The Spirit & Its Letter
Traces of Rhetoric in Hegel's Philosophy of Bildung

John H. Smith
The Spirit and
Its Letter
The Spirit and Its Letter

Traces of Rhetoric in Hegel’s Philosophy of Bildung

* * *

John H. Smith

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Ithaca and London
For Jane and Julian
Contents

Preface ix

On Prefacing: The Prediscourse *(Vorrede)* of the *Phenomenology* 1

*Introduction: Representation, Rhetoric, Bildung* 29

1 Hegel's Rhetorical *Bildung* in the Stuttgart Gymnasium Illustre 55

2 The Theological Manuscripts: Allegories and Hermeneutics of *Bildung* 97

3 The Dialectics of *Kritik* and the *Bildung* of Philosophy in the Jena Essays 138

4 The Representation of *Bildung* and the *Bildung of Representation* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* 174
   The *Elocutio* of the Spirit 175
   Rhetorical Hermeneutics in the World of *Bildung* 197
   Dialectic and Dialogue 215

5 Propedeutics of Philosophy 239
   Hegel's Neohumanist Pedagogy in Nuremberg 239
   Sophistry and the Prehistory of Philosophy 270

vii
Contents

Index of Latin Rhetorical Terms 279
General Index 281
This book began several years ago as a rhetorical analysis of Hegel's early philosophy. My goal at that time was to trace the development of Hegel's philosophical style from his earliest school writings, through his theological manuscripts and Jena essays, to the Phenomenology of Spirit. Since Hegel's style is infamous, I set out to explore its origins and influences. The question I posed was simple: How did his style develop, that is, how did his philosophy gradually take on the form that it did?

This examination of the “gradual taking on of form” of a philosophy led to a consideration of Hegel's education in the broadest sense of the term, since, in German, development, education, and taking-on-form are contained in one word, Bildung. To explore the role of Hegel's own Bildung, of the pedagogical theories and practices that influenced the way he gave form to his ideas and the way his very ideas took shape, I had to go beyond the original textual scope of stylistic analysis and introduce the disciplinary or institutional history of rhetoric, especially as it came into conflict with philosophy in the modern period. Thus the more strictly rhetorico-philological thrust was augmented by an effort to situate Hegel's writing within a wider historical development of the disciplines responsible for principles of education and representation in Western culture.

Finally, I turned to the significance of the concept of Bildung in Hegel's philosophy. The multifaceted meanings of Bildung in Hegel's early writings show not only that its analysis in Hegel is central to a
Preface

history (Begriffsgeschichte) of this master concept of Western thought but also that the wider history of this concept, especially its anchoring in rhetorical pedagogy, illuminates a central category of Hegel's philosophy. The philosophical concept of coming-to-form is informed by Hegel's individual appropriation of a rhetorical tradition that itself focused on processes of acquiring and producing forms. Hegel paradoxically transforms a traditional concept of rhetorical Bildung into a philosophical concept according to the rules of that very rhetorical tradition, and this transformation helps explain the implicit self-reflexive structure of his early philosophy.

Based on textual, institutional, and conceptual analyses, this book strives to make a contribution to contemporary discussions of fundamental philosophical issues. Hegel, as both Hegelians and anti-Hegelians argue, has offered the greatest solution to, or at least formulation of, the problem of representation. According to Hegel's unification of logic and ontology, the "world," "reality," "the absolute," can be represented truthfully because the representation and the thing represented are not separate entities linked arbitrarily by a philosopher's subjectivity; rather, things and thought are engaged in a common movement toward self-representation. Whereas Hegelians would view this movement as an unfolding dialectical logic of the concept, and anti-Hegelians would skeptically (problematically) argue for the difference between representation and the thing represented, I would claim that Hegel's approach to representation is powerful, and limited, precisely because it is the first to think through "reality" in terms of the categories and conditions that underlie Western theories and practices of representation. The power of the argument lies in its circular self-reflexivity: Hegel has justified his philosophy by attributing the conditions of its representation to the object of representation. Indeed, the object of representation attains its highest form of existence in the very representation that is the fulfillment of its conditions. The limits of this argument emerge from the historicity of the concepts involved: If we give the name "rhetoric" to the principles of representation which have guided expression in Western culture since the Greeks, we can say that Hegel is the philosopher who thought through ontology in terms of rhetoric, a circumscribable, albeit widely embracing, "language game."

The thesis of this book, therefore, is that Hegel's own Bildung, his formative education as a writer of philosophy, led to an internalization of the traditional rhetorical system, that his concept of Bildung reflects differing facets of rhetoric with different degrees of emphasis at different times, and that the continued existence of a rhetorical Bildung in this antirhetorical philosopher of Bildung is responsible for essential
Preface

paradoxes that form the motor of his philosophy. My argument rests on the parallelism drawn between the development of Hegel’s writings and the formation of his concept of Bildung, both of which took place under the sign of rhetoric. I offer a kind of biography of his writings that traces at different stages of development the connections between their “formative education” and an emerging notion of philosophical representation.

In a prefatory discussion, “On Prefacing,” I offer a reading of Hegel’s Preface (Vorrede) to the Phenomenology of Spirit. Written in the spirit of Hegel’s own Preface, which demonstrates both the necessity and impossibility of a “prediscourse” of philosophy, it presents my methodology not so much in advance as at work. It shows the tensions and paradoxes present in an exemplary Hegelian text and argues for the need to introduce rhetorical categories in order to understand them. The Introduction then provides a more abstract elucidation of the book’s central concepts: representation, rhetoric, and Bildung.

Chapter 1 lays out in greater detail the aspects of the rhetorical system to which Hegel was introduced through his schooling. The conservative and traditional rhetorical pedagogy in Stuttgart formed the foundation for the development of the form and key strategies of his philosophy. Chapter 5, on Hegel’s experience as a teacher and director of the gymnasium in Nuremberg some thirty years later, forms a kind of closing and confirming parenthesis of rhetorical pedagogy around the formation of his first systems. The theological manuscripts discussed in Chapter 2 reveal both the transition of formal, pedagogical, and rhetorical practices of writing into philosophical discussion, and the crucial way in which the universalizing system of rhetoric contains structures to engender an individual writer. Hegel’s concern with the development and representation of Christianity was modeled on the prescribed concerns he had with overcoming imitiveness and dependence on tradition.

Only with his entry into the public sphere in the Jena essays (Chapter 3), however, did Hegel confront the need to justify his principles and practice of philosophical representation. He came to develop a paradoxical, dialectical method that translates (though not fully) the categories of rhetorical argumentation he had to use (criticism, ad hominem differentiation) into needs of “philosophy itself.” The concrete preconditions of his writing became abstracted into the self-developments of a subject-object, although the praxis leaves its unrecuperated marks on his theory. Here we see that a practice of Kritik rooted in rhetoric was necessary for the development of his system, although that necessity cannot be argued for on philosophical grounds.
Preface

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chapter 4) can be seen as the fullest formulation of a philosophy that depends on, brilliantly transforms, yet cannot account for its own rhetorical traces. The tensions within Hegel's system between a truth-as-self-presence and truth-as-representation, between philosophy and its written form of argumentation, between the spirit and its letter, are thus traced back to rhetorical Bildung, to the formation and education of Hegel into a writer of philosophy.

When work on this book was largely complete, Donald Phillip Verene's *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* appeared (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985). Verene's insightful work and his support of my own were invaluable in the final, doubt-filled stages. The independently reached analyses of his book and my fourth chapter—the point of greatest overlap—show that the concept of Zeitgeist is not without merit. I think we both agree that the sisters of the trivium—at least *Rhetorica* and *Dialectica*—are more powerful when they work in unison. My historical research on the rhetorical tradition and my treatment of Hegel's works surrounding the *Phenomenology* provide additional support for almost all aspects of Verene's discussion.

My research would not have been possible without financial assistance from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the School of Humanities, University of California, Irvine. Professors Stanley Corngold and Walter Hinderer of Princeton University, Wilfried Barner and Rüdiger Bubner of the University of Tübingen, and Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauß of the University of Constance all provided encouragement and fruitful criticisms at different points along the way. The critical and bibliographical talents of Gary Campbell, my research assistant, provided more than mere assistance throughout the final stages of manuscript preparation. My gratitude to Professor Jane O. Newman of the University of California, Irvine—Jane—cannot be expressed in the rhetoric of such acknowledgments.

*Irvine, California*

John H. Smith
The Spirit and
Its Letter
On Prefacing: The Prediscourse (Vorrede) of the Phenomenology

An explanation, as it customarily precedes a book in a preface—about the purpose the author had in mind in writing it, or about the motivations and the relationships that the author sees his work entertaining to earlier or contemporary treatments of the same topic—such an explanation seems not only superfluous for a philosophical text but by the very nature of the matter even inappropriate and counterpurposeful. For the manner and content of what could be conveniently said about philosophy in a preface—like a historical indication of the tendency, standpoint, the general argument and results, or like a connection between the conflicting claims and assurances about the truth—, these things cannot be valid given the way philosophical truth is to be depicted.

Eine Erklärung, wie sie einer Schrift in einer Vorrede nach der Gewohnheit vorausgeschickt wird—über den Zweck, den der Verfasser sich in ihr vorgesetzt, sowie über die Veranlassungen und das Verhältnis, worin er sie zu anderen früheren oder gleichzeitigen Behandlungen desselben Gegenstandes zu stehen glaubt—, scheint bei einer philosophischen Schrift nicht nur überflüssig, sondern um der Natur der Sache willen sogar unpersuasend und zweekwidrig zu sein. Denn wie und was von Philosophie in einer Vorrede zu sagen schicklich wäre—etwa eine historische Angabe der Tendenz und des Standpunkts, des allgemeinen Inhalts und der Resultate, eine Verbindung von hin und her sprechenden Behauptungen und Versicherungen über das Wahre—, kann nicht für die Art und Weise gelten, in der die philosophische Wahrheit darzustellen sei.

[Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 11]

Hegel's first formulation of his philosophical system, the Phenomenology of Spirit (1807), begins with a paradox. In the opening paragraphs
The Spirit and Its Letter

of the Preface (Vorrede), Hegel defines the function of a preface to philosophical works in a manner that his Preface then seems to contradict. He lists a number of topics that ought not be the subject of a philosophical preface, but then proceeds to deal with precisely these kinds of topics. In the initial sentences (cited above) he states, for example, that a preface should not contain a summary of the work, or a formulation of its goals and purpose; it should not present a historical discussion of the background of the work, or the personal position of the writer vis-à-vis other works and writers in the same field. It seems an inexplicable contradiction, then, that these very subjects make up the content of Hegel's Preface. As Walter Kaufmann points out: "What is so odd is merely that the preface itself—as Hegel admits with some embarrassment—is an example of the kind of writing that Hegel tries in the preface to banish from philosophy."2

This paradox of the Preface—namely, that Hegel writes in a form and about topics that he explicitly criticizes—becomes more than a curious anomaly or oversight on Hegel's part if one considers both the origins of the banned themes and the central concept of the Preface, philosophical Bildung, as the "pre-discourse" of his Wissenschaft, that is, as underlying conditions of his writing. My own writing here, "On Prefacing," which likewise does not have the form and function one might customarily expect, will analyze central arguments and strategies of the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit in order to show how, through the key concept and process of Bildung, rhetoric enters into and prestructures Hegel's writing in such a way as to engender such paradoxes. I shall offer a paradigmatic reading, then, of one of Hegel's best-known and richest texts, paradigmatic since my reading of the Preface demonstrates both my approach here and tensions found in many of Hegel's early philosophical writings. The paradoxes that arise out of the tension between rhetoric and philosophy, because Hegel tries to negate the structures of representation he had inherited from his rhetorical Bildung even as they influence his writing, are indicative of basic aporias encountered in all antirhetorical speculative philosophy.

1. All references to the Phenomenology of Spirit are taken from the Theorie-Werkausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970). In this Preface page numbers within parentheses refer to this edition. All translations throughout the following study are my own unless otherwise indicated.
2. Walter Kaufmann, Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts and Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 120. He also makes a similar statement in his commentary on the first paragraphs of the Vorrede (p. 371, n. 4): "The oddity here noted is indeed a striking characteristic of the preface that follows."
On Prefacing: The Prediscourse

We can note, to begin with, that the topics Hegel rejects in the opening to the Preface reformulate categories belonging to the *ars rhetorica* as developed in antiquity and handed down in humanist, baroque, and Enlightenment handbooks. For example, the idea that a work should attain a specific goal and serve the author’s predetermined purpose (*Zweck*) had characterized rhetoric—the *technē* of purposeful writing and speaking—since the Greeks and became in the eighteenth century the specific means of differentiating rhetoric from other activities, especially poetry and philosophy. Similarly, the cataloging of the causes and reasons (*Veranlassungen*) of a work, the way an author arrived at the topic and formed the appropriate arguments, corresponds to the rhetorical doctrine of *inventio*, since Aristotle one of the five tasks (*officia*) of the orator. Also, the requirement that the author establish the work’s relationship to earlier or contemporary treatments of the subject at hand, belonged to rhetoric as the *ars disputandi*, the technique—closely related to the sister discipline of dialectic—of engaging in critical and argumentative dialogue before a public forum. Likewise, the notion of making in advance general statements about the content and direction of the argumentation, as well as the reliance on claims and

3. Walter Jens, in the article on *Rhetorik* in the *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte* (vol. 2, ed. Werner Kohlschmidt and Wolfgang Mohr [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1958]), gives a brief overview of this negative approach to the purpose-oriented and persuasive nature of rhetoric (p. 432): “The attacks against rhetoric made under the auspices of idealism confirm *ex negativo* that far into the nineteenth century rhetoric was clearly understood to be an intentional discipline that aimed at a real effect and not at the promotion of beauty. Hence the invectives directed against its ‘technique of disguise’ (*Verstellungs-Technik*—Goethe), against the ‘machinery of persuasion’ (*Maschinen der Überredung*) which the rhetorician might make use of, against its ‘deceptive cunning’ (*Überlisten*) and ‘trickery’ (Kant); hence especially the playing off of ‘pure poetry,’ which ‘never has any purpose outside of the poem itself’ (Schelling), against the ‘purely purposeful context,’ which determines the orator’s work (Hegel).” As is clear from these citations, the criticisms of purposeful speech from the perspective of “pure poetry” paralleled those from the perspective of “pure philosophy.” See also Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1960), par. 256 on the concept of persuadere.

4. On *inventio*, see Lausberg, *Handbuch*, par. 260ff. (esp. p. 146). Aristotle essentially defines rhetoric as *inventio*, namely, the ability to seek out arguments for a particular cause. He defines rhetoric as a science as follows: “that its function is not so much to persuade, as to find out in each case the existing means of persuasion” (*Rhetoric*, 1355b: bk. 99 1, 1, 14). Or even more explicitly: “Rhetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatsoever” (bk. 1, 11, 1).

5. Rhetoric as an *ars disputandi* thrived throughout the Middle Ages, especially in the universities. See, e.g., James Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). The last remnant of this tradition, the *disputatio*, was still significant throughout the eighteenth century and lives on in such vestiges as dissertation defenses.
The Spirit and Its Letter

assurances to the audience which serve to convince it of the truth, both recall features of the rhetorical system, namely, the task of disposicio, by which the author orders the discourse, and the "proof" unique to rhetoric, the enthymeme, which, according to Aristotle, depends on the common opinions and assumptions of the audience.6

Having rejected this long list of rhetorical categories as superfluous for a philosophical preface, Hegel goes on, however, to indicate that rhetoric, that is, the question of representation and depiction, will be a topic of concern after all. For, he writes, the central concern of his Preface is the manner in which philosophical truth is to be depicted (darzustellen sei), and thus he must concern himself with the issues of philosophical rhetoric and elocutio before dealing with "philosophy itself." The paradox of the Preface, which has been mentioned but not yet analyzed in Hegel research, revolves around the uneasy though necessary position of rhetorical issues in philosophy. This paradox leads us to the heart of issues concerning representation.

Ironically, then, Hegel employs and discusses rhetorical categories in the course of the Preface even though he denies their role in a philosophical text. In fact, in rejecting specific categories because they seem to him "not only superfluous . . . but by the very nature of the matter inappropriate and counterpurposeful" (p. 11), he appeals to rhetorical criteria of aptness, purpose, and agreement between the res and verba, the matter and verbal expression.7 Hegel's interest in a proper mode of depicting truth "philosophically" cannot avoid rhetorical criteria for dealing with the question of expression. Thus, given its argumentative strategy of employing rhetorical categories even as it rejects them, the Preface to the Phenomenology provides a classic example of rhetorica contra rhetorican.8 The parameters preestablished for all discourse by the ars rhetorica still hold in a philosophical discourse that would dispense with them.

6. On disposicio, see Lausberg, Handbuch, par. 443. Aristotle introduced the distinction between syllogism and enthymeme in his Rhetoric. Formally, the enthymeme is an abbreviated syllogism (brevior). This implies that one of the premises or the conclusion is left out so that the audience must fill in the missing assertion on the basis of its own opinions. Aristotle writes: "that rhetorical demonstration is an enthymeme which, generally speaking, is the strongest of rhetorical proofs" (bk. 1, 1, 11); and further: "our proofs and arguments must rest on generally accepted principles . . . when speaking of converse with the multitudes." See also Lausberg, Handbuch, pars. 371, 875.

7. Aptum (or decorum) was one of the major "virtues" of classical rhetoric. See Lausberg, Handbuch, par. 460. Hegel also speaks below against discussions of "purpose and such generalities" (Zweck und dergleichen Allgemeinheiten; p. 11).

8. I take the phrase from Walter Jens's study of Hugo von Hoffmannsthal in Von deutscher Rede (Munich: Fink, 1969). Also see Gerd Ueding, Einführung in die Rhetorik: Geschichte, Technik, Methode (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976), for a discussion of this phenomenon in eighteenth-century arts and letters.
On Prefacing: The Prediscourse

In order to discover how this paradoxical relationship between rhetoric and philosophy developed and came to take the unique form it has in Hegel's writing, we must inevitably confront questions concerning Bildung, a key concept that unites problems of development, education, and form. If one of Hegel's great contributions to the history of ideas was his convincing demonstration that our understanding of any thing's, person's, or concept's significance must be grounded in its Bildung, then, in a Hegelian spirit, we can analyze the case of his own discourse in terms of his development, education, and cultivation to a specific form of philosophizing.

* 

In the Preface Hegel defines the Phenomenology: “This becoming [development, Werden] of scientific knowledge as such (Wissenschaft überhaupt) or of knowledge (Wissen) is what this phenomenology of Spirit depicts” (p. 31). Hegel's first formulation of a philosophical system represents, gives form and expression to, an earlier act of becoming or coming-to-knowledge. Both the act of attaining knowledge and the act of depicting that development—the two fundamental features or tasks of Hegel's philosophy—define the concept of Bildung: “The task of leading the individual from his uneducated and unformed (ungebildeten) standpoint to knowledge was to be grasped in its universal sense and the universal individual, the self-conscious Spirit, was to be considered in its education and formation (Bildung)” (p. 31). In other words, the Phenomenology depicts for the reader the Bildung of the Spirit. This definition, with its powerful equivocation between the individual and the universal—in the first edition, “the self-conscious spirit” (der selbsbewußte Geist) read “the World Spirit” (der Weltgeist)—has led one strand of Hegel criticism to interpret the Phenomenology as a kind of Bildungsroman.

Jostiah Royce was the first to approach the Phenomenology in such literary terms. Although he did not use the term Bildungsroman in describing it, he did compare its structure to that of traditional novels of education or cultivation, including Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, Novalis's Heinrich von Ofterdingen, and Tieck's William Lovell. “Now under the influence of the literary habits of the time, it unquestionably occurred to Hegel to make his portrayal of what he calls the experience of the Geist, or typical mind of the race, something that could be narrated in a story, or in a connected series of stories in which typical developments are set forth. . . . The world spirit, then, is the self viewed metaphorically as the wanderer through the course of history, the incarnate god to whom the events of human life
may be supposed to happen."9 Walter Kaufmann reiterates this view: "The Phenomenology is the Bildungsroman of the Weltgeist, the story of its development and education."10 And M. H. Abrams in Natural Supernaturalism analyzes the structure of the Phenomenology more extensively in terms of novelistic forms: "Hegel's book, taken as a literary form, is thus one of the earliest, yet at the same time the most intricate and extreme, of modern involuted works of the imagination. It is a self-contained, self-sustained, and self-implicative puzzle-book, which is enigmatic in the whole and deliberately equivocal in all its parts and passing allusions. . . . [It] is the representative autobiography of spiritual education, told explicitly in the mode of two consciousnesses."11

Both Royce and Abrams assume that the process of Bildung depicted in the Phenomenology and in the Bildungsroman unfolds in metaphorical, enigmatic, equivocal, double, allusive, and disguised formal structures. Perceptively, even if unconsciously, they thereby characterize Hegel's major text on Bildung in terms taken from a rhetorical tradition predating that of the Bildungsroman. Yet they do not pursue the historical and formal links between rhetoric and Bildung, either for Western culture in general or for Hegel's development in particular. A close reading of the Preface shows, however, that Bildung, or "the forming, educating, cultivating movement" (bildende Bewegung; p. 33), whose presentation and depiction is the enterprise of Hegel's Wissenschaft, contains within itself traces of the classical and humanist rhetorical systems which can be summarized in three points: (1) elocutio, or the ability to find and employ the appropriate expression for any matter; (2) imitative and emulative exercitatio, or the young writer-orator's hermeneutical struggle with traditions; and (3) dialectical inventio and disputatio, or the discovery and application of arguments against a partner in public dialogue. The Preface of the Phenomenology, in which Hegel explicitly and extensively equates his philosophy with a process of Bildung, is a prime example of the palimpsest-structure of both Bildung and his philosophical writing—a philosophical discourse written over, containing, and prestructured by traces of a rhetorical prediscourse. The contours of the prediscourse are formed by these three fundamental features of Bildung in the classical and humanistic ars rhetorica.

10. Kaufmann, Hegel, p. 158. This statement is repeated in his commentary to the Preface (p. 381). It is important, given what I will propose, that Kaufmann's discussion of Bildung and the Phenomenology as a Bildungsroman is preceded by a brief mention of problems of translating the word Bildung. See also Ivan Soli, "Bildung, Geschichte und Notwendigkeit bei Hegel," Hegel-Jahrbuch (1972):292–96.
Elocutio. The main theme of the Preface is philosophical elocutio, the
depiction or representation of philosophical ideas by the appropriate
linguistic expressions. Hegel returns time and again to issues of presenta-
tion, depiction (Darstellung), representation, idea or image (Vorstel-
lung), formation or formulation (Gestaltung), form, execution, composi-
tion, or argumentation (Ausführung), and method. The entire Preface
can be considered a defense of the significance of form for the writing
of philosophy, although this defense follows the paradoxical lines of a
self-reflexive oratory that strives to overcome itself. Hegel writes near
the beginning of the Preface, for example: “For the matter (Sache) is
exhausted not in its purpose alone, but in its execution [composition,
Ausführung] and the result is not the real [effective, wirkliche] whole
unless considered with its becoming” (p 13). Viewed from the perspec-
tive of rhetorical theory and practice, this sentence becomes a dizzying
mise-en-abîme in which a position continually reflects the negative image
of itself. The identification of the “matter” (Sache) with the execution or
composition recalls a fundamental position that underlies all rhetorical
elocutio, namely, the intricate relationship between res and verbum.12 All
rationally grounded systems of rhetoric from Aristotle through the
eighteenth century justify the clothing of ideas by words—the defining
function of elocutio—with the argument that the former (res) would be
incomprehensible and incomplete without verbal expression. Although
Hegel seems to support this rhetorical principle, he apparently does so
by denying the relevance of “purpose” and hence by negating perhaps
the second most significant characteristic of rhetorical discourse. The
purposeful, that is, rhetorical and persuasive use of language, however,
reenters Hegel’s argument when he emphasizes the “real [effective]
whole.” His criterion of das wirkliche Ganze, the whole against which he
measures the execution of the res, still implies that the speech act of
philosophy must fulfill a purpose, since the word wirklich in Hegel’s
system echoes its etymological origin in werken and wirken, “to work, to
have an effect.” The “real,” according to Hegel, is always implicated in
some effective totality, what contemporary philosophical hermeneutics
would call Wirkungsgeschichte.13 Indeed, if we recall that the Werden that
contributes to the totality of philosophy refers not to an arbitrary act of

12. The relationship between res and verbum, that is, the question of the proper
representation of the res by verba, is certainly the underlying issue of rhetoric. See
Lausberg, Handbuch, par. 45. For a discussion of this concept in Hegel, see Rüdiger
Bubner, “Die ‘Sache selbst’ in Hegels System,” in Zur Sache der Dialektik (Stuttgart:
Reclam, 1980).

13. For example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer phi-
losophischen Hermeneutik (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960): “The true, historical
object (Gegenstand) is not an object but, rather, the unity of this one and the Other, a
The Spirit and Its Letter

becoming but to the process of Bildung which gives form and expression to knowledge as Wissenschaft, we recognize that this abstract statement strives to account for a mode of persuasive philosophical expression by appealing to apparently nonrhetorical concepts. Though Hegel occasionally seems to reject categories from traditional rhetoric ("purpose," "result"), his choice of terms to justify his philosophical elocutio—Werden, das wirkliche Ganze, Ausführung—in fact reformulates traditional categories.

Thus we can identify Bildung in Hegel’s philosophy with his emphasis on the “extended formulation or expression of form” (Ausbildung der Form; p. 19), the necessity of which he defends with versions of arguments that had been used in the rhetorical tradition to explain and support elocutio. He writes: “Without this extended formulation (Ausführung) scientific knowledge lacks general comprehensibility (Verständlichkeit) and appears to be the esoteric possession of a select few” (pp. 21–22). The subtle reference to the public indicates that Hegel is appealing to a conception of truth, or more precisely of the expression of knowledge, which relies on audience consensus. Rather than arguing for a status of the “matter” independent of form and public reception (along the lines of: What does truth care if it is understood?), he emphasizes that the “matter” cannot be known if both it and the audience are not “well formed, educated in form” (ausgebildet). Hegel’s appeal here to the comprehensibility that derives from the proper formal Bildung or Ausbildung reformulates a fundamental concept of rationally grounded elocutio, namely, perspicuitas, the connection between res and verba which allows for the latter to be comprehended. The doctrine of perspicuitas says not so much that ideas should be expressed clearly as that the author must seek the appropriate means of expressing any given ideas, whereby the expression becomes an inherent feature of the ideas and not just a secondary supplement. Indeed, without their verbal representation (Ausbildung) the ideas would be meaningless, irrelevant, without effect, less than real (mere imaginings or Einbildungen).

Hegel’s reformulation of perspicuitas, or the necessity of the extended formulation (Ausbildung) of ideas, into philosophical terminology, has

relation in which the effective reality (Wirklichkeit) of history as well as the effective reality of historical understanding exists. A hermeneutics adequate to its object of study (eine sachangemesse Hermeneutik) would have to make manifest in understanding itself the effective reality of history. That which is demanded I call an effective history (Wirkungsgeschichte)" (p. 283). Gadamer later identifies himself with Hegel by agreeing that the active force of historical understanding is appropriately called Substanz (pp. 285f.).
On Prefacing: The Prediscourse

major consequences for the point of beginning of his (indeed any) philosophical system:

If form is asserted to be identical with essence, then it is therefore a misunderstanding to believe that knowledge could spare itself form and be satisfied with essence or that which is in and of itself. It would be a misunderstanding to believe that some absolute principle or absolute intuition would render the extended execution (Ausführung) of essence or the formal development (Entwicklung) of form unnecessary. Precisely because the form is as essential to essence as essence itself, essence cannot be grasped or expressed merely as essence, that is as unmediated substance or as pure self-intuition of the divine, but must also involve form and the complete richness of developed form; only in that way can essence be grasped and expressed as something real [effective, Wirkliches]. [P. 24]

Hegel expresses this same idea in a manner closer to that of traditional handbooks on elocutio when he writes that there are no such things as "naked truths" (p. 42), since the matter (Sache) or Spirit must always appear, take form, be clothed (einge Hüllt; p. 19) or covered (ver hüllt p. 19) in some formulation (Gestalt or Gestaltung). Moreover, the "richness" of the formation that encases the Sache echoes the copia verborum et rerum, the copiousness that was the goal of Roman and especially humanist oratory. Ironically, the philosophy of Spirit requires cultivation of the letter to express, indeed to grasp and become, truth, for becoming, as Bildung, is a process of adopting form. Thus, no principle can serve as a foundation for philosophy that does not always already contain a movement toward form and expression. Hegel rejects for this reason any philosophy that does not presume the primacy of formal mediation.

The "misunderstanding" that Hegel refers to concerning the relationship between form and essence, verba and res, such that one might falsely posit the independence and insignificance of the former, has in fact arisen in various interpretations of the Phenomenology and its Preface. One of the first such misunderstandings occurred between two friends and intellectual companions, Schelling and Hegel. As is well known, the break between Schelling and Hegel occurred after Schell-

---

14. We shall see in chap. 1, below, that rhetorical handbooks from Melanchthon on often define elocutio as the "clothing" of thoughts in language.
The Spirit and Its Letter

ing read the Preface and felt personally attacked by Hegel's critique of abstract formalism in philosophy. The misunderstanding may very well have been sparked by the paradoxical structure of Hegel's remarks: His defense of "extended formation or cultivation of form" is accompanied by an attack against particular forms and formalisms found in his contemporaries' works. These attacks could easily foster an antiformalist, antirhetorical reading of Hegel if one does not take into account the underlying thrust of his argument. For example, he rejects the "the forms [formations or figures, Gebilde], which are neither fish nor animal, neither poetry nor philosophy" (p. 64), that is, the creations of the Romantic poet-philosophers like numerous Novalis, Schlegel, and Schelling epigones. Similarly, he rebukes philosophers of religious feeling for wrapping base sentiments in deceptive "cover" or "garb" (Einhüllung; p. 18), or "in a high priest's cloak" (im hohenpriesterlichen Gewande; p. 65). Moreover, in his extensive passages on method and formalism (pp. 47–50, 55–59), he rejects earlier forms of philosophical methodology as belonging to "a lost culture, education, form" (einer verschollenen Bildung; p. 47) and attacks virtually all other philosophies (especially those based on the mathematical approach) for imposing an arbitrary form on the material. He proposes instead his own "speculative philosophy" as the "proper or literal depiction" (eigentliche Darstellung; p. 55). Such antiformalist statements could, and did, lead to the misunderstanding that Hegel had abandoned all traditional belief in the importance of form and rhetorical elocutio for the writing of philosophy.

And yet Hegel's conception of true or proper philosophy as the story of Bildung can also be interpreted in a radically different way, one that sees the act of figuration as central to the philosophical activity. Hegel writes succinctly and ambiguously early in the Preface: "The power of the Spirit is only as great as its expression" (Äußerung; p. 18). Since Hegel is certainly aware of the specifically linguistic connotation of "expression," we may read this statement as a reformulation of the key principle of elocutio: Force of mind can be attained only by re-presenting, re-creating, doubling itself as forceful expression. Such expression, which in traditional rhetoric falls under the heading of figurative language, is attained, according to Hegel, through a process of "reformulation" (Umgestaltung) and "in ever progressing movement" (p. 18), a process he summarizes in the concept Bildung, the result of which is the creation of "the figure [form, Gebilde] of the new world" (p. 19). Rather than an antiformalist attack, we encounter in Hegel's philosophy of Bildung a hidden theory of tropological representation. The very definition of Wissenschaft—"Scientific knowledge depicts this for-
On Prefacing: The Prediscourse

ming and educating (*bildende*) movement" (p. 33)—contains within itself a self-reflexive structure of doubling which provides both a philosophical foundation for his rhetoric and a rhetorical foundation for his philosophy. Scientific knowledge is itself already a depiction, a re-presentation, that is, it presents again an original presentation or formation. The "movement" of and in philosophy—a metaphorical image that requires explication—consists in the very process that lies at the heart of rhetorical *elocutio*, namely, the act of giving figurative expression and form to ideas in language. The ideas themselves, or the *Sache selbst*, are in fact never merely "in themselves," for it is the nature of the *Sache*, if it is to become real, *effective* "scientific knowledge" (*Wissenschaft*), to double itself in some form.

In explaining this crucial principle in which his philosophy intersects with a central doctrine of rhetoric, Hegel again expresses himself paradoxically. He begins his critique of contemporary views of methodological formalism with some hesitation (p. 47), but he then clearly and harshly rejects their mere ideas, images, representations (*Vorstellungen*) for the sake of the "proper or literal depiction" (*eigentliche Darstellung*) of his "speculative philosophy" by means of the construction he calls the "speculative sentence." 16 This emphasis on "proper or literal (*eigentliche*) depiction" would seem to entail a rejection of the entire realm of *elocutio* and its concern with figurative (*uneigentliche*) speech. When he actually explains this "proper depiction," however, it turns out to be not "literal" at all but, rather, copiously figurative. In fact, he even introduces his analysis of the "speculative sentence" (pp. 58–62) with phrases including terms he apparently rejected earlier; for example, "in order to imagine it" (*[um] es so vorzustellen*; p. 58), and "formally, the above mentioned can be expressed as follows" (*formell kann das Gesagte so ausgedrückt werden*; p. 59), thereby showing that there is place, indeed the most central position, for images, form, and figurative expressions in his philosophy.

Indeed, the speculative sentence, whose "dialectical movement" (p. 61) is the means of depicting *Bildung* and hence the "becoming of scientific knowledge" (which, it will be recalled, Hegel characterized as a *bildende Bewegung*), contains an inherently double, and therefore figurative and in the widest sense metaphorical, structure. Whereas in a normal sentence or judgment the predicate is attached unambiguously

16. For the most detailed and revealing discussion of the "speculative sentence," see Günter Wohlfahrt, *Der spekulative Satz: Bemerkungen zum Begriff der Spekulation bei Hegel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981). Although Wohlfahrt analyzes the philosophical significance and background of Hegel's concept of the "speculative sentence," he never considers it in terms of its rhetorical tradition, form, function, or effect.
to the stable subject that forms its ground (for example, “The grass is green”), in the speculative sentence the subject and predicate are mutually dependent on each other, and only by a comparison between them can some meaning be found outside the actual assertion. Hegel gives two examples: “God is Being” (Gott ist das Sein; p. 59) and “The effectively real is the universal” (Das Wirkliche ist das Allgemeine; p. 60). These sentences are neither tautological identities, nor situations of entailment or attribution, nor matters of shared properties. Rather, according to Hegel, a transference takes place from the subject to predicate (as in a normal sentence) which then forces us to reflect back on the nature of the subject which threatens to lose itself in the predicate. Hegel writes: “Thought, instead of moving forward in a transition from subject to predicate, feels itself hindered because the subject has been lost; hence, thought is thrown back onto the subject that it had missed” (p. 59). The sentence expresses a simultaneous similarity and difference, thereby compelling thought to abandon the secure position of objective and concrete understanding: “Thought thus loses its firm, objective ground, which it had in the subject, to the extent that it is thrown back onto the predicate and then does not remain there but returns to the subject of the content” (p. 60). The sentence is called “speculative” because its double structure, the reflexive interaction between subject and predicate, acts like a mirror (speculum) which makes an otherwise hidden truth visible by engendering a nonlinear and non-literal thought process. Its “movement” is actually that of the reader or listener who follows the figurative transitions of the sentence in order to repeat a process of Bildung which gives knowledge its grasplable form. Hegel’s abstract descriptions of dialectical structures gain precision, then, when considered from the perspective of a process of writing and reading, forming and interpreting, rhetorical figures. The speculative sentence conforms to standard definitions of tropes, which form the core of all elocutio, as a tension maintained between literal and figurative levels of meaning.

The result of a philosophy in the form of speculative sentences is, according to Hegel, not “the insufficiency of common sense but formed and educated (gebildete) and complete knowledge” (p. 65). This statement recalls Aristotle’s statement in the Poetics that from metaphor—a “happy” expression that is neither tautology nor a positing of difference (Hegel’s dialectical “unity as harmony”; p. 59)—arises genuine knowledge. 17 Hegel points out that such sentences are the reason why (his) philosophy is often considered incomprehensible by those

17. “We learn above all from metaphors.” Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1410b.
On Prefacing: The Prediscourse

who otherwise possess “the necessary conditions of education (Bildung) to understand it” (p. 60), thereby implying that other conditions of formative education besides the strictly philosophical will be necessary to comprehend his discourse. By arguing against the imposition of form from without and for the inherent, doubling drive to form, Hegel paradoxically but eloquently justifies both the “perspicuity” and the “copiousness” of his philosophical elocutio (Durchsichtigkeit and Reichtum; pp. 19, 67). The internal movement of thought and language, res and verba, leads to transformative figuration (Umbildung; p. 34) and more precisely to what Hegel calls “system.” It follows, he writes, “that knowledge (Wissen) is only real [effective, wirklich], and can only be depicted, as scientific knowledge (Wissenschaft) or system” (p. 27). That is, Hegel’s concept of science as system follows from his concept of the internal doubling and self-reflexive drive of Bildung in the same way as the goal of traditional elocutio consists in both the appropriate and richest formulation of ideas in language.

In this initial analysis of the Preface we see that Bildung is identified with form, with the mode of depicting the development of knowledge. It therefore corresponds to that part of classical and humanistic rhetorical systems, elocutio, which supplies the form and expression for ideas. In both traditional rhetoric and in Hegel’s discussion of philosophical representation an apparent paradox arises from the rejection of form, in favor of the true res or Sache, even as linguistic form and expression is considered indispensable to all knowledge. In Hegel the paradox is exacerbated since he does not thematize the issue of rhetorical elocutio, indeed even might seem to mask it in his reformulation of its categories. Thus, where elocutio deals with the doubling involved in res versus verbum, perspicuitas, figura, copia verborum, tropus, and so on, Hegel writes of the reflexive and speculative nature of Sache versus “form,” “proper (eigentliche) depiction,” “richness (Reichtum) of Spirit,” “formations” (Gestaltungen, Gebilde), “transformations” (Umbildung), and more. And yet by emphasizing the inherently representative force and movement in all thought and language (die bildende Bewegung) and by equating scientific knowledge with Bildung and the production of an appropriate and copious Bild or Gebilde, Hegel places the concerns of elocutio at the heart of his philosophical endeavor.

Exercitatio. Because elocutio must be learned, rhetorical Bildung also involves the strenuous educative process of acquiring, practicing, and varying modes of expression. This hermeneutical core of the classical rhetorical system, namely, an individual’s appropriation and reinterpretation of past models on the way to a unique style, forms the second aspect of the prediscourse to Hegelian Wissenschaft. In a passage
The Spirit and Its Letter

cited in the previous section, “Elocutio,” Hegel defined the force of the Spirit as being only as great as its expression. He goes on to say of the Spirit: “its depth [is] only as deep as it allows itself to expand and lose itself in its interpretation or exegesis (Auslegung)” (p. 18). This statement implies that part of the Spirit's power of expression, part of its Bildung, arises from a power of interpretation, explication, application, and self-loss in its object. It implies further an underlying logic by which self-loss in some Other can lead to better self-expression. It implies, finally, that the Spirit's drive to double, figure, represent itself in linguistic form is directly related to, even dependent on, its ability to lose itself in its interpretation. Depth in expression relies on a prior act of expansive interpretive gestures. The unfolding of the Spirit involves not only a force of figuration, but also a hermeneutical impulse to interpret, an impulse that presumes and philosophically reformulates a temporal-historical component of rhetorical Bildung.

In the discussion of Hegel's notion of Bildung in terms of elocutio and figurative representation, we considered the acts of giving form without introducing either a subject who performs and undergoes the process of formation or a concept of temporality which must accompany the formative becoming. Yet the doubling whereby the Sache gives itself a form and whereby the form comes to contain a meaning can be fully understood only within a larger process of a subject's history. The very self-reflexive formulations “gives itself” or “doubles itself” imply both a subject and a temporal difference. Hegel, in keeping with most rationally grounded systems of rhetoric, attempts to explain not only the intricate self-reflexive, speculative relationship between res and verba, but also the way in which the doubling within the “idea”—which is, as we saw, essentially both idea and form—developed. Between an “original” and a “mirror image” or imitator there exists not only spatial but also temporal distance. According to Hegel, then, the Sache or Spirit, which is never single but always double, is always already the product of some effective process. Even the beginning is in some sense always an end or product:

The beginning of the new Spirit is the product of a wide-ranging upheaval of multifarious forms of educative development (Bildungsformen), the price of an extremely tortuous path and likewise extreme strain and effort. This beginning is the totality that has returned to itself out of succession and expansion, the simple concept of totality which has come to be. The effective reality of this simple totality, however, consists of a process in which those formations that have become past moments develop once again and give themselves form, though in their new element, in their developed meaning. [p. 19]
On Prefacing: The Prediscourse

Since, according to Hegel, this secondary “concept” determines the form of philosophical exposition—“Scientific knowledge must be organized around the proper (eigene) life of the concept” (p. 51)—philosophy repeats in its Bildung the history of Bildungsformen. This self-reflexive structure is actually the same as that of the “speculative sentence”; here, however, we have to do with a developmental process of a quasi-or really living subject that learns to adopt and give up forms. We can see this shift to a subjective temporal structure in the shift in focus from the earlier paradoxically figurative “proper or literal depiction” to the equally paradoxical and catachrestical, even personifying “proper life” of the concept. Bildung applies now not just to a figuration or metaphoricity inherent in the use of language for expressing ideas but to the manner in which the transsubjective Spirit comes to take on forms and figures historically and in which an individual comes to master those historical forms. Although Hegel is clearly interested in the development of the “universal” Spirit, the equivocation of general Bildungsformen and an individual’s Bildung allows Hegel to model the phenomenological becoming of Spirit on the education of an individual to language. The model for that individual’s Bildung, we shall see, was the course of strenuous training offered by rhetorical exercitatio.

In the Preface, Hegel initially defines the individual on which he will model the Bildung of philosophy (and hence his entire enterprise) in abstract terms. An individual is characterized by the domination of one particular shaping moment, although the individual being does contain within itself other moments as well. As a temporal structure, then, the present form of the individual contains past forms—both of its own development and of the surrounding culture. Hegel writes:

The particular individual is the incomplete Spirit, a concrete form (Gestalt), in whose total existence one particularity is dominant and in which the others are present only in vague outlines (verwischten Zügen). In the Spirit that stands higher than another, the lower concrete existence has sunk to an inapparent moment (zu einem unscheinbaren Momente herabgesunken); what was earlier the matter itself is now only a trace (Spur); its form (Gestalt) is enwrapped (eingehüllt) and has become a simple shadow. The individual, whose substance is the higher standing Spirit, proceeds through this past. [p. 32]

If earlier we were concerned with the apparently timeless force within the Sache and Spirit that drives them to double themselves into a form of expression, here we see that over time the Sache becomes a form or figure by “sinking” to the status of a recorded trace.

Hegel then offers a concrete image to explain this abstract process,