

Phantasie, Recognition, Memory – Comparing Fichte and Hegel on Language

Aakash Singh

Abstract

The author compares the linguistic philosophies of Fichte and Hegel, concluding that Hegel's position is more comprehensive than Fichte's. Fichte and Hegel share essential suppositions about language and philosophy, best seen in their remarks on Phantasie, schematism, and especially the idea of unity. The issue of recognition is the primary point of difference between them. Fichte sees man's desire for recognition in the (historical) transformation of signs from visual to audible; for Hegel, however, man's desire for recognition is prior to Fichte's placement of it. Whereas for Fichte, man desires to express his thoughts as soon as he realizes that another man is reasonable, for Hegel, man desires to objectify his thoughts, or value, at this moment. With this fundamental difference in their conceptions of recognition, Fichte and Hegel end up with very different conceptions of language that reflect in some ways their differing conceptions of philosophy as a whole. The author closes by corroborating this finding through an analysis of their respective treatments of memory.

=====

It would be instructive, at this point, to compare Fichte's approach with Hegel's much better known discussion of the "master-slave dialectic" in the *Phaenomenologie des Geistes*. A strong case could be made on Fichte's behalf along the following lines. Hegel did not recognize that the semiotic issues discussed by Fichte are "predialectical," that is, that they serve as presuppositions for any subsequent dialectical articulation employing the medium of language. Consequently, Hegel lacked the crucial link between freedom, signification, and social existence that would have allowed him to treat the encounter with the other as a genuine mutuality rather than a radical dissymmetry that could only issue in the notorious "struggle to the death."¹

The footnote cited as headnote to the present essay is provocative. It suggests that (1) it would be worthwhile to compare the linguistic philosophies of Fichte and Hegel; and, (2) language (as signification) is tied up with notions of freedom and social existence,

¹ Footnote by Jere Surber in his *Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1996), 65.

as in Hegel with the relation between his philosophy of language and his description of the encounter with the other as a “struggle to the death.” This latter implies an interrelationship of the parts of Hegel’s system, and considered with the former postulates that Fichte in some way benefits from treating language predialectically, or from Hegel’s perspective, pre-systematically. This assertion is corroborated by a footnote of Fichte’s own:

I do not prove here that man does not think without language and that without it he could have had no universal abstract concepts. He is capable of this simply by means of the pictures which he projects by his imagination [*Phantasie*]. It is my conviction that language has been held to be much too important if one believed that without it no use of reason at all would have occurred.²

And yet Fichte begins his essay on language by claiming that his method takes the form of a deduction of the necessity of the origin of language from the nature of human reason, a sort of transcendental deduction (he calls it *a priori*) that is at least consistent with his own broader system of philosophy, if not equivalent to it. This being said, it is my primary task in this essay to compare the linguistic philosophies of Fichte and Hegel; but, contrary to the suggestion of the headnote, I will argue that Hegel’s position is more comprehensive than Fichte’s. I first present Fichte’s view of language, next present Hegel’s, and then after both have been comprehended in their own terms, tackle the comparison.

Fichte’s Linguistic Philosophy

² Footnote by Fichte in “On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language,” translated by Jere Surber in his *Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy*, 124.

Fichte's essay "On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language" begins with a statement consistent with the critical systematic position: empirical study cannot reveal how or why language arose; how language arose must be deduced, analogous to a transcendental deduction, from the nature of human reason. This position is maintained throughout the essay, although the reader notices that some foundational principles are imported from elsewhere—and yet these principles, discussed below, are not inconsistent with a "deduction from the nature of human reason" insofar as they are principles established in the System, the *Wissenschaftslehre*. As already noted, however, the establishment of a place for these linguistic reflections within Fichte's system as a whole is not possible, as Fichte unfortunately neglected to develop them further. But fortunately, the juxtaposition and ensuing remarks made in the present paper of Fichte's and Hegel's views of language can still benefit from glimpses—albeit fleeting ones—at their respective systems of philosophy, in that the latter's view of language is explicitly tied to his system and the former's as just mentioned is tied to his *Wissenschaftslehre*.

"Language" is defined as the expression of thoughts by arbitrary signs.³ It is thoughts that are to be expressed and not acts, which announce themselves. Arbitrary signs are the means for this, and these are signs explicitly determined to designate a concept, with no difference made whether the thing signified is resembled. Thus, if a concept of a thing is mimicked vocally or represented pictorially there is no essential difference—these are both equally realizations of man's linguistic ability.

Having established that man can and does indicate his thoughts by arbitrary signs, Fichte

³ Fichte, J.G. "On the Linguistic Capacity and Origin of Language." In Surber's *Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy*, 120. Because I am here presenting Fichte's views, I will not flood this portion of the present essay with citations (henceforth as *Fichte* and page number). My analysis follows the course of Fichte's exposition as closely as possible.

turns to the main problem of deriving how man in fact came to do this. Fichte “derives” the answer—or at least its elements (some speculation being allowed after the facts are established)—a priori; he does not depend merely upon empirical anthropological work, or even sophisticated (non-critical) philosophical speculation therefrom (like Rousseau’s method in his *Discourses*), but rather on the nature of the human mind. And yet, Fichte gives something of an anthropological presentation, akin to Rousseau’s, even reckoning with the Hobbesian “state of nature” hypothesis. Fichte thus posits an “Ursprache,” an Ur language, thereby impregnating his term *origin* in “origin of language” with both an historical and a transcendental meaning.

Man’s essence, Fichte begins, is to subjugate nature. Nature’s beasts, for example, must be domesticated or fled from. Either man enslaves nature, or is enslaved by nature, or in the case of preventing the latter temporarily, he flees. But man interacts with man differently—or so it must be assumed, because if man treated man under the same condition (*i.e.*, either enslaved or was enslaved by) there would be no society at all, and yet there is. But, as already indicated, to *assume* that man treats man differently is insufficient: the Hobbesian war of all against all must be (transcendentally) proved false; the differential treatment of man must be deduced. Here Fichte introduces one of the principles (alluded to above) that maintains the scientific (or, critical systematic) status of his essay; this “highest principle in man” is found elaborated in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

“Be always at one with yourself” (Fichte, 122). It is this that drives man to subdue nature—nature must be made reasonable to harmonize with man’s reason. It follows, of course, that if a man were to interact with another man, provided this man were found

to be reasonable, no struggle to-make-reasonable would ensue. But how is another man found to be reasonable? The simplest answer would be to claim that it is by language, but language is what Fichte seeks to explain. Thus, he suggests that it is by the apparent purposive action of another, and especially by the reciprocal action of another, as when a man shows counter-force to one's own force. These standards of conduct are presumably taken up by and inherent in language as such. But Fichte does not state that it is the drive to be seen as reasonable or to test the rationality of another that leads to language. Instead he suggests that, as a man knows another *is* rational (by purposive action and reciprocity), a man desires to express his thoughts to the other.

Language, then, is not an essential condition for reason, but follows from it. In a footnote to this effect (quoted in full above), Fichte is more emphatic—but he admits this is his “conviction,” and it is not to be taken as part of the procedural deduction—stating that language is too highly esteemed if one holds that without it the use of reason would not have occurred. It will be necessary to return to this during the discussion of Hegel's conception of language.

The quest for others to know our thoughts is consistent with our highest principle of harmonization: our actions may indicate our thoughts (though that is not their function), but they may be construed as indicating hostility, indeed even though they were meant as friendly, and thus signs are needed and invented with the aim of expressing our thoughts. As the expression of our thoughts is the sole function of signs, these signs may be audible or visual, and neither is inherently better than the other, although utility will later shift the balance—this account Fichte develops after having grounded language's origin, in a quest for language's actual progressive realization.

Fichte now begins to discuss the *Ursprache* thoroughly. The *Ursprache* must have been a hieroglyphic language, a language wherein visual signs alternate with audible signs. The first signs were imitations of nature. A person was free to express his thoughts, but he was not free how to—*i.e.*, what sign he used—because the sign imitated sound (*e.g.*, a lion's roar) or sight (by representative sketch), along with gesticulation. Sight and hearing were the favored senses for man's development of language in his freedom, although the precedent was established in the favoring of these senses by nature. The inconvenience of the visual aspect of signification when trying to communicate at distances or when another's attention was elsewhere led to the development from a hieroglyphic to an auditory language. Someone wanting to attract attention may make a noise and learn from the success of the procedure that noise making keeps attention—audible language is thus generated, in addition to overcoming the aforementioned inconveniences, in part from a desire for "recognition" (a point discussed below with reference to Hegel).

It has already been mentioned that the first signs were imitative (of sight and sound), but in the need for audible signs there exists among other problems that of signifying mute objects. Also, how does it happen that if someone thinks up a term that he will not forget it, and that others will agree with it? Fichte tackles these and other such questions in a deduction of the origin of words. A person of spiritual excellence may orate and in the process employ abbreviated forms of the signs, which are, recall, imitative of sound. Others may recognize the efficiency of such abbreviation, and as it is employed over time people will notice that the abbreviated signs no longer sound like the original sign of imitation (and consequently the natural sound imitated), and thus realize that mute

objects can be represented in signs. These mute objects, Fichte suggests, might have been signified through their (imagined) relation to other sounding or soundable objects. But signs that have no relation to natural sounds can only be agreed upon and become current by habitual domestic use, and this domestic use could become publicly current, and occlude other rivals, if used by a political authority, especially a charismatic one. Others must remember what such a man has said.

Whereas this scenario explains the rise of signs for objects, Fichte must explain signs for abstract concepts. It is at this point in Fichte's essay when the subject matter is specifically interesting in relation to the system of philosophy. Fichte chooses here to frame the discussion in terms of when such concepts would have arisen in the development of language, and he discusses in particular the concept of *thing*, of *being*, and then *spiritual* concepts like "the soul" and "immortality": these are the very issues of the critical philosophy; and Fichte even suggests that at least *being*, if not the spiritual concepts, was only properly understood by Fichte himself and explained in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. In this, Fichte predicts Hegel's attitude that the development of language in history is a process leading right up to him, although their respective accounts of this process are very different, as will be discussed below. The first concepts treated are those of species and genus. The former merely requires the cognition of the resemblance of one thing to another and so could have been developed in the early stages of inventing audible language itself; at any rate, they were definitely developed earlier than the latter, as genus concepts would not have been of immediate utility, but occurred only when a species-name was forgotten while a resemblance to another species was apparent. The general abstract concepts came latest, although, as in the case of *thing*, were derived from species concepts. The concept *thing* was used first in place of a

forgotten particular thing, but gradually came to signify some-or any- thing in general. Fichte's discussion of the concept of *being*, as mentioned already, brings with it some explication of the critical position, and serves as a transition, in Kantian terms, from the transcendental aesthetic—begun in his discussion of *thing* and early in the paragraph on *being*—through the transcendental analytic—with the proper signification of *being* as achieved in the *Wissenschaftslehre*—to the transcendental dialectic: the mental (or spiritual, *geistige*) concepts. This sketch is an analogy only, but it is meant to indicate the importance of the terms Fichte scrutinizes; these terms are not arbitrarily chosen, but rather are in some sense the nexus for the relation of the issue of language to the system of philosophy. This is most clear with the *geistige Begriffe*. Fichte observes, consistent with his discussion up to this point, that such a concept must have been present for someone before a sign for it was sought. He means to answer, therefore, the prior question of the origin of *geistige Begriffe* (Fichte, 131).

After the necessities of life are met, Fichte narrates, “the soul’s innate drive to progress” pushes man to reflect, and so to consider the cause(s) of appearances. He will be led from the sensible to the supersensible, as in the judgement, “there is a world, therefore also a God.” Fichte references in a footnote the attack on this mistaken judgement by critical philosophy, and in the exposition reaffirms the relation of issues of language to a system of philosophy (but as this is only a note, he simultaneously reaffirms the opposite). It is a small step to traverse from a supersensible cause of the world to other spiritual ideas like the soul and immortality. As these ideas arose, the desire to express them to others would also arise, and signs would be found to this purpose. How? In the explanation of this, Fichte again makes a foray into the “nature of human reason,” that is, into the subject of the critical philosophy. By the schemata of the imagination, sensual and

spiritual representations are unified. Signs for the spiritual concepts are borrowed from the schemes, in much the same way Kant claims that we say that “God *exists*” by analogical extension of this category of the understanding. As anyone familiar with the critical position must know, the transfer of sensible signs to supersensible concepts, despite being efficacious for communication (until, that is, antinomies are encountered), is the cause of an illusion. There was, however, no way to avoid the error—there is no other way for the human mind to signify the spiritual concepts.

When Fichte proposed, early in his essay, to treat language in accordance with his method, and not merely empirically, he belittled the explanation of the origin of language in cries of joy, remarking that “involuntary eruption of emotion is not language”; just the same, words alone are not language, syntax is essential, and up to this point Fichte has described only the origin of words. Fichte is led therefore to discuss grammar. In his discussion, as with that of the signification of mute concepts, Fichte begins with the earliest and simplest and moves to the later and more complex. The majority of Fichte’s work has been done, however, and this second part of the essay is therefore somewhat less philosophically interesting than the part already covered. For this reason I shall only highlight some of the main points, and also those portions of the text that are related to the task of the present essay, of considering the philosophical relationship between Fichte’s and Hegel’s linguistic philosophies.

Fichte treats of the rise of grammar itself through the syntax, the establishment of an order of placement, of the *Ursprache*. He then deals with parts of the sentence—including the substantive and verb—and interestingly, their rise in strict relation to the strengths and limitations of the means of communication—the human physiology. The declension

of the substantive is so explained: “every word has a longer and stronger accent the further back in the series of signs it occurs” (Fichte, 142); while the modifications of the verb has a more ideational, or intellectual, explanation. Discussing person and tense, Fichte again introduces implicitly his system, referencing the I=I formulation, by stating that, of the persons (1st, 2nd, 3rd), the 1st must have developed latest, and only in a high culture: as the 1st person is the *I*, it demonstrates the highest character of reason. The first tense was the aorist, indeterminate in time and aspect. Present, as determinate time, was then established, and the words to designate vague futurity or pastness were employed (e.g., yesterday, tomorrow). What I want to note in this respect is that Fichte posits that the future tense arose by dint of the *promise*; the promise demanded that futurity be transformed from vague notion into concrete tense indicator. This work of the promise in relation to grammar recalls for us Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* insofar as *it* interacts with Hegel’s ideas on language. We shall return to this below.

In his conclusion, Fichte makes a prescient remark. He suggests, while discussing that they have some apparently fundamental differences from his portrait of the *Ursprache*, that Greek and Latin were not themselves *Ur* languages but instead came from some previous root. He does not go as far as to suggest that they had the *same* root, but, as Fichte might himself say, it is a small step to take from the earlier recognition to the later one; this later argument was developed only a few decades after Fichte’s essay. But to notice that the languages as they present themselves to us do not reveal their essential origin, Fichte only reaffirms the demand for a method with which he began. When discussing primitive syntax, Fichte remarked that “natural man articulates his thoughts exactly in the order in which the representations follow one another in the soul” (Fichte, 138)—but this changes with the development of civilization, when natural orders are

altered and manipulated for effect of expression. Empirical research based on an anthropology of language, for example, will miss the point—the essence of language can only be discovered a priori, by a transcendental deduction from the nature of human reason.

In this presentation of Fichte's philosophy of language numerous allusions have been made to Hegel. These allusions, however, must be explicitly articulated, and they must be discussed systematically, and not simply in a one-to-one comparison. To be sure, neither of these thinkers is reducible to such a presentation. For this reason, Hegel's philosophy of language must be understood on its own terms, as we have just done with Fichte, before we begin to force it into dialogue with Fichte's.

Hegel's Philosophy of Language

When imagination elevates the internal meaning to an image and intuition, and this is expressed by saying that it gives the former the character of an existent, the phrase must not seem surprising that intelligence makes itself be as a thing; for its ideal import is itself, and so is the aspect which it imposes upon it. The image produced by imagination of an object is a bare mental or subjective intuition: in the sign or symbol it adds intuitability proper; and in mechanical memory it completes, so far as it is concerned, this form of being.⁴

Hegel's treatment of language is found under the rubrics of "Imagination" and "Memory," which, preceded by the rubric "Recollection," are subsumed under the middle

⁴ Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* (pt. 3 of *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)), paragraph 457. The problems with calling this source Hegel's decided view of language are innumerable (see Surber, 23-end), but the present essay employs the sections "Imagination" and "Memory" from Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* as representative of Hegel's philosophy of language in respect to his system of philosophy. As with the account of Fichte, the following presentation of Hegel will avoid repeated citation (henceforth as *Hegel* and page number), as the exposition follows as closely as possible Hegel's own.

category, “Representation,” flanked by “Intuition” and “Thinking” of yet another triadic structure. Here, in clarifying only as much of this complex as is needed to grasp Hegel’s view of language, I will begin with the workings of *creative* imagination (*Phantasie*), with its own divisions and forms. Creative imagination, a function of the intelligence, is not given direct sensuous content from intuition. Its ideas, which have pictorial existence, however, are subjective; they do not correspond to objects when created. As (nominal) reason,⁵ intelligence strives to give the character of an existent—to appear objective and not merely subjective—to the self-generated ideas. This occurs in self-uttering, the creation of signs.

According to Hegel, this creation is responsible for the transformation of the self, in only vague opposition to the universal, into an individual. But because intelligence is still bound to the content of the images that it symbolizes—when giving to its ideas the character of an existent—the authentication (which at the same time transformed the self into an individual) is still only a subjective one. This activity of intelligence is *symbolical* imagination.⁶ The dialectical striving is, however, for an absolute authentication, and thus gradually the objectification of the idea is liberated from the content of the image, and the idea becomes authenticated in and for itself alone. Thus this production is no longer symbolically bound and the resulting creation is a sign proper, and not a symbol. With the sign, the content of the idea is not dependent on the content of the intuition, but intelligence, as reason, can manipulate freely the sensuous aspect: this is why the sign

⁵ The term *nominal* is here used because there is no necessary relation of intelligence at this point to truth, whereas reason *qua* reason insists upon truth, and is also free, or in this context, not bound by sensuous content. Hegel, 211.

⁶ There is also the sign-making imagination of allegory, expressing “the subjective element more by an ensemble of separate details,” and the poetic imagination, which appears most free, but is still bound in selecting its material from sensuousness “adequate”—which must mean something analogous to, though not as limited as, symbolical—to the content of the idea to be represented. Hegel, 212.

is arbitrary, and Hegel evidences that when used in language the signification must be learned; it cannot just be intuited.

The unity of an independent representation with a given intuition is initiated by intelligence and is called an image. If this intuition receives its meaning from the independent mental representation and not its self-representation, that is, it represents not itself but something forced into it by the mind, it is called a sign.

Hegel likens the sign to the situation of a pyramid within which a foreign soul has been conveyed and is maintained (thus introducing *memory*, which will be discussed below) in it—the soul is the idea and the pyramid-material is the sensuous content which is not used for itself but for the idea. Intelligence is more like reason with sign-making than symbol-making as it displays wider choice (freedom) and authority. And this process of intelligence, of symbol-and better, sign- making is integral to any system, and must be seen as constituting an essential part of the system, rather than like in works on logic and psychology where, Hegel remarks, people just discuss language as an appendix and not as internally essential. So, for Hegel it is necessary to see language in the system, in the process of the development of intelligence into reason.

The intuition is cancelled, sublimated by the process of transformation into a sign by intelligence. Intelligence has therefore this negativity in it—and the process of becoming actual at the moment of becoming negated is endemic of time, filled full by the intuition, and carried over into the representation of sign, instituted as Hegel says, through the voice. The inward idea manifests in *utterance*, and the intuition is thus raised to the ideational realm. This is language: intelligence representing its inward ideas in an

external medium.

But Hegel proves himself able to treat language concretely too, and this entails a discussion of the material and formal elements: words and grammar. As for the former, they have the aspect of vocal imitation, but the true wealth is the creativity of symbolizing within the imagination. At any rate, the original sensuousness is negated by the sign and so the original references and meaning are now either trace only or are entirely lost. As for the formal element, grammar, the categories of the intellect generate it.

As the vocal note has the character of time (of sensibility), written language has that of space. This is especially true of hieroglyphics, which use spatial figures to represent ideas (even moderns use hieroglyphics for numbers and for planets and chemical elements and so on; Hegel recognizes their practicality). But alphabetical (or, “phonetic”) writing uses spatial figures to represent vocal notes, which are of course themselves already signs. Alphabetical writing is thus essentially the signs of signs. Hegel mentions in this respect Leibniz’ desire for a universal sign language, but shows that Leibniz was misled: the need for universality was actually that which produced alphabetical writing. But the thrust of Hegel’s criticism lies in the double-edged argument that such a hieroglyphic language would be not only impossible, but, considering the Chinese language as Hegel does, deeply undesirable. The language may work for things, concrete objects (although the names even for things constantly change in the sciences), but certainly not for abstract concepts, which are always changing and being filled in and developed. Thus Hegel holds that only a stationary civilization can have a hieroglyphic language; the alphabetical language, on the other hand, pushes progress forward.

Hegel actually attempts to defend this last remark. The word (the most worthy way for the idea to be uttered) is brought to consciousness and is reflected upon. It is analyzed, broken down into its essential components, by intelligence. Alphabetical language thus retains the advantage of vocal language, that ideas have names: the name is the sign for the externality of the simple idea. The hieroglyphic antagonizes the name, the fundamental desideratum of language. The name is the immediate signification of the idea—simple, not composite; and just so the alphabetical word is a signifier of the name, and is not composite even though there are many letters. This, Hegel notes, allows for precision. In hieroglyphic language, on the other hand, the relation of concrete ideas to one another must be tangled and perplexed, and their analysis by the intellect must be confusing—not simple as in alphabetical language. Thus Hegel nuances but essentially restates his previous determination: a hieroglyphic language would require a philosophy as stationary as Chinese civilization.⁷

On the bright side, an alphabetical language leads the mind from the sensibly concrete image to the formal structure of the abstract vocal word and stabilizes and gives independence (freedom) to the inward life. Over time, habit transforms the written word to a hieroglyph—the tones are no longer necessary (except for uneducated people who read aloud to get the sense of meaning)—we must note two points here. First, the *process* is shown at this juncture in Hegel's analysis to be of the utmost importance, as the

⁷ This nuance is one of positioning his philosophy of language into a tight fit with his philosophy of history, but this in some respects sacrifices the strength of the latter by the apparent (to us) arbitrary nature of Hegel's position. In the latter, China is situated in an era where only one man is recognized to be free, and Hegel discusses the cultural and then philosophical significance of this. He probably understands his criticism of the inherent value of the hieroglyph to support his systematic valorization of the inherent value of freedom.

alphabetical language, so forcefully argued to be inherently superior to the hieroglyph, develops into a hieroglyphic in some ways (and Hegel's remark on the uneducated show that this transformation is a valuable one); therefore, it is not the hieroglyph as such that is bad, but only the hieroglyph system which developed without the necessary mediation. Second, in this process, we see that for Fichte, whom we observe understood the hieroglyphic language differently from Hegel, the hieroglyphic language serves as an Ur language, and the primacy of utterance succeeds rather than precedes it. Both agree, as is obvious from Fichte's claim that the oriental languages bear out his linguistic suppositions⁸ and from Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, that there is something missing in the Chinese language that is present in alphabetical, and the only defense for such a claim is accord with a system.

In alphabetical language, space and time (visual and audible) have the correct relation to one another: visible language is related to vocal only as a sign and the intelligence expresses itself (its idea) immediately and freely by speaking. The name is the combining of the intuition with its signification (the idea), and this is the combining of the outward with the inward—the name is outward, but for it to be more than fleeting, it is reduced to inward again as (verbal) memory. This moves us from representation to memory, on the way to thought.

Hegel discusses memory as the last of three sections under the heading *Representation*. Memory itself is also considered under three forms: (1) retentive; (2) reproductive; and, (3) mechanical. Retentive memory is the synthesis achieved in the sign as it is made

⁸ Compare "All that we say here about the original form of verbs can be verified by the root words of the oriental languages" (Fichte, 135), with his explanation of why Greek and Latin do not bear out his description of an Ur language, "the primitive natural language will gradually perish and be replaced by another which carries in itself not even the slightest trait of the former" (144).

universal insofar as it is made permanent—name and meaning are objectively united; the intuition is rendered a representation, and the representation in its inwardness is rendered concrete: the meaning of names is retained—we can remember the ideas objectively linked to language signs. The reproductive memory works between the name and the thing: the name is the thing as it counts in the ideational realm. The process of the intelligence giving the character of an existent to its ideas is externalization and the intellect internalizes this externalization in a process in accord with the general development of (the) mind as it feels, represents, or thinks—it is sensitive, representative, or cogitant (Hegel, 220). Only with this realization of the recapitulation of Hegel’s system in this development of language is the following abrupt remark coherent: *we think in names*. This is a detail explicitly counter to Fichte’s “conviction,” described in the first footnote of his essay on language, that language is held as too important if one maintains that without it the use of reason would not occur. Hegel does not make a “moment” of language (Surber, 26), so technically he does not state that language is the *sine qua non* of reason. However, it is apparent that *Phantasie*, mentioned by Fichte and the locus of the generation of signs for Hegel, is in no wise sufficient to comprehend its superiors. Memory is noble because it deals in names which are liberated from their sensuous qualities—it is higher than imagination, on the way to thought.

The word as sounded vanishes in time—time is thus only destructive (not preserving) negativity. Intelligence is a valuable negativity (higher than merely a form of sensibility, like time) in that the outward is cancelled to represent the inward and in transformation the outward is preserved. Words are absolutely necessary to our thoughts.⁹ To want to

⁹ “Words thus attain an existence animated by thought. This existence is absolutely necessary to our thoughts. We only know our thoughts, only have definite, actual thoughts, when we give them the form of objectivity, of a being distinct from our inwardness, and therefore the shape of externality that at the same time bears the stamp of the highest inwardness” (Hegel, 221). This dialectical process of mediation is

think without words, then, is irrational! Those who say that the highest things are ineffable, recalling the emotionalists whom Hegel criticizes early in the *Philosophy of Right*, are idiots—one must not bemoan the linkage of thoughts to words: words give to thoughts their highest existence: the true word like the true thought is the thing itself. But the internalizing of the thing (object) through the word can reverse, and the object can become subjectivized by familiarity and lose its meaning; it can become mindless. This establishes the connection to the final form under which Hegel considers memory, mechanical memory, and also closes his explicit discussion of language in the *Philosophy of the Spirit*.

In the divestment of subjectivity (attaching meaning to a name) and the reappropriation of objectivity (maintaining meaning in a name) the intelligence is universal: it abolishes the distinction between meaning and name. Intelligence becomes something of a repository for names as such, meaningless words; it is thus mere *being*, as words merely *are* there, though they *mean* nothing. As this repository, it is mere abstract subjectivity, or memory—mechanical memory, since the relations are external only. In mechanical memory, intelligence is simultaneously external objectivity and meaning; it is thus explicitly active as the existence of the identity of subjectivity and objectivity—it is thus active as reason implicitly. Memory, then, is the passage to thought, a process beginning in intuition and mediated by representation. Memory is the existential aspect of thought, while thinking is active reason.

Thus we close our exposition of Hegel's view on language with memory, having begun it with *Phantasie*. We have yet to consider explicitly, aside from parenthetical comments,

formally recapitulated in a series of cycles and epicycles in Hegel's system.

Fichte's and Hegel's writings on language *together*. This we now undertake, and in so doing again follow a path from *Phantasie* to memory; that is, we shall find that, although Fichte and Hegel share essential suppositions about language and philosophy, and this is best seen in their remarks on *Phantasie*, schematism, and especially the idea of unity, they end with very different conceptions of language that reflect their different conceptions of philosophy, and this is best illustrated in their respective discussions of memory. Let us begin by laying the ground shared by both of these authors.

Phantasie, Recognition, Memory - A Comparison

Derrida identifies Hegel's semiology as a *Phantasiology*. Whether or not that is entirely apt, the arguments and supporting citations Derrida employs demonstrate at least the fact that where Hegel begins—with the creative imagination, as we saw above—"bears no implicit criticism of Kant" ("The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology," trans. A. Bass, in *Margins of Philosophy*, U. of Chi. Press, 1982, 79).

This notion seems to hold as well for Fichte, as in the footnote where he suggests that man projects pictures by his *Phantasie*. There are clearly certain basic agreements between Fichte and Hegel—common, perhaps to the German Idealists—about the substructure of the mind. We observed in Fichte's discussion of the abstract mental or spiritual concepts the introduction of the schematism, and when Hegel discusses the vocal and written in terms of sensibility, time and space respectively, or especially when he claims that the categories of the intellect generate grammar, we might believe that we are reading Fichte's essay and not Hegel's.

That they share beginnings may not surprise us, however, but to notice that their aims are

compatible is an unanticipated discovery. Considering Hegel's *Differenzschrift*, to observe a tacit agreement over linguistic issues with systematic repercussions is a shock. But the inner drive, the fuel of the Hegelian dialectic can be processed by Fichtean principles: the motive of harmonization, to be always at one with oneself, appealed to Hegel—he just thought Fichte's system could not execute it (Hegel's criticisms can be found in the introduction to his *Differenzschrift*). “The soul's innate drive to progress,” quoted above, which produces the leisure time available to contemplate, or the “desire to express” the fruits of this contemplation—on the one hand, the drive to express one's thoughts to another rational being, as the origin of language; on the other hand, the drive much later to express the “sublime” spiritual concepts, as the origin of the (illicit) terms for the supersensible realm—are “drives” Fichte posits as first principles consistent with an a priori deduction of language from the nature of man's reason. Hegel similarly expresses this in his discourse when, for example, intelligence “strives” to give the character of an existent to the self-generated ideas. This, recall, occurs in self-uttering, the creation of signs. Thus both Hegel's and Fichte's narratives of the creation of signs have an essentially similar impetus.

“Essentially similar” is not precisely *the same*. I might have chosen the latter word were it not for the very footnote of Fichte that initially announced the similarity, and paragraph 457 of Hegel on *Phantasie* and sign-making that seemed to be Hegel's response to Fichte. Speaking hyperbolically, it appears that Fichte wrote the footnote as a challenge for Hegel, and that Hegel wrote the *Philosophy of the Spirit* as his reply. Let me attempt to justify this perspective.

We observed already that Fichte attempts to demonstrate that, although man in respect

to *nature* must either enslave it or be enslaved by it (or flee), man in encounter with man does *not* struggle to enslave. This is because man enslaves in order to harmonize, to make his environment conform to reason, but man recognizes another man *as* reasonable, and so no struggle would ensue, but rather a desire to express. Fichte points to the fact that there is society to defend his position. Hegel sees things differently. In the presentation of Hegel's view of language we observed that for Hegel it is necessary to see language in the system, in the process of the development of intelligence into reason, and we saw that Hegel found in the creation of language the transformation of the self into an individual. In Hegel's discussion of the encounter of man with man, Hegel analogously finds the development of Consciousness into Self-Consciousness. But this development is not as pacific as Fichte's account of the encounter of man and man. Rather, it is like Fichte's account of man with nature—a struggle to enslave or to be enslaved. With this, Hegel incorporates another idea differently applied in Fichte's narrative: *recognition*.

Fichte saw man's desire for recognition, we noted, in the transformation of signs from visual to audible. For Hegel, man's desire for recognition is prior to Fichte's placement of it: whereas for Fichte, man desires to express his thoughts as soon as he realizes that another man is reasonable; for Hegel, man desires to *objectify* his thoughts, or *value*, as soon as he comes to this realization. As Kojève reads it, "to speak of the 'origin' of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for recognition."¹⁰ This point of difference is the breaking point, and, despite the similarity of their origins, the

¹⁰ Although this issue is not discussed by Hegel within the explicit remarks on language, it is clearly implied when treated in a portion of the *Philosophy of the Spirit* that corresponds to the discussion of language. The place of the discussion of language within the triad of Intuition, Representation, and Thinking has already been introduced; this triad of *Psychology* corresponds to that of *Phenomenology*, with the rubrics, Consciousness proper, Self-consciousness, and Reason. Kojève is of course reading the Jena *Phenomenology*, not the ostensibly corresponding portion of the *Philosophy of the Spirit*, but the relation still holds. A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Trans. J. Nichols (Cornell University Press, 1980).

differences continue to broaden as the writings are penetrated. Fichte indeed sees language as developing in an effort to maintain harmony, to maintain the unity of the self with the self, and so on the reverse side, to *prevent* conflict. For Hegel, however, conflict is essential to the ultimate unity: potential conflict is not to be avoided, as in Fichte's account; but rather actual conflict must be worked through, dialectically mediated. Hegel, ironically just like Fichte, can point to the existence of society as evidence of his position.

While considering the nature of dialectic in relation to Art in Hegel (and if there were space here it would be interesting to consider the role of language in Hegel's *Philosophy of the Spirit* as a groundwork for Objective spirit on the way to Art in Absolute spirit), William Desmond predicts the relation of language to mastery and slavery by articulating dialectic in terms of conflict (*Art and the Absolute*, SUNY Press, 1986, 91).

The point to notice in this is the way in which for Hegel's view of language dialectical mediation comes to the fore, while for Fichte this is not an issue. This is apparent again in the first footnote of Fichte, where the notion that language is the *sine qua non* of thinking is rejected. For Hegel, the relation of language to thought is a dialectical one, and the process of mediation is essential—while thought may be the truth of language, thought (as distinct from the isolate activity of *Phantasie*), is not possible without language. It is the import of dialectic that permits a synthesis of what are apparently sundry reflections in Fichte's essay on language—as e.g., the relation of the future tense to the promise, which, though it may adumbrate a nexus between Fichte's theoretical and practical writings (Surber, 16), can concretely bind Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (or its exposition within the *Philosophy of the Spirit*, as Objective spirit) to his thoughts on

language.

Finally, we cannot neglect to discuss Fichte's claim that his writing on language is not merely an empirical compilation but is rather a deduction from the nature of human reason. What has just been presented puts us in a position to see the relation of Fichte's claim to Hegel's writing. Fichte's transcendental deduction, he would agree, is a deduction from the nature of human reason *at an advanced era*: Fichte himself recognizes that the Ur language lacked inherent structures developed only in later languages, when reason had advanced. Fichte shows that abstract general concepts, like *being*, and spiritual concepts, like *soul*, were not fully understood until he himself explained them. But why could people before Fichte, with the same nature from which Fichte deduces, not achieve the self-reflection necessary to rightly understand these concepts? Fichte *states* that an advanced civilization is necessary for such an understanding; however, Hegel *explains how* such an advanced civilization could be achieved (and consequently also the proper understanding of the concepts).

This last claim is best supported by a review of Fichte's narrative about the retention of the signification of the arbitrary sign, which in Hegel is discussed as "Memory." Fichte states that once an audible association is achieved (through *Phantasie*) in order to represent an object that itself makes no sound, the resulting signification is retained because of the hegemonic use of it by a charismatic political-poetic authority, and the subsequent recollection of the important words of this statesman-poet. While this may or may not have actually occurred, consistent with our remarks above, it presents only *that* memory is involved in language, and does not explain *how*. Thus we may now make sense of two remarks made by Hegel in the course of his writing on language, the first

near the beginning of his discussion and the second near its end. We conclude the present essay by recording them. The justification of the present reading of each should by now be clear, relying on all that has been said above.

Hegel complains that in “logic and psychology, signs and language are usually foisted in somewhere as an appendix, without any trouble being taken to display their necessity and systematic place in the economy of intelligence” (Hegel, 213). Hegel later states, in order to ridicule the then current denial of the obvious, that “the German language has etymologically assigned memory, of which it has become a forgone conclusion to speak contemptuously, the high position of direct kindred with thought.” These are the clues to understand, then, why it appears that, as claimed herein, Hegel’s writing seems to constitute a response to Fichte’s footnote: in the note, Fichte refuses to grant language a systematic place in the economy of intelligence, and consequently neglects a serious treatment of memory. Indeed, it should now be apparent that the first section of Hegel’s explicit discussion of language (Paragraph 457) seems to sum up Hegel’s reply to Fichte’s footnote, and thus, I hope to have shown, also a rebuttal to the headnote of the present essay.

Copyright © 2001 Minerva. All Rights Reserved.

Aakash Singh has studied Classics and Law in the U.S. and Europe. He is currently completing his doctoral dissertation in contemporary political philosophy at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, in Belgium.