Liberal Education and Exemplary Ordinariness:
On the Meaning of *Bildung* in Hegel's Political Philosophy

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My aim in this paper is to understand how Hegel thinks classical education or study of the ancients participates in the transition or transformation of bourgeois society into the state, a transition that is perhaps the most distinctive moment and feature of Hegel's political thought as a whole. According to Hegel, what makes a society of individuals into a genuine community is a process of formation through which the abstract notion of individual rights becomes embodied in the workings of the state and the hearts and minds of its citizens or members. He also claims, in a lecture written about a decade before he elaborated his formal political philosophy or philosophy of right, that the study of great literary works of antiquity—and of the ancient Greeks especially—plays a crucial part in the transformative process he describes. To what does Hegel ascribe the constitutional power of such study? Is the classical education he describes truly a liberal education? And what can we learn from him about the role of liberal education in strengthening or deepening the foundations of our own community? I aim to shed some light on these questions.

The first part of the paper is a consideration of the education or *Bildung* of bourgeois society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] into or towards the state [*Staat*] that Hegel describes in the *Philosophy of Right*. In the second part of the paper I will examine a few striking figures and images in the lecture, with the intent of understanding Hegel's conception of the worth of classical education in the modern world and, in particular, a fundamentally liberal world of individuals pursuing their separate ends and their own notions of happiness.

I: The *Bildung* of Society: A Consideration of *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, §§182-7

Hegel conceives of the modern political association as a restless, dynamic, unruly, but ultimately rational process through which a collection of individuals—aware of their rights or what Hegel calls "subjective freedom"—strive and struggle, one and all, to attain their own ends and end up constituting a new kind of ethical unity that Hegel calls the state.[1] From the standpoint of the political philosopher, it is a kind of dramatic spectacle through which a new form of human community comes into being behind the backs of its members as they aim only to satisfy their private interests. Hegel looks out, Zeus-like, upon the battlefield of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and appreciates the combatants not for their heroism or warrior virtue, but rather (and somewhat ironically) for their unwitting advancement of the universal interest. What he sees with much greater clarity than the participants do is the absolute extent to which they need one another in order to realize their individual ends. He sees them becoming more and more alike and cooperative even as they think exclusively of their own purposes and projects.

A passage from a *Zusatz*[2] to the opening paragraph of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* section captures Hegel's understanding especially well:

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[1] State [*Staat*] for Hegel has a special meaning as the ethical community in which individuals or "private persons" find themselves finally "at home." It is, for him, something morally much greater than a juridical entity that protects individual rights. The latter sense (as will be discussed below) entails a relationship of estrangement between the individual's purposes and desires and the means to their accomplishment and satisfaction. The genuine state only comes into being as a result of an accomplished process of overcoming that estrangement and, more broadly, the process through which individual subjectivity places its stamp on the world. In his introductory lectures on the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel famously claims that "the state is not a work of art"—that is, it does not come into being directly and intentionally through human planning and artifice, but only as the final expression of human *will* and *action* and the historical world they create.

[2] The *Zusätze* or additions to the text of the *Philosophie des Rechts* are based on the notes of two of Hegel's students who attended different series of the lectures that form the basis of work. The—necessarily selective, given their volume—inclusion of these notes in later editions of the work is controversial, but the notes themselves are reliable and I do not hesitate to make reference to them where they are helpful in making sense of Hegel's argument. The *Zusätze* should not be confused with Hegel's own *Anmerkungen* or remarks to many of the paragraphs in the work, the purpose of which is to unpack and elaborate on, or give broader context to, the work's very dense and abstract main text. On these matters see H.B. Nisbet's Translator's Preface to the Cambridge edition of the work: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Allen Wood, ed. (Cambridge, 1991), pp. xxxv-xxxvi. I make use of the Wood-Nisbet edition throughout the paper with some modifications to the translation.

> Since particularity is tied to the condition of universality, the whole [of bourgeois society] is the ground [*Boden*] of mediation in which all individual characteristics [*Einzelheiten*], all aptitudes, and all accidents of birth and fortune are liberated, and where the waves of passion surge forth, governed only by the reason which shines through them. Particularity, limited by universality, is the only standard by which each particular [person] promotes his welfare.[3]

Hegel seems quietly to delight in the vision of an anarchic mass of liberated individuals getting straightened out as a consequence of the passionate pursuit of their own ends. They are, in a sense, defeated by their own rationality, and there is a certain charm in the beholding of this spectacle. While the individuals regard the state as merely a juridical structure that allows them to pursue their private interests, Hegel sees this whole situation as a kind of spiritual engine that generates a substantial moral community: the state in the proper sense of the term.[4] The individual regards the state as the means to his own projects and satisfaction; it allows him to get what he wants and to keep it (or to do what he wants and keep doing it) without fear of invasion or violence at the hands of the others.[5] But Hegel sees *society* as the means to or presupposition of the *state*—the ethical communion that comes into being only as a *result* of the formative process that takes place in society. His political-philosophical aim is to show how the self-defeating structure of society leads to higher possibilities for individual satisfaction. The spirited modern individual must constantly sacrifice his particularity at the altar of the universal—the "system of all-round interdependence (§183)" in which he involves himself willy-nilly—and

[3] Addition to §182.
[4] See Hegel's rather grandiloquent (yet also quite technical) definition in *Philosophie des Rechts*, §257: "The state is the actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] of the ethical idea—the ethical spirit as the substantial will, manifest [*offenbar*] and clear to itself, which thinks and knows itself and implements what it knows in so far as it knows it."
[5] For Hegel, Thomas Hobbes is the philosopher of *society* in Hegel's sense, not of the state. The Leviathan, despite its great power and fearsomeness, guarantees only the unstable flux of society and the sense of estrangement that accompanies it. *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* in Hegel's sense is not the Hobbesian state of nature, but rather its opposite, what Hobbes calls civil society or the civil condition of mankind.

Hegel undertakes to show how this (unintentional) sacrifice does finally bring back the gods of the city.

Thus far, Hegel's theory of modern society does not appear to differ fundamentally from the theories of many of his eighteenth-century political-philosophical predecessors. Kant, for instance, famously describes how the very antagonism of society awakens previously dormant moral powers whose activation begins the historical process of a moral regeneration of mankind.[6] Both Kant and Hegel owe a lot to the works of the Scottish political thinkers—above all, Adam Smith—and their innovative accounts of how commerce and intercourse amongst essentially self-concerned human beings leads to new forms of human association and interconnectedness.

In attempting to explain what is distinctive about the Hegelian understanding, I would begin with the suggestion that both Kant and Hegel are responding to Smith's type of social and psychological analysis, but in the spirit of a radical re-founding of the modern community that they learned from reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau. They read Smith in the light of Rousseau and the possibility of a restoration of a genuine republic to which he aspires. One might say that Kant and Hegel are attempting a synthesis of two thinkers who take divergent approaches to the problem of how a genuine community of interests can be constituted on the basis of individual rights or "subjective freedom." If Smith's view is broadly that the antagonism of society produces distinct *manners* and *sentiments* and a sort of psychic or moral economy that (together with a flourishing physical economy) compensates us for the loss of genuine republican association; and if Rousseau's view is broadly that the antagonism must be radically superseded by means of the establishment of a general will that founds a new republic—then the view of

[6] See especially the essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in which Kant describes how "a *pathologically* enforced social union is transformed into a *moral* whole." In Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political Writings*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 41-53.

Kant and Hegel is that the social antagonism *itself* contains the intellectual and moral seeds of its own regeneration. It can reasonably aim at something much higher than a thoroughly "polite" and economically productive civilization, yet without repudiating the fundamentally individualistic character of modern society. It is not, however, that Kant and Hegel are attempting to broker a compromise between two thinkers who have radically different dispositions towards modern life, but rather that they claim to have arrived at a truer and more complete understanding of the nature and consequences of individual freedom. One might say that in their view, Smith articulates the *process* without articulating the final *result*; while Rousseau articulates the *result* without fully accounting for the *process*.[7]

Kant and Hegel both approach the problem as one of *forming* or *educating* individual freedom or subjectivity in a profoundly transformative way, but without abandoning the foundation of individual rights. On the contrary: they aim to complete the structure to which that very foundation gives rise. The Kantian solution—an ambitious attempt to engender a progressive project that gives new moral meaning to human history—is of great interest and difficulty in its own right and I will not attempt any kind of summary here. (And Kant, too, draws on classical notions of liberal education in his understanding of how individual freedom can fully realize its own moral possibilities.) For the remainder of this section, I will attempt to draw out what is distinctive and interesting about Hegel's understanding of the "education" of individual freedom that characterizes bourgeois society.

Hegel spells out his basic claim most fully and clearly in §187 of the *Philosophie des Rechts*. Individuals, he claims, "can attain their end only insofar as they themselves determine their knowing, willing, and acting in a universal way, and make themselves into *links* in the

[7] These formulations are admittedly glib and are not intended as anything remotely close to an accurate characterization of these two great modern political philosophers. My intent is simply to characterize a certain broad way of thinking about modern society that is common to both Kant and Hegel.

chain of this *interconnection* [Zusammenhang]"—i.e., the universal element of society which appears to individuals merely as a means to their private ends and not as an end-in-itself. "The interest of the idea in all of this," he continues,

> which is not present in the consciousness of these members of bourgeois society as such, is the *process* of raising [*erheben*], through natural necessity as well as their arbitrary needs, the members' individuality and naturalness *towards* [zur] *formal freedom* and formal *universality of knowing and willing*—of *educating* [bilden] subjectivity in its particularity [*besonderheit*].

Active participation in the "system of needs" that characterizes bourgeois society leads to an elevation of individual judgment and action to the level of formal freedom and universality of moral and intellectual judgment. The more we pursue our private ends, the more we get to know our way around the "chain" of interdependency, and this has the effect of making us something more than mere links in this chain. We become in a more normative sense *social* beings, aware of the general context of our actions. And Hegel characterizes all this as a process of *education* or *cultivation—Bildung*—"of subjectivity in its particularity."[8]

This key paragraph occasions a relatively lengthy *Anmerkung* on education in general, in which Hegel makes clear that the education or cultivation of members of bourgeois society is not an education merely by analogy, or an education only in the special sense of what might today be called "socialization." He readily associates *Bildung*—a word with very lofty, including religious, connotations[9]—with the very ordinary and prosaic process of learning how to be a

[8] The key part of the sentence reads: "…*die Subjektivität in ihrer Besonderheit* zu bilden." The dative construction makes it clear that subjectivity is being educated or cultivated *in* (not into) its condition of particularity. The sense is similar to something like, "He learned, *in* his naïvete, that not everyone who makes a promise is to be trusted." Hegel means to say that subjectivity is, in truth, being formed *out of* or *away from* its particularity, *towards* universality of thinking and acting.

[9] The word has its origins in the word *Bild*—picture or image or *eikon*—and in particular, Martin Luther's use of the word in his translation of Genesis 1.26-27: "Und Gott sprach: Lasset uns Menschen machen, ein Bild, das uns gleich sei…. Und Gott schuf den Menschen ihm zum Bilde, zum Bilde Gottes schuf er ihn." ("And God said, Let us make

functioning member of modern bourgeois society. The commentary is all the more remarkable in that in it, Hegel is refuting two alternative views of the worth and significance of education, and his refutation seems to proceed precisely from that lofty sense of *Bildung* in comparison with which Hegel's use of the term sounds such a dissonant note. Specifically, he rejects both the Rousseauean understanding of education or culture as the corruption of natural simplicity, and the moral flipside of that understanding according to which education is nothing but a means to the ends of "needs, their satisfaction, the pleasures and comforts of particular life, etc." Both views, he states, "show a lack of acquaintance with the nature of spirit and the goal of reason." Hegel's intention here seems to be to show that *Bildung*, in its true and proper meaning, is not something external to, or separate from, the process through which the individual discovers himself to be a member of a larger social context—but that *it is that very process*, grasped in its full human significance.

What, then, is the "goal of reason," if it is neither natural simplicity nor the satisfaction of individual needs and desires? Hegel states it as follows:

> [its goal is] for *natural simplicity* [Natureinfalt]—whether as passive selflessness or as the coarseness [*Rohheit*] of knowing and willing—that is, the *immediacy and individuality* in which the spirit is immersed, to be worked away [*weggearbeitet*] and for its externality to receive for the first time the rationality *of which it is capable*, namely, the *form of universality*, that is, *understanding* [Verständigkeit].

Hegel seems to equate the *acquisition* of rationality or understanding with the *elimination* of natural coarseness. Hence *Bildung* is simultaneously something positive and something negative, the development of new powers and the "working away" of original nature. On both

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man after our image, after our likeness…. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.") *Bildung* literally means the formation of man in the image of God, and its later humanistic use retains (or retained until relatively recently) much of the majesty of its origins. "Culture" in the sense of "man of culture" captures some, but by no means all, of *Bildung*'s sense of a deep inner formation and perfection of mind and soul.

the individual and the general level, it involves an *exchange* or *replacement* of the immediate and particular with the mediated and universal. As in the art of sculpture, the rough exterior of the stone needs to be worked away to reveal the universal form that lies within, but which is, in truth, a *result* of the very process of the working away of the "natural" exterior. It is only by means of such a process that spirit finds itself "at home" in externality. To remain on the level of satisfying immediate needs and wants is to remain in a condition of self-estrangement—to be compelled to venture out into a foreign land merely to subsist.

"Education [*Bildung*]," Hegel concludes,

> is therefore *liberation* and work towards a higher liberation; it is the absolute transition [*Durchgangspunkt*] to the infinitely subjective substantiality of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*], which is no longer immediate and natural, but spiritual and at the same time raised to the shape of universality.

In practice, education is "*hard work* [harte Arbeit] against mere subjectivity of conduct, against the immediacy of desire, and likewise against the subjective vanity of feeling and the whim of one's preferences." This negative labor of opposition is, at the same time, an ascent to the level of understanding and the being-at-home-in-externality that is, for Hegel, the condition of genuine individuality. The shucking off of natural simplicity and roughness allows us recognize ourselves in external actuality and, thus, to possess ourselves fully. We are liberated from the compulsion of having constantly to "play the game" to satisfy our needs and desires; the barrier between our subjective particularity and the interplay of individual interests is effaced or eliminated through our very participation in that interplay.

In a famous (or infamous) *Zusatz* to the foregoing passage, Hegel comments as follows: "By educated people, we may understand in the first place those who do everything as others do it and who do not flaunt their particularity, whereas it is precisely the latter that the uneducated

display, since their conduct is not guided by the universal aspects of the object." He goes so far as to claim that education "irons out" our peculiarities—like wrinkles from a shirt.[10] Again, Hegel seems to go out of his way to show that *Bildung* is not some kind of special possession, but an exemplary kind of ordinariness—the exemplariness of neither wanting nor needing to be anything special. Hegel appears as a great defender and champion of the bourgeois at a time when the bourgeois was already an object of contempt and of all manner of political and aesthetic attacks and efforts of overcoming. The fully self-conscious participant in bourgeois society, the man who has embraced the game and made it his own, is, Hegel suggests, nothing less than the complete human being. One might say that he means to vindicate *civilization* against *culture*, the alleged antagonism between which is expressive of an approach to the problem of modern dividedness that Hegel fundamentally rejects. For Hegel, "culture" means precisely the *Bildung* (or *Ausbildung*—the working out or elaboration) of civilization's implicit rationality and completeness. "Culture" is not a radical alternative to civilization, but a civilization that has come to understand its own finality and has thus made peace with itself. For Hegel, the "man of culture" is the bourgeois who has grasped that his is the most rational, satisfying, and contradiction-free life that can be lived on the foundation of individual freedom.

Hegel implies that even in a self-consciously individualistic society, one should expect a certain human type to predominate, and that this (in the strict sense) assimilative tendency of individual-rights based societies ought to be encouraged and seen through to its best conclusion, rather than fought against in the name of human variety or diversity (as the Romantics of Hegel's

[10] This much-decried passage might be seen as simply an affirmation of the essentially classical, as opposed to Romantic or naturalistic, character of education in general. Swimming provides a useful analogy: If one wants to swim well in the "ocean" of externality—the sea of competing individuals with competing interests into which we are thrown—then it is best to master the accepted strokes and eliminate individual peculiarities of motion. Excellent swimmers all look about the same in the pool, and to see them all at once, moving together and in competition with each other, is an impressive spectacle indeed.

time and, perhaps, the "multiculturalists" of ours). Indeed, it is especially in such a society that human beings tend to be or to become similar to one another, to a greater degree than in any past society. All are *gebildet*—formed, shaped, educated, cultivated—by and into the one universal *Zusammenhang*. There are no substantial social classes through which our characters are shaped, and traditional morality or natural law in a pre-modern sense is too weak to prevail over the spirit of individual freedom that animates modern societies. Moral traditions or *Sitten* must necessarily be reconstituted through the free actions of individuals. In this sense, modern societies, our own included, are the least "diverse" that have ever existed. Our incessant talk of "diversity" is ultimately an expression of our lack of diversity. We feel, obscurely perhaps, this lack, and we are troubled by it; but according to Hegel's account, this is not because we truly love or long for human diversity (it is difficult to conceive how such an abstraction could *be* an object of human longing), but because we have not thought through and cultivated our uniformity and responded to the intellectual and moral demands that it places on us. We have a bad conscience about out failure to accept what we are, and we try to appease it by praising and exaggerating superficial differences. But this only leads to a bad kind of similarity or sameness—a generic sort of eccentricity that is, for Hegel, a sort of no-man's-land of the spirit.[11]

II: Liberal Education in a Bourgeois World

Does classical liberal education have any place in the bourgeois world that Hegel champions? Surprisingly, study of the ancients appears to play an essential role in the larger process of *Bildung* that he seems to conceive in thoroughly modern terms. What, then, is the relationship

[11] Many things in our own society might be seen as examples of this tendency: "customized" consumer products that are nothing more than inputs into a computerized manufacturing system; the prevalence of tattoos and body art expressing outward difference but inner sameness; the nearly infinite variety of poetically-named colors with which to paint "accent walls"; "hipster culture" and its tendency to become entangled in ironic self-contradiction; etc.

between classical learning and the *Bildung* of bourgeois society? What purpose does the former serve, if not to help us to ascend out of the noisy cave of modern society? How does study of the ancient Greeks and Romans belong to or participate in the process through which individuals form themselves into an ethical whole on the foundation of subjective freedom? I will address these questions by examining some key passages in the first of a series of annual addresses Hegel gave as rector of the new gymnasium established at Nuremburg in 1809. The lecture as a whole takes the form of a defense of classical learning—a defense which was by no means either expected or obligatory on Hegel's part. Hegel wants to set the tone for the new institution, and he does so by making the case for a revival of classical education against some of the major currents of his age.

"The spirit and purpose of our institution," Hegel claims in beginning his statement about the principle [*Prinzip*] and fundamentals [*Grundzüge*] of the new school, "is *preparation for learned study,* a preparation which *is built on the foundation* [Grund] *of the Greeks and Romans.*"[12] Their works have been, for millennia (Hegel rather oddly says), the ground or soil [*Boden*] "on which all culture [*Kultur*][13] has stood, from which it has sprung, and with which it has been in continuous connection [*Zusammenhang*]." It is impossible, he claims, to conceive of

[12] "Rede zum Schuljahrabschluß am 29. September 1809," in G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke 4: Nürnberger und Heidelberger Schriften, 1808-1817* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 314. Part of the address is translated by Richard Kroner as "On Classical Studies," in *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. Jon Stewart (Evanston: Northwestern, 2000), pp. 291-9. I have made use of Kroner's translation with some modifications.

[13] Hegel uses the word *Kultur* occasionally (including twice in significant passages in this lecture) as more or less a synonym for *Bildung*, which has a much more important and definite (but also quite complicated and puzzling) place in his philosophy as a whole. *Kultur* for Hegel seems to mean a society or a people in a *gebildete* condition. In the second passage (discussed below), Hegel speaks of "the culture [*Kultur*], art, and science of a people" in a way that implies its equivalence to "the *Bildung* of the modern world." The implication is that *Bildung* includes all three of these entities, so perhaps *Kultur* may be taken to refer more specifically to manners or moral culture, which would be roughly consistent with the Kantian usage of the word. (Kant makes systematic use of *Kultur* on account of his neo-Roman emphasis on the careful tending and cultivation of nature.) The later nineteenth-century German tendency to employ *Kultur* as a polemical term against—and as the antidote to—civilization or *civilisation* as something typically English or French is foreign to Hegel, who, as I explain above, can be understood to be an opponent of the civilization-culture distinction before it really gets political traction.

an educated or enlightened society that does not somehow rest on the foundation of the ancients. Hegel then ventures the following analogy:

> Just as the natural organisms, plants and animals, struggle to free themselves from gravitation, but cannot escape this element of their being [*Wesen*], so has all art and science grown up out of that ground [*Boden*]. And even though the arts and sciences have attained their own self-sufficiency, they have not emancipated themselves from the recollection [*Erinnerung*] of that older education [*Bildung*]. As Antaeus renewed his forces by touching his mother earth, so has every new resurgence and invigoration of science and culture [*Bildung*] raised itself to the sunlight out of a return to antiquity [*Altertum*].

Several things are noteworthy in this complicated image. First, modern knowledge is rooted in ancient soil; it is a new growth, but it is not a radical departure from or superseding of the ancients. Second, the works of the ancients appear in the analogy as something different in kind from modern art and science. Hegel likens ancient *Bildung* to the soil, the inorganic element, and modern *Bildung* to the organic beings, plants and animals. Modern *Bildung* lives and dies and regenerates itself, while ancient *Bildung* is the permanent ground or *Boden* of all spiritual growth and striving. Ancient *Bildung* is original, modern *Bildung* is derivative. Third, modern *Bildung*, by its nature, does indeed *wish* to escape its ground, but is prevented from doing so by an external force, *recollection*, just as natural beings are prevented by gravitation from taking leave of the earth. Finally, the allusion to Antaeus implies that modern *Bildung* would destroy itself (or be destroyed by some Heracles) if ever it did succeed in escaping or renouncing ancient *Bildung*.

This account of modern intellectual and artistic activity is reminiscent of Hegel's account of the activity of the modern individual in the *Philosophie des Rechts* discussed above. Modern knowledge wishes to be immediately for itself and independent even though it is grounded in the element of the ancients; just as the modern individual wishes to be immediately for himself even

though he depends on the universal element of society for his subsistence. The logic of development by means of self-defeating self-assertion is the same in both cases. In the case of modern individuality, what prevents lift-off is the *Zusammenhang* of mutually interdependent individuals. The more we strive for independence, the more we find ourselves caught up in the universal element of society. In the case of modern knowledge, the more it strives for independence, the more it "recollects" the ancient ground from whence it is sprung. In both cases, the attempt to escape the origin leads back to the origin, but the relationship to the origin is profoundly altered in the process. The ancient republic is the ethical origin of the modern constitutional state populated by an enlightened, sociable, prosperous, and mutually cooperative bourgeoisie. Similarly, ancient *Bildung* is the ground on which the modern arts and sciences flourish and proliferate, and enable the manifold pursuits of the modern individual. The implication is that the study of the ancients is somehow essential to the maintenance of the integrity and self-conscious universality of the modern state. The study of—or rather the modern *return* to the ancients, which is what Hegel was trying to effect at the new gymnasium in the new, post-Napoleonic, reformed Bavarian monarchy[14]—has, for Hegel, the greatest political importance. This return is deeply implicated in the *Durchgangspunkt*, the moment of passing over into "the infinitely subjective substantiality of ethical life." The process Hegel describes in the *Philosophie des Rechts* of simultaneously ridding ourselves of natural coarseness while

[14] On the political background and context of Hegel's appointment as rector, see the excellent account of Terry Pinkard in *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 7. Pinkard presents Hegel, along with his friend and patron Immanuel Niethammer, as a champion of "neo-humanism" against Catholic and Protestant traditionalism on the one hand, and modern utilitarianism on the other. While this is broadly accurate, it perhaps does not appreciate Hegel's radical skepticism towards any kind of "cultural" palliative for modern society. Pinkard's Hegel is an intellectual like Niethammer, but Hegel may be more accurately characterized as *anti*-intellectual in the strict sense of the word. *Bildung*, in Hegel's view, is not primarily the formation of an enlightened class that can direct society, but rather it is *the formation or education of society itself*. There is a deeply republican character to Hegel's thinking that is (ironically) often missed by interpreters who regard him as a theorist of society or community in the sense of a wise and public-spirited intellectual critic.

acquiring new rational powers seems to be underwritten by a new regard for the works of the ancients as the permanent or inorganic basis, the soil, of modern ethical life.

Later in the lecture, after defending the importance of the study of ancient languages as one moment in the organic whole of knowledge rather than (as it was in the old institution) the most important part of higher learning, Hegel raises an objection that prompts a stirring, and rather poetic, defense of classical education. Hegel points out that the study of ancient languages, even when their place in the whole of knowledge is properly understood, is very demanding and time-consuming. Shouldn't we then just leave it to a few specialists and allow the rest to devote their time to the study and cultivation of the new sciences? "It seems to be a just demand," Hegel says, "that the culture [*Kultur*], art, and science of a people come to stand on its own two feet." He then poses the following question:

> May we not believe, of the *Bildung* of the modern world, of our enlightenment and the progress of all the arts and sciences, that they have replaced their Greek and Roman children's shoes and outgrown their leading-strings [*Gängelbande*] so as to be able to walk on their own ground and soil [*Grund und Boden*]?[15]

Hegel alludes to Kant's exhortation (in his famous essay, "What is Enlightenment?") that we cut our leading strings and start living and thinking by our own lights. But, he continues, if we truly wish to overcome coarseness or vulgarity—"if we agree that excellence [*das Vortreffliche*] should be the point of departure"—then, he claims, the study of Greek and Roman literature (in that order of priority) is the indispensable basis [*Grundlage*] of education. "The perfection and glory of these masterworks," Hegel says, "must be the spiritual bath, the profane baptism, which gives to the soul its first and inalienable tone and coloration [*Tinktur*] for taste and knowledge [*Wissenschaft*]." Moreover, a general familiarity with the ancients does not suffice for this

[15] *Werke 4*, p. 317.

critical preparation of soul. Rather, "we must dwell and dine with them, so that we can inhale their air, their ideas, their manners, one might say even their errors and prejudices, and become at home in this world, the most beautiful that has ever existed."

What should one make of this striking image of a rigorous classical education—one that includes mastery of Greek and Latin—as a "profane baptism"? For one thing, it implies that classical education is, or ought to be, more a radical *exposure* to the ancients than a scientific *study* of their works or way of life. We return to the ancients not primarily to know or learn about our origins, but to transport ourselves out of the modern world and back into what Hegel calls "the second, higher paradise, the paradise of the human spirit." There is a theological understanding at work, at least metaphorically,[16] that needs to be unpacked before we can understand how the works of the ancients function as a permanent standard for education. For Hegel, the ancient world is the postlapsarian peak of human existence. It is the beautiful whole assembled from the broken shards of the first, naïve paradise of human nature—like a glorious mosaic made from the pieces of a simple glass vessel that has been smashed. Its blessedness or serenity [*Heiterkeit*] is no child's game, but is like a veil, "spread over the melancholy which knows the cruelty [*Härte*] of fate but is not thereby driven to lose its freedom and moderation."

We have, Hegel implies, fallen from this second paradise that knew how to deal beautifully with a human condition filled with suffering and strife. (Hegel seems to have Homer and Greek tragedy especially in mind here.) The post-Christian principle "of the *self-sufficient and inherently infinite personality* of the individual, the principle of subjective freedom"[17] disrupts

[16] Hegel's understanding of paradise is in a sense necessarily metaphorical, in that paradise for him is not truly paradise, but rather a beautiful condition that was made to be broken or ruined as the means to a higher or more developed condition. The "higher" paradise of the spirit occurs in the world *after* the fall (!), and its beauty is owing to its sublime and poetic way of dwelling in a world of suffering and sin. The true (earthly) paradise comes at the *end*. And it is not truly a paradise, but a world that understands itself as final or post-historical and in which the spirit can finally come to rest and experience *boredom*—with all of its problems and possibilities.

[17] *Philosophie des Rechts* §185 (Anmerkung)

the tragic beauty of the ancient world. Its disruption, however, is both lamentable and inevitable—inevitable, because according to Hegel's redemptivist understanding, we can only return to God by means of the recognition of the individual's infinite personality which is sacrificed in the world of the ancients for the sake of the beautiful whole. Yet our souls need to "bathe" in their world if we are going to have any hope of constituting a *new* whole through our own *harte Arbeit* following our expulsion from the first paradise. We need not just a glimpse of, but a thorough immersion in

> the greatness of their sentiments, their statuesque [*plastische*] virtue free from moral ambiguity, their patriotism [*Vaterlandsliebe*], the grand manner of their deeds and characters, the multiplicity of their destinies, of their morals and constitutions

as a preparation for the demands of modern ethical life or citizenship. The new ethical whole that we modern individuals are trying to assemble will never be as beautiful as the ancient precisely because it will never be as "holistic"; it will always be riven by the spirited striving of individuals who are all too aware of the infiniteness of their personalities. Thus, "whoever has not known the works of the ancients, has lived without knowing what beauty is."

A synopsis of the foregoing argument might be that we need to study the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans because they are the expression of the only paradise that historical human beings have ever really known. But a claim like this can easily lend itself to snobbery, philistinism, "elitism," and a host of other vices of the intellectual (or, the general vice of *being* an intellectual, or at least an intellectual of a certain kind). Is there something more definite that serious exposure to the ancients *does*, according to Hegel, that makes it something more than just a beholding of a beautiful world (a world whose beauty is hardly self-evident to many modern people, as anyone who teaches Homer and Aristotle to college freshmen can attest)? How,

exactly, does classical education function as a baptism or purification of the modern soul that orients it towards a higher kind of cooperation amongst free individuals than would otherwise be possible?

Hegel addresses the question indirectly towards the end of the lecture when he treats the *formal* aspect of education after having discussed its substance. By what formal means or process does the study of the ancients have the effects or consequences that he claims it does? His answer, in sum, is that these works, read in their original languages, have the effect of *estranging* [Entfremden] us from ourselves. Genuine *Bildung* takes place only by means of the imagination's straining to occupy itself with "something not given in immediate experience, something foreign, something pertaining to recollection, to memory and the thinking mind."[18] Hegel claims that "only what is strange and foreign attracts our interest and lures us to activity and effort." Our moral and intellectual faculties are quickened by the experience of the foreign—similar, perhaps, to how one becomes more attentive and perceptive when visiting a foreign country for the first time.

Hegel speaks of the pedagogical necessity of a "separation wall" [*Scheidewand*], and claims that "the world and language of the ancients" is best suited to this purpose. Their world appears to us as a barrier between ourselves and…*ourselves*; that is, between the unformed self and the self that has realized itself through a process of self-estrangement and return.[19] Not just any

[18] *Werke* 4, pp. 320-1. Alasdair MacIntyre captures something of the spirit of Hegel's claim in the following statement: "[I]t is a primary responsibility of a university to be unresponsive, to give its students what they need, not what they want, and to do so in such a way that what they want becomes what they need and what they choose is choice-worthy." MacIntyre, "Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices," in *Higher Learning and Catholic Traditions*, ed. Robert E. Sullivan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), p. 15. (Cited in Liam Kavanagh, "Interview: Alasdair MacIntyre*," Expositions* 6.2 (2012), p. 1.)

[19] The subtitle of the *Bildung* section of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (published two years prior to the Nuremburg lecture discussed here) is "the self-estranged spirit" or "spirit in its self-estrangement." It is the quasi-historical account of how spirit-in-general comes to be *gebildet*, that is, to return to itself in a new kingdom following the break-up of its ancient paradise. A complete investigation of the questions being posed in this paper

unknown subject matter encourages this process. We require a genuinely foreign world that challenges us and draws us out of ourselves through its beauty as much as its troubling strangeness. The works of the ancients possess an unmatched power to separate us from ourselves and, hence, force us to work to rebuild ourselves into something greater. They are like a beautiful, exotic stranger whom we meet outside the gates of the first paradise, and who excites in us the energy of mind and soul to build for ourselves a new home worthy of the spirit with which we are originally endowed.

Conclusion

For Hegel, classical education serves the purpose of reminding us of human possibilities that our world of individualistic striving tends to obscure. It draw us out of ourselves towards what is universal, and encourages the best tendencies of our type of society towards genuinely ethical cooperation. It does not, however, promise any sort of transcendence of, or ascent above, the plane of bourgeois society. Although he waxes eloquent about the study of the ancients as immersion in the truly beautiful, he comes close to conceiving of classical education as essentially the *means*, or an especially important part of the means, of society's self-actualization or self-completion. It is the final stage of the modern individual's moral work of smoothing off his rough edges and becoming an exemplary participant in bourgeois society—the type who works hard, cares about the common good while respecting others' freedom and independence, and assiduously works to "bring people together" instead of remaining absorbed in his own private affairs.

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would require considerable attention to the *Phenomenology*, which is Hegel's complete account of the process of spirit's "recollection" of all its past phases that brings its historical development to completion.

Is *Bildung* as Hegel conceives it a liberal education? In the sense that it aims to liberate us from the narrow moral horizons that modern individuality tends to encourage, then it can certainly be called liberal. And Hegel intimates another sense of the liberating power of classical education when he speaks of its power to excite in the young the desire to dwell in a foreign world and allow themselves to be transformed by the experience. But he conceives of this power in terms of an immanent social process through which the modern individual learns to recognize himself in the workings of bourgeois society. Its purpose is ultimately to make us more completely at home in bourgeois society rather than to free us in a radical way from its forces and relations (whatever such a liberation might mean or entail). Hegel's most basic thought is that the truly liberally educated human being is the one who embodies a sort of exemplary ordinariness and derives satisfaction and serenity from being this way. He has, with the help of the ancients, learned to "own" his bourgeois existence and not to long for any kind of transcendence, at least not in this world. We may wonder at the spectacle of such a person. Whether one wonders with admiration depends, finally, on whether one thinks there are other modern possibilities for a human life well and fully lived.