literally furnish their annual salaries, which is just to say that, even as they act in the “universal interest,” they live fully within the selfish confines of civil society. “The general spirit of the bureaucracy,” Marx writes,

is the secret, the mystery, preserved inwardly by means of the [knowledge] hierarchy and externally as a closed corporation. To make public the mind and the disposition of the state appears therefore to the bureaucracy as a betrayal of its mystery...The end of the state becomes [the bureaucrat's] private end: a pursuit of higher posts, the building of a career.²⁶⁶

Just as the young apprentice would, the bureaucrat undergoes a specialized education to prepare them for the trade of public service. Once initiated into the trade of governing, it becomes a matter of self-preservation for those who work for the state to guard it from the surplus of public opinion that mass political education generates. Consequently, the rank-and-file citizen's *Bildung* stalls for a lack of a substantial outlet within the state for the contentful expression of their opinions. Past the point of pure self-expression, there are no opportunities for citizens to see, reflect upon, and learn from the objective consequences of their judgments. The bureaucratic hoarding of political knowledge thwarts the citizen's *Bildung* in a comparable way to how civil society thwarts

²⁶⁶ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 47.

the poor rabble's.²⁶⁷ Indeed, it makes sense to call the ordinary citizenry a nascent "political rabble" whose need to connect epistemically with the political state cannot be satisfied under the conditions Hegel describes.

Public opinion, I want to argue, then, is a crisis intrinsic to the structure of modern ethical life that has the paradoxical impact of fortifying and destabilizing the political state. It fortifies the state by linking the citizen's thoughts to the state's fate, yet it destabilizes the state by introducing a need to participate thoughtfully in the political order that cannot be met under modern constraints. The crisis of epistemic alienation embodied in public opinion is dialectically entwined with the human organism's alienation from its natural life. Public opinion is a symptom of the absence of sufficient material and epistemic links between individuals and the institutions they recognize as authoritative. As such, it fails to satisfy at least two of the "needs of second nature" that emerge during human natural genesis. The first is the objectification of subjectivity, a need first experienced naturally in the animal organism and raised to a higher level in the human animal. How exactly does public opinion fail to satisfy this need? The answer lies in its externality to the authoritative decision procedures of the political state. The utmost that public opinion can contribute (and this only rarely, given its subjective origin) is to raise considerations that *may* aid the deliberations of the *Bildungsbürger*. Yet the *Bildungsbürger's* denial that public opinion has any countervailing authority to their technocratic expertise places a rigid formal boundary between the subjective will and objective decision-making. Now, to objectify subjectivity would of course not require the state to defer to every whim of every particular will. But it would require, at the very least, more inclusive formal outlets than the mere public discharge of one's opinion regarding the state's universal affairs, such that the citizenry's educated judgments would guide deliberations in all consequential state actions. Without meeting this stringent formal requirement to incorporate subjective judgments into the objective political process, Hegel cannot maintain that the state reflects the "inner will" of its citizens and develops apace with it. Second, public opinion fails to satisfy the need of "actualizing the genus in thought." Mere opinion about the universal, as Hegel construes it, is insufficiently rational cognition. As particularity thinking the universal, it fails to develop into adequate conceptual cognition of the ontological interdependency of the species. More specifically, it fails to think this interdependency in its historical determination as the concrete social relations of modern ethical life. In order for such cognition to take place, the process of extending and deepening the epistemic contact between ordinary people and their basic institutions would have to continue, in turn sustaining the *Bildung*-process that is a function of this contact.

That public opinion has such a flimsy epistemic foundation is what makes it so susceptible to the democratic pathologies of "majoritarian tyranny" and reactionary demagoguery, problems that have vexed liberal political philosophers since Hegel. One parallel to Hegel's discussion of public opinion in the Prussian context can be found in the works of Alexis de Tocqueville, who, writing of Jacksonian democracy in the United States, observes that public opinion under liberal democracy has a way of rending the citizen's mind in two. On the one hand, having the right to an opinion dignifies the citizen with the status of a political judge; on the other, it incentivizes them

²⁶⁷ The dissolution of the old feudal economy and the emergence of modern capitalistic production creates a surplus population of unemployed who do not find opportunities for gratification in cooperative economic enterprise. This "poor rabble" (*Pöbel*), as Hegel famously calls them, is a permanent bloc of the disaffected who are economically and ethically alienated from modern ethical life. Their counterpart is the "luxury rabble," a cadre of the super-rich who profit from others' immiseration.

to conform with whatever they perceive to be the majoritarian view so that they can be part of a powerful political bloc. Tocqueville offers no cure for this thought that does not think. To him, thoughtlessness is a pathology of liberal democracies because there is no obvious institutional basis upon which to build more substantial epistemic relationships between individuals and mass society. The constant threat of reactionary demagoguery, classically formulated by Plato, stems from this pathology. A demagogue who understands that the people's ignorance about their governing institutions is directly proportional to their real, material alienation from these institutions is one who can effortlessly bend their opinions to his private will.

Seeing the depth of this modern crisis, Hegel offers up a robust patriotism as a curative. The patriotic citizen's affective immersion in the institutional context that gives them life is supposed to help them supersede the insufficient rationality of their subjective opinions. Here, however, it is instructive to revisit the analogy from *Philosophy of Nature* of the patriotic citizen to the potato plant growing in a cellar. Just as the plant engulfed in shadow grows toward the sunlight, so does the individual engulfed in their subjective ignorance grow toward the political state. One's *Bildung*, on this model, tends less toward a full reflective endorsement of the social order than toward a total nutritive immersion in it. Yet the political state, for Hegel, maintains its own lifelikeness only insofar as it does not appear as something external to the citizens but as an immanent expression of their wills. A rational state must not originate in an alien source. Yet what is this sun-like political state if not the inorganic par excellence, something that, like the sun that stands in for the idea of the good in Plato's *Republic*, is not of this vanishing world?

The permanent crisis of public opinion is proof that democratic self-consciousness and democratic sociality cannot be fully realized under the modern state-form Hegel describes. The citizen's arrested *Bildung* is a mirror of the political state's own. Hegel's ambivalence about public opinion betrays his awareness that his system is unable to solve the problem that *Bildung* introduces. Still, a critical lesson can be learned here. Insofar as the political state fails to emerge as the immanent expression of the rationality of its citizens, providing them no substantial outlets by which to render universal political judgments, it persists as an alien structure to them, a "solar state" imposing material and epistemic constraints on their *Bildung* that cannot be superseded simply by keeping the patriotic faith. The positive philosophical value of *Philosophy of Right*, meanwhile, lies in its fleeting glimpse of the process by which free and more egalitarian social relations emerge (albeit in stunted form) out of modern historical conditions. We learn from the text that *Bildung* as political education is a function of the increase of the points of substantial epistemic contact between individuals and the institutions in which they are inculcated. We also learn that the political state's incapacity to bring this process to fruition will eventually inhibit it from sustaining itself intergenerationally. To be sure, the political state does have something to contribute as a provider of formal education to its citizens. But its repudiation of democratic self-consciousness and democratic sociality destabilizes its claim to embody the inner will of its people.

Of Burghers and Bondsmen: *Bildung* through Nurture and Struggle

“One does not need education or encouragement to cherish a dream of freedom.”

-C.L.R. James, *Black Jacobins*

I.

Chapters One, Two, and Three established what the concept of *Bildung* means in Hegel’s philosophical system, and specifically, what it means in the contexts of living nature, human subjectivity, and human sociality. Overall, Hegel presents *Bildung* as the unified process of natural genesis and political education through which the human life-form grows, conserves, and reproduces itself intergenerationally. Considered as a process of living nature, *Bildung* is the natural genesis of the individual organism and its species-life from embryogenesis to death. On the subjective side of human natural genesis, it is mind’s nascent self-disclosure through ensouled corporeality, a process that unfolds in the foreground of a highly structured social world that introduces novel “needs of second nature” that must be satisfied. On the objective side of human natural genesis, *Bildung* encompasses the formation of universal ethical dispositions and modes of thinking that link individuals epistemically to the institutions they recognize as authoritative. Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* attempts to show how this concrete unity of individual and state obtains in modern ethical life. Throughout that text, Hegel shows *Bildung* to be a function of the democratization of various political-economic institutions, namely the publicly supported and operated schools and trade corporations. And yet, Hegel repeatedly denies that *Bildung* entails the formal democratization of the political state as a whole. Instead, Hegel argues that the state’s affairs must be handled by a universal estate, an elite cadre of *Bildungsbürger* who operate more or less autonomously from public opinion (even if they do sometimes “give it a hearing”). Such a view shows Hegel to be in step with other liberal-minded conservatives of his era, thinkers who, witnessing the destructive potential of mass politics during the French Revolution, sought to find a line of best fit between democracy and epistocracy.

In Chapter Three, however, I uncovered a buried *Doppelsatz*²⁶⁸ that complicates Hegel’s story: Democratization propels *Bildung*, and *Bildung*, by virtue of the novel needs it actuates, propels further democratization. The second part of the *Doppelsatz* is not mere armchair speculation but is derived from a systematic reading of *Bildung*’s nested meanings across Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*. In Chapter Two, I showed how, for Hegel, human natural genesis tends toward the multiplication of the needs of second nature, among which is “thinking the genus,” i.e., the need of connecting individuality and universality concretely in thought. According to Hegel, under modern ethical life, the ordinary citizen’s thought exhausts itself in mere subjective opinion about the universal and so requires patriotic feeling to accomplish what thought alone cannot. Trusting the universal estate of the *Bildungsbürger* to care for one’s own good makes up for the fact that the state’s inner workings lie beyond the ordinary person’s ken. As I tried to show, Hegel’s appeal to patriotism is but a makeshift corrective for the deeper political crisis of the modern state’s externality to the educated citizen’s will.

To review, there are two respects in which public opinion reveals the citizen’s tenuous relationship to the political state. In one respect, public opinion exists because every citizen has a formal relationship to the state as the guarantor of their right and their life. Therefore, each person has a general concern for affairs of state because these have some bearing, however miniscule, on

²⁶⁸ By *Doppelsatz* or “double sentence,” I am alluding to Hegel’s famous declaration in the Preface of *Philosophy of Right* that “The actual is rational, and the rational is actual.”

their day-to-day activity. Yet it is clear that such a general interest, based on mere formal belonging, vastly underdetermines an individual's relation to the whole. In a second respect, public opinion is a byproduct of the more direct interactions between individuals and the political-economic institutions in which they daily participate. Hegel's generic burgher learns a trade and joins a corporation that gives them a material stake in, and thus a partial view of, the social whole. That said, the ordinary person sees the whole but through a glass, darkly. What they learn through their trade, while valuable in developing their sociality and enriching their cognitive life, is not adequate for comprehending society in its totality. Hence, they must defer to the educated citizens, the *Bildungsbürger*, who receive special training to manage the state. Yet, as Marx cautions in his critique of Hegel, it is naïve to suppose that a class of technocratic elites can be fashioned to serve the state without prioritizing their own interests to some extent. The bureaucrat, although they pretend to universality, sees the whole from their own particularized point of view with its own set of interests. Thus, whereas the citizen's universal relation to the state underdetermines their political cognition, suspending them in abstract thought, their particularized relation overdetermines it, constricting their thought to subjective minutiae. In both respects, the citizen's highest cognitive achievement, the formation of their own educated opinion, is stripped of its political efficacy, and the state itself, shutting out the populist noise, suffers from an overall epistemic poverty in which political knowledge disproportionately comes from but a portion of the population.

But there is reason for concern even beyond Marx's populist critique of modern bureaucracies. Modern ethical life as a whole seems to actuate "needs of second nature" within the individual that cannot be satisfied by its overall institutional arrangements. Not only the needs of first nature but also those of second nature, emergent in the *Bildung*-process, have to be satisfied. In this concluding chapter, I offer a provisional resolution to this problem. First, I will briefly review how some scholars have tried to supersede it by adapting Hegel's theory of the state to a more liberal-democratic framework. After showing the necessity but insufficiency of these approaches, I consider a more novel line of analysis, Frederick Neuhouser's social-ontological critique. Neuhouser will help me return to the part of Hegel's work that I briefly touched upon in the Introduction – the lord-bondsman relation – and consider its bearing on the political problem at hand. Specifically, I will argue that the bondsman's *Bildung* through political struggle is indeed preserved, in a much-attenuated form, within the burgher's experience, without having been fully superseded. The final judgment of my dissertation, emerging out of the theses of the preceding chapters, is the following:

If the burgher's experience in the state preserves a measure of the bondsman's, then the bondsman's democratically oriented struggle against the aims of the objective social order that dominates them must remain an integral part of an account of intergenerationally reproducible Bildung.

II.

One possible solution to the public-opinion problem would be to formalize democratic decision-making in the political state. Many commentators argue that Hegel's thought accommodates a "liberal-democratic" or "republican-democratic" redux of modern ethical life, including Albrecht Wellmer, Lucio Cortella, Michael Thomson, and Axel Honneth, the latter two of whom think that Hegel's political theory logically entails a democratic-republican ethics. Despite the prominence of such interpretations of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, I do not think they grasp the depth of the crisis presented by public opinion. In this section, then, I will criticize this

cluster of views on their own terms, showing their necessity but insufficiency for repairing the state. In the next section, I will elaborate on what they all miss, namely, the connection between political and natural alienation in Hegel's account of *Bildung*.

For the sake of expediency, let me group together Wellmer and Cortella, then Honneth and Thompson. Albrecht Wellmer argues that Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is a democratic translation of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*,²⁶⁹ caveating that the democratic form of modern ethical life has "no ethical substance beyond that of the democratic discourse itself." Wellmer's position is that "only the *form* of an egalitarian and communicative coexistence of a plurality of competing conceptions of the good"²⁷⁰ can constitute democracy's substance. What is interesting about Wellmer's conception of democracy is how it leaves Hegel's critique of democracy basically intact. According to Hegel, democracy never develops itself beyond the principle of formal equality; it treats all individuals the same without particularizing the institutional links between individuality and universality. Hegel dismisses democracy precisely for these reasons, claiming that, without providing stronger bonds between individuality and universality, it will only ever be able to destroy, never to construct. In other words, Hegel thinks that democracy ultimately stymies the *Bildung* of individual and state alike. It undermines Wellmer's project of democratizing Hegel, therefore, to adhere so totally to a threadbare, formalistic conception of democracy that Hegel himself rejects.

Lucio Cortella's work on Hegel and democracy is a step beyond Wellmer's in that it centers *Bildung* in its democratic redesign of modern ethical life. "Properly speaking," writes Cortella, "Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*...[is] no more than a process of formation, made possible by our inclusion within certain [social and political institutions]—that is, a *Bildung* by which we learn to *use* our freedom, our critical capabilities, our autonomy." What distinguishes democracy, Cortella thinks, is that it does not overdetermine individuality in its effort to restore the particularity it gave up for society's sake. On the contrary, democracy presents formal inclusion itself as its substantial content, providing only the "objective preconditions that permit individuals to decide on their life choices,"²⁷¹ which are informed by their various subjective conceptions of the good life. Here, Cortella more or less imports Wellmer and Hegel's definition of democracy, but with a slight twist. Instead of stopping at the thought that democracy renders political formalism itself as substance, Cortella goes on to argue that the formal principles of democracy will be extended beyond the state, into the family and civil society as well, refashioning these as institutions rooted in egalitarian norms of mutual ethical recognition.²⁷² In other words, democracy establishes democratic norms in all spheres of modern ethical life, not just the political sphere. While this is an attractive view insofar as it grasps the centrality of *Bildung*, it presupposes that *Bildung* will be sustained by virtue of more formal inclusion in the system, and moreover, that extending formal equality to all domains without overcoming the fundamental political problem of epistemic subjectivism will suffice. I do not see how this follows.

Michael Thompson tries to construe Hegel as a democratic republican by emphasizing the logical structure of his social ontology.²⁷³ Hegel is a republican, Thompson argues, because he shows that the free state enables its members to comprehend their ontological interdependence on a conceptual level. Grasping this independence with more than just their feelings, citizens can

²⁶⁹ Albrecht Wellmer, *Endgames* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 16.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 50-1, my emphasis on the word "form." Wellmer's point is that form is substance in democratic societies.

²⁷¹ Lucio Cortella, *The Ethics of Democracy* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015), xix.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁷³ I already commented on Thompson's views in Chapter Three.

consciously make it the basis of robust communal aims beyond the mere subjective freedom to opine. In other words, Thompson tries to show that grasping ontological interdependency amounts to “thinking the genus.” I would be tempted to agree with Thompson if his proofs did not rely so heavily on the *Science of Logic* at the expense of considering the concrete political problems of *Philosophy of Right*. Something like the public-opinion problem does not even seem to register within Thompson’s republican reinterpretation of Hegel’s state. It is as if the conscious recognition of thick relations of ontological interdependency that would obtain under formal democratic republicanism (and which are already present in Hegel’s epistocracy) would solve this problem on its own. But again, I ask, how does this follow?

Axel Honneth, finally, argues that Hegel is an “authoritarian liberal” who “sees the citizen above all in the role of a serviceable subject” who possesses “all the traditional basic rights but no chance to make a political contribution to structuring their common life.” For example, the citizen has no space to get together to have discussions about the nature of the common good, the structure of the public domain, or the source of the general will. “Despite all his republican tendencies,” Honneth says, “Hegel did not want to interpret the sphere of the state as a political relationship constituted by the democratic formulation of a political will”:

As a liberal, he does make the legitimacy of the state dependent on the free approval of every single citizen, but he does not grant them jointly the collective role of a sovereign who determines, through the procedures of public consultation and opinion formation, what the aims of the state system should be. And yet such a democratic rounding off of his theory of ethical life would have been perfectly compatible with the theory of justice he pursues in *Philosophy of Right* as a whole.²⁷⁴

Hegel’s critique of democratic formalism would be sufficient on its own to rebut Honneth’s confidence that formal democracy is “perfectly compatible” with the theory of justice expounded in *Philosophy of Right*. But even supposing it were not, my analysis of the concept of *Bildung* and its relation to the public-opinion problem would be. What I showed in Chapter Three is that the public-opinion problem arises because of the partial democratization of certain political-economic institutions within the state. Democratization propels the *Bildung* that leads the ordinary citizen, immersed in their particularity, to develop a concern for universal affairs. More formal democracy alone would not correct this problem (although it would be a start!), and besides, Hegel’s “authoritarian liberalism” is premised on the belief that more democracy might even exacerbate the problem. To be fair, though, Honneth’s view, like my own, is that Hegel is too dismissive of some of the democratic entailments of his theory of the state. For Honneth, the political formalization of democracy actualizes the ambitious project of grounding alienated individuality in a communal ethics. If I am correct that individuals cannot fulfill their *Bildung* so long as the state remains an external presence in their lives, however, then Honneth at least needs to explain better how a democratic pathology like public opinion could be corrected by formal democracy alone.

III.

Another common thread in these democratic adaptations of Hegel’s political thought is that they marginalize the connection of political to natural alienation across Hegel’s system. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the political-education side of *Bildung* is dialectically entwined with the natural-genesis side. Consequently, pathologies of the political process have to be interpreted as pathologies of human natural genesis. It is not *just* a political problem that the

²⁷⁴ Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 79-80.

state alienates public opinion from political efficacy and that the citizen has no substantial outlet through which to enact their burgeoning political consciousness. It is also a problem for human natural genesis itself, insofar as it indicates that certain needs of second nature – e.g., objectifying subjectivity, thinking the genus – are not being satisfied under the current social arrangement.

There are some working scholars who are actively engaging *Philosophy of Right* in this manner. Frederick Neuhouser in particular attempts to translate the political problems of modern ethical life into the conceptual framework of “social ontology” so as to be able to use naturalistic analysis for social critique. Neuhouser’s social-ontological critique of politics rests on the premise that, if human societies and living nature are structurally homologous, then analyzing the natural genesis of the human being *as an organism* establishes additional, proto-political criteria by which to diagnose pathologized forms of human sociality. According to Neuhouser, whose starting point is consonant with my own, the political state should be understood as “sublimated life” (*aufgehobenes Leben*) or “self-conscious life” (*selbstbewusstes Leben*). What societies and organisms have in common is their basic function of reproducing themselves (*sich Reproduzierendes*). In the case of organisms, what is reproduced is life-activity itself. In the case of societies, what is reproduced is self-conscious life-activity, or as Hegel likes to call it, “freedom.” In the lord-bondsman section of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel stipulates that freedom consists of a dual relation between human subjects and between human subjects and nature. For someone to be free, they must stand in self-reproducible relations to the natural objects upon which they labor and to other human beings with whom they stand in ethical relationships of various kinds. A social pathology, on Neuhouser’s description, is a disturbance to the life-activity through which these social and natural relations are reproduced. The lord-bondsman dialectic is a social pathology because, instead of establishing reproducible relations between free human beings and between humans and nature, it fundamentally distorts these relations by introducing one-sided domination into them. The lord domineers over the bondsman not just socially but materially, treating them as a mere instrument for exploiting nature, as opposed to a self-actualizing, free being in their own right. What results is an ailing society built upon unfree, unequal relations that cannot provide universal satisfaction in a material or intellectual sense.

Neuhouser believes that the lord-bondsman relation is a paradigmatic model of “social pathologies.” These, mind, are not caused by natural or human “pathogens” alien to a particular social order but by the internal structure of the order itself. They are akin to what Aristotle calls “*hamartia*” in the *Poetics*, tragic impairments that originate in the order’s very ethos.²⁷⁵ I would like to suggest that we expand Neuhouser’s idea of social pathology, of which the lord-bondsman relation is exemplary, to the public-opinion problem.²⁷⁶ To be sure, I am not suggesting that we

²⁷⁵ It would be worthwhile to apply insights from Aristotle’s analyses of Sophocles’s tragedies to Hegel’s account of public opinion. On Aristotle’s reading of *Oedipus Rex*, for example, the cause of the tragic protagonist’s (and the city’s) downfall is a kind of “epistemic poverty” in which the relevant knowledge needed to avert personal and political catastrophe is missing, largely because of the lack of information-sharing throughout the monarchy. Public opinion generates a similar kind of epistemic poverty, not only in the individual’s mind, but in the bureaucratic state overall, which sources most of its information from a small number of rarefied circles.

²⁷⁶ The famous “rabble problem” of civil society, which I have not discussed but which is more than tangentially relevant to the problems I am raising, is another major problem from *Philosophy of Right* that it ought to encompass. The dissolution of the old feudal economy and the emergence of modern capitalistic production creates a surplus population of unemployed who do not find opportunities for gratification in cooperative economic enterprise. This “poor rabble” (*Pöbel*), as Hegel famously calls them, is a permanent bloc of the disaffected who are economically and ethically alienated from modern ethical life. Their counterpart is the “luxury rabble,” a cadre of the super-rich who profit from others’ immiseration. Both the poor and the luxury rabble are byproducts of capitalistic social relations and are thus pathologies or, if you like, tragic *hamartia* of modern ethical life.

conflate the epistemic alienation of the citizen with something like racialized plantation slavery. Far from it, I want to apply Neuhouser's idea of social pathology broadly to political problems that can be linked dialectically to natural ones. That is, in the broadest sense, what Neuhouser thinks the lord-bondsman allegory models: a relation of one-sided domination in which one party is fundamentally alienated from fulfilling human natural genesis in the fullest sense. Assuming my interpretation is correct, the public-opinion problem fits this description within the context of the state's inclusive political life.²⁷⁷ This is significant given that Hegel's aim in *Philosophy of Right* is to show that the state makes it possible for the citizen's political education to be fulfilled in unity with their natural genesis. Therefore, if the citizen's lot bears any resemblance at all to the bondsman's, then it shows that, even in the political sphere wherein *Bildung* happens through nurture and is supposed to achieve its full restitution with society, unjust social relations remain that stymie human natural genesis.

Back in the Introduction, I discussed how the bondsman's *Bildung* is a political education advanced through struggle, producing a second nature that is necessarily at odds with, not consonant with, the prevailing political order. Because the political order deprives the bondsman of their freedom, their struggle must necessarily take the form of founding a new order that espouses a more humane law. Whenever this occurs, the bondsman's revolution against the lord is not an act of vengeance, then, but of universal justice. As long as the bondsman remains unemancipated, so does the lord live in a state of illusory freedom that is actually a state of dependency. This raises the important philosophical question as to whether the bondsman's *Bildung* has something essential to contribute to the citizen's. I want to propose provisionally that it does, and moreover, that political education through struggle is a necessary supplement to political education through nurture.

Hegel says in the *Encyclopedia* that the lord-bondsman dialectic is a necessary moment in the founding of states as well as the natural life-cycle of human beings, claiming that the experience of social subordination is "a necessary moment in the *Bildung* of every man."²⁷⁸ What

Frank Ruda aptly calls the poor rabble the "un-Estate of poverty" (Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 15). that results from the regular functioning of the other estates (agriculture, industry, and government). It is not the rabble who create their own poverty but poverty that creates the rabble. Their condition is that of having sunk so far below the standard level of subsistence – a level determined by the prevailing social consensus on the most essential human needs – that their feeling of interdependence on the wider community never develops. What is pathological about this is that the poor rabble's privation is as fundamental to civil society's healthy functioning as is profit. As Hegel admits, civil society is an abundance of riches that is somehow not wealthy enough to provide a material livelihood for all who enter it. "This in turn gives rise," Hegel writes, "to the evil that the rabble do not have sufficient honor to gain their livelihood through their own work, yet claim that they have a right to receive their livelihood" (Hegel, PR, §256). Ruda puts the same point slightly differently: civil society "should assure the livelihood of its members, but it can only grant it by committing a misdeed against its own principle [of cooperative work] and would consequently harm the conditions of its own existence." (Ruda, *Rabble*, 16). Ruda's redefinition of the rabble problem cuts to its pathological core: the rabble do not have access to the activity through which civil society educates its members – formative work. That is to say, the poor rabble pass through a failed *Bildung*-process that does not prepare them for full participation in the public affairs of their community. As they carve out a hardscrabble existence, they hold bourgeois work and citizenship in contempt, correctly asserting their right to a basic livelihood while knowing full well that it can only be granted by others' labor. This instills in the rabble the misapprehension that civil society is a universal family that provides like a natural family. Furthermore, it earns them the resentment of the employed burgher class, who blame them for their impoverished condition instead of understanding it as a fundamental failure of collective enterprise.

²⁷⁷ The bondsman's condition is far more abject because they are excluded from political life altogether, exposing them to far more abject practices of domination that lack accountability to the law.

²⁷⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: OUP), §454.

this declaration implies, first of all, is that the state's end of cultivating loyal, educated citizens is compatible with certain forms of domination, such as disciplining children who question adult authority or censuring adults who act beyond their rights. Second, however, and more importantly, it implies that the bondsman-figure's *Bildung* is not wholly subsumable under the state's ends. Indeed, what ultimately lifts the bondsman out of subordination into freedom is their self-conscious rejection of the objective norms that hold them in subjugation. The result of their *Bildung* is a "second, spiritual nature" that is formed by struggle, rather than by the state's avowed end of reconciling the universal and the particular through deliberate nurture. In other words, the bondsman's *Bildung* is a struggle for emancipation in which the extant state plays little to no positive role and for whose results the state can take no credit.

So, what would a political education outside of the state's nurture look like? According to Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, the bondsman's constant experience of violence and forced labor are the main drivers of their political education. Thus, their *Bildung* would be shaped in large part by external coercions that do not aim to nurture them. Their physical person would surely bear the scars of it, insofar as being alienated from their natural livelihood is a fundamental aspect of their bondage. Moreover, their psychological life could not but be impacted by their physiological and social alienation. On Hegel's account, formative work is what instills the habit of self-objectification in the individual; yet neither the overall conditions of their work nor its fruits are at all under the bondsman's control. Despite, and also because of, such adversities, the bondsman embarks upon the *via negativa* of political education. Forced down into their own consciousness, wherein they contemplate the constant endangerment of their life, they begin to see that they have an independent existence from their lord. Deprived of the benefits of their labor, they come to appreciate their shaping hand upon the world and their right to claim what belongs to them. Such discoveries launch them into the political struggle that defines the rest of their life (and that may claim their life).²⁷⁹ Out of these initial stages, a new form of "reason" emerges that is capable of rejecting this unjust state of affairs, and after reason, a "universal spirit" whose aim is to actualize the freedom of all who are in bondage (including, as it were, the lord). Thus, for Hegel, the bondsman's emancipation is a precursor, indeed a necessary condition, of the building up of a rationally organized social world.

C.L.R. James's analysis of the Haitian Revolution can add some historical texture and philosophical substance to Hegel's allegory of the bondsman (which, recall from the Introduction, seems to have been based on Sainte-Domingue).²⁸⁰ Whereas Hegel writes of the lord-bondsman relation in broadly allegorical terms, James offers a concrete analysis of the form of bondage that built the modern Western world: racialized plantation slavery. James emphasizes how extremely this form of bondage alienated African-descended people from their natural needs, depriving them of stable kinship structures, of reproductive self-determination, of the right to grow up under institutions designed to nurture life. (All of these things, note, are necessary moments of the burgher's *Bildung*, according to Hegel.) Nevertheless, under these abject conditions, with no formal preparation for political leadership or scripted revolutionary roles, people like Toussaint

²⁷⁹ At this point in Hegel's account, the bondsman's *Bildung* takes center stage, driving the lord offstage. Hegel initially charts the bondsman's education in three philosophical moments: *stoicism*, which is a withdrawal from suffering in order to overcome it through thought; *skepticism*, which is a general incredulity toward the vanishing nature of worldly norms; and the "*unhappy consciousness*," a thinking dissatisfied by its inability to actualize its aims in the world.

²⁸⁰ Revisit my discussion of Hegel, the Haitian Revolution, and the lord-bondsman allegory from the Introduction.

L'Ouverture,²⁸¹ Cécile Fatiman,²⁸² and Jean-Jacques Dessalines²⁸³ helped emancipate a submerged population against the wills of the West's three most powerful empires (Napoleonic France, Great Britain, and the United States). The theme of political education through struggle figures centrally in James's analysis of their extraordinary achievements,²⁸⁴ and central to the account is the black bondsman's dual life on the plantation, the one part lived under the yoke of lord and colony, the other part lived outside it – in creolized language, in mutual aid, in syncretic spiritual rites practiced after dark. The bondsman's dual life encompassed the natural struggle for self-preservation under conditions of extreme material precarity and violence. It involved, too, the construction of alternative social-reproduction mechanisms out of a combination of African and Indigenous cultural inheritances and imposed Euro-Christian norms. Finally, it involved long-term planning, study, and struggle, for in order to enact their emancipation, the black bondsmen of Sainte-Domingue had to learn from the failures of many smaller rebellions before attempting the ultimate one.

James attributes the explosive political ascent of the Revolution's central figures to this self-formation through fire. Raised in a social order hostile to life, they developed a form of political consciousness that drew its volcanic energy from the experience of extreme natural alienation and revolutionary struggle beyond the slaver-state's oppressive institutions. It was, indeed, a radical-democratic consciousness, one oriented not only to abolishing the chains of slavery but also of founding a new order wherein the ex-slave would be a lawgiver. Hence, James argues that the black people of Sainte-Domingue were the eighteenth century's preeminent democratic revolutionaries, more radical in spirit than the French plebeians who stormed the Bastille and deposed their king. At various points in the course of their struggle, they articulated a global vision for the emancipation and empowerment of all submerged peoples, even if they could not bring it about beyond their own island.²⁸⁵

Hegel's account of the lord-bondsman dialectic, while inspired by the Haitian Revolution, fails to account for the part of the bondsman's dual life that develops unmixed with the state, the part from which the more humane universal law issues and which eventually repudiates the lord's. Overlooking this, Hegel tries to subsume the bondsman's *Bildung* under the burgher's, arguing in the *Encyclopedia* that slavery should be abolished gradually so as to give the black bondsman time to acquire the dispositions of the Euro-Christian citizen, dispositions, he thinks, for which slavery provides a poor but necessary introduction.²⁸⁶ Although Hegel's overall judgment is profoundly wrong here, both philosophically and morally, it contains at least one buried truth, which is that certain elements of the bondman's experience are conserved, in significantly attenuated form, in the burgher's. But what could the bondsman and the burgher possibly have in common on the level of political experience, if the one is enslaved and the other free? The answer is that they both reside

²⁸¹ The great general of the early period of the Haitian Revolution, eventually arrested by Napoleon and jailed in France, where he died in prison.

²⁸² The woman credited with leading the voodoo ceremony the night before the first revolutionary actions took place.

²⁸³ The general who formally liberated San Domingue from French rule and named it Haiti.

²⁸⁴ It is not my place, given my scholarly training, to wade into historiographic debates about James's overall methodology or his hagiographies of some of its central figures. Rather, I am interested in his analysis of the basic facts of Toussaint L'Ouverture's life and of the lives of the enslaved people he helped lead to victory.

²⁸⁵ The reactionary backlashes in the United States, Brazil, and other slave societies in the wake of the Haitian Revolution shows the extent to which the event threatened the white ruling classes on all sides of the Atlantic.

²⁸⁶ Hegel's world-historical take on the Haitian Revolution is that it would not have occurred if not for Europe's Enlightenment-Christian values. Besides being profoundly racist, another reason this analysis is ridiculous is because European slavers everywhere appealed to Christian theology and Enlightenment-era anthropology precisely in order to justify the continued enslavement of African-descended people.

on a continuum of democratic self-consciousness brought about through the limited exercise of political control. For the revolutionary bondsman, who is by definition deprived of the rights of citizenship, the experience of natural alienation is so total (or near-total) as to threaten their life at all times. Their democratic self-consciousness emerges in the course of their struggle for political control, and, as James compellingly argues, they set the genuine universal example of “actualizing the genus in thought.” For the burgher, meanwhile, their natural alienation is such that the even the nurturing they receive within the constraints of citizenship leaves certain needs of their second nature unsatisfied.

To the extent that each figure exercises some measure of political control, either by seizing it for themselves or being incrementally initiated into it, each experiences a democratic concretization of their consciousness that can be leveraged for further liberation. Now, the fact that the burgher and the bondsman exist on this continuum of democratic self-consciousness does not *necessarily* link them politically. (Nor, across many historical contexts, does it prevent the burgher from exploiting the bondsman, as was often the case in the age of plantation slavery.²⁸⁷) What it indicates, rather, is that the burgher of Hegel’s modern state has much to learn about “thinking the genus” from the bondsman’s struggle. *As long as the basic structure of modern ethical life persists, then democratic struggle against the political state from within the bounds of the political state will be necessary to sustain Bildung intergenerationally.* Fresh seeds must be sown on scorched earth; vitalism must be supplemented with volcanism.

My proposal of “volcanism” as a supplement to “vitalism” is in part an attempt to respond to Susan Buck-Morss’s valid criticism of the eighteenth-century revolutionaries who analogized their political oppression to slavery while actively discouraging or even thwarting the abolition of plantation slavery in Europe’s colonies. While I agree with Buck-Morss that such hypocrisy deserves no defense, it is also important to highlight the ways in which some French thinkers of the time who used this analogy (such as Nicolas de Condorcet and Olympe de Gouges, active members of the Amis des Noirs) *did* intuit the continuum between their democratic ambitions and the Haitian’s and expressed their solidarity publicly. I highlight their clarity of conscience not to extol them but in order to make the point that such a continuum of democratic self-consciousness actually existed in the revolutionary struggles of the eighteenth century and has manifested itself in numerous other revolutions and social movements that have come to pass since.²⁸⁸

IV.

Karl Marx writes in his *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right”* that democracy is the “resolved mystery of all constitutions.” In democracy, Marx continues:

the constitution...is returned to its real ground, actual man, the actual people, and established as its own work. The constitution appears as what it is, the free product of men...; [the] specific difference of democracy [from monarchy] is that here the constitution is in general only one moment of the people’s existence, that is to say the political

²⁸⁷ The contradictory aims of the French merchant bourgeoisie, who had a vested interest in maintaining racialized plantation slavery in San Domingue while vying for their own political freedom in France, exemplified the difficulty of connecting democratic movements on the European continent to the European colonies. On the other hand, the public endorsement of black emancipation by the Amis des Noirs and other groups of French revolutionaries is evidence that solidarity based on shared democratic values was imminently possible.

²⁸⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois’s book, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Free Press, 1935), which analyzes the contemporaneity of the Freedmen’s struggle for emancipation with the federal government’s attempt to build a public-school system in the South, offers another robust case-study for my argument. See especially the chapter titled “The Founding of the Public Schools.”

constitution does not form the state for itself...It stands related to other constitutions as the genus to its species...”²⁸⁹

In many respects, this dissertation has been a systematic exegesis of this passage. Marx’s critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, although it does not use this exact language, stems from a deep sensitivity to how the *Bildung* of human beings is tethered to their democratic actuality as the constitution’s “real ground.” On this view, Hegel’s error is in starting with the monarchical state and making the result of man’s *Bildung* the subjectified state; whereas, true *Bildung* – the one that actualizes the genus in thought – starts with the man and transforms the state into objectified man.

One point that Marx belabors in this section of his critique of Hegel is that the state itself is but a “moment” of democracy, not democracy entire, which is nothing but the persistent natural existence of the people with all of their emergent needs and projects. To Marx, the “political republic” to which so many Hegelian democrats aspire is another attempt to start with the political constitution and to make man into a “subjectified state.” In “true democracy,” however, “the political state disappears,” by which Marx means it becomes only one function of the overall life-activity of the human genus, “the first true unity of the universal and the particular.”

My study of Hegel’s concept of *Bildung* unlocks some of the democratic potential that Marx either overlooks or understates in his critique of Hegel. I am in full agreement with Marx that Hegel’s chief error is in equating a subservient form of citizenship within the political state to the final end of a *Bildung*-process that encompasses not only political education but human life entire. I do not think that view can be successfully defended, and I have stated why. On the other hand, I do think there are resources within Hegel’s thought, namely the model of the bondsman’s *Bildung*, that can contribute to the discussion that Marx wants to have about democratically oriented human development. Above all, Hegel gives us a glimpse of the proto-democratic elements of human natural genesis as well as the general material arrangements under which democratic forms of self-consciousness and sociality emerge. That is a contribution well worth our time to consider.

²⁸⁹ Karl Marx, *Critique of “Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”*, edited by Joseph O’Malley (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 30-1.

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