

1998-02

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Sage Publications, Inc.

Schmidt, James. "Cabbage Heads and Gulps of Water: Hegel on the Terror." *Political Theory* 26:1 (1998): 4-32.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/3768>

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Cabbage Heads and Gulps of Water: Hegel on the Terror^{*}

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In a well-known passage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel declared that the sole “work and deed” of the French Revolution was:

death, and indeed a *death* that has no inner depth or fulfillment; ... the coldest, shallowest of deaths, with no more significance than cleaving a cabbage head or swallowing a gulp of water.¹

Hegel’s imagery is powerful, but also somewhat obscure. It is clear enough what he was suggesting with the grotesque image of the guillotine as a kitchen utensil, grown to a monstrous size and put to a different task. It speaks to the utter indifference towards death that Hegel saw as the hallmark of the Terror: slicing off the heads of fellow citizens had become no more difficult than using a *Kohlhobel* to slice cabbage for sauerkraut.² What he was attempting to invoke with the other part of the image — the gulp of water — is not so obvious. Commentators on the *Phenomenology* have provided little in the way of explanation other than noting that, like the metaphor of cabbage-cleaving, it shows how routinized death had become: killing had become an act with no more meaning than swallowing a gulp of water.³ But one may still ask: Why a “gulp of water”? The question, it turns out, is not an idle one.

Jean Hyppolite once observed that “it is by no means easy to interpret relevant passages in the *Phenomenology*, for they present an inextricable weaving of concrete and particular events along with general and universal notions.”⁴ The image of the “gulp of water,” as we shall see, is one such reference to a specific event, dropped into Hegel’s text without comment, presumably with the assumption that readers would get the point. Our failure to pick up the reference suggests how differently we approach the *Phenomenology* than its first, largely baffled, readers. Commentators today typically treat the discussion of the French Revolution in the *Phenomenology* as a first draft for either the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* or the *Philosophy of Right*.⁵ While such a reading may allow us to see how Hegel eventually resolved the problems he first posed in the *Phenomenology*, it incurs the cost of making the development

^{*} An earlier version of this paper was presented at the meetings of the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies, Austin, Texas, March 31, 1996

of Hegel's views on the French Revolution more straightforward than they in fact were. To understand how Hegel sought to make sense of the Terror in the *Phenomenology* we need to look, not to his later works, but rather to the sources on which he drew and the events in the recent past which shaped his imagery. We need to know how Hegel learned about the French Revolution, what events in the Revolution struck him as noteworthy, and how he came to incorporate these events into his account of the Revolution. And, appropriately enough, it helps a great deal to know what he was alluding to when he invoked the peculiar image of a death as cold and empty as "swallowing a gulp of water."

We can take, as our point of departure, the letter he wrote to Friedrich Wilhelm Josef Schelling on Christmas Eve, 1794. Hegel had been Schelling's friend and classmate at the seminary in Tübingen when the Revolution broke out, and at the time of the letter had been living in Berne for a little over a year, working as a tutor for an old patrician family. Schelling, who was far more successful initially in academic life than Hegel, was at the University of Jena. Amid discussions of old friends from the seminary and Schelling's recent publications, we find two paragraphs that provide the earliest written record of Hegel's reaction to the French Revolution:

By accident I spoke a few days ago with the author of the letters, well known to you, in Archenholz's *Minerva* that are signed "O," and allegedly written by an Englishman. The author, however, is a Silesian and is named Oelsner. ... Oelsner is still a young man, but one sees he has toiled much. He is living here this winter on his own means. ...

You probably know that Carrier has been guillotined. Do you still read the French papers? ... This trial is very important, and has revealed the complete infamy [*Schändlichkeit*] of the Robespierrists.⁶

From this letter we learn that Hegel's sources for information about the French Revolution included the journal *Minerva* and its correspondent Oelsner. We also learn what it was about the French Revolution that most occupied his attention at the moment: the trial of Jean-Baptiste

Carrier. If we follow up on these two clues, we will understand both the interpretive context in which he first began to make sense of the Terror and the peculiar significance that the “gulp of water” had in Hegel’s portrait of the Terror.

“A Silesian ... Named Oelsner”

In December 1794, the twenty-four year old Hegel, fresh from seminary, met Konrad Engelbert Oelsner, six years his elder and worn down by the French Revolution. It is not hard to guess who found whom more interesting. Oelsner had studied law at the University of Frankfurt (Oder), with side interests in history, philosophy, medicine, and mathematics.⁷ After brief stint as a tutor in Frankfurt, he left the town — and his academic studies — to journey to Vienna and then to Switzerland. It was here that he received the first reports of the Revolution and, in July of 1790, moved to Paris, where he settled into the circle of German immigrants and became a regular visitor to the Jacobin Club. His closest ties were with those Girondist deputies who would eventually split with Robespierre (he knew Brissot, Condorcet, and Kersaint) and their German and Swiss associates, which included Wilhelm von Archenholz, a retired Prussian officer, military historian, and journalist. Archenholz was the editor of *Minerva*, an influential monthly that from 1792 onward provided German readers with reports on events in Paris and translations of documents and articles pertaining to the French Revolution.⁸ In August 1792, Oelsner began a regular series of “Historical Letters on the Most Recent Occurrences in France” for the journal. The letters, which continued monthly until March 1793, provided a vivid first-hand account of political events in the capital, interspersed with his own reflections on their significance.⁹

Hegel was an avid reader of *Minerva* and, as Jacques D’Hondt has shown, its articles left a mark on his subsequent work.¹⁰ It was here that he first read portions of Volney’s *Les Ruines, ou Méditations sur les Révolution des Empires*, which he would subsequently draw upon in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.¹¹ It was also here that he encountered a selection from Rabaut de Saint-Étienne’s *Précis de l’histoire de la Révolution française pour l’année 1792* that

dealt with the class structure of the *ancien régime* in a fashion that resembles Hegel's treatment of the dialectic of noble and base consciousness in the *Phenomenology*.¹² Oelsner's reports, along with articles by Archenholz and others, were one of Hegel's chief sources of information about the French Revolution.

Both Archenholz (who left Paris in the summer of 1792) and Oelsner (who stayed on until July of 1794) were concerned with the turn the Revolution had taken during the summer of 1792. Archenholz published an extended critique of the Jacobin leadership in the August, 1792 *Minerva*, denouncing their "political enthusiasm [*politischen Schwärmerey*]" and expressing disgust at their appeal to the basest instincts of the lowest classes in French society.¹³ Oelsner's reports from Paris more than confirmed Archenholz's reservations. He was present at the Tuileries on August 10, 1792 and likened the slaughter of the Swiss Guards and the mounting of their heads on pikes to a second Saint Bartholomew's Day.¹⁴ Pondering the events that had led to the toppling of the monarchy, Oelsner concluded that the "shortsighted politics" of those foreign governments who had sought to crush the Revolution had paradoxically provided the impetus for a revolution that would sweep Europe, dissolving the ties that bound civil society together.

In the heart of civilized states there is a race of barbarians [*Geschlecht von Wilden*]. It is by far the most numerous. I thought of that segment of Europeans that had been hardened by poverty while the others had been weakened by excess. Born with the same claims to the goods of nature as the great, the rich, the happy, this segment starved. The animating breath [*Odem*] of philosophy has permeated all the atoms of civil society; they take in hand the knowledge of right and the feeling of power.¹⁵

The events of August 10 had reinforced Oelsner's long-standing conviction that social reform is possible only if it is guided by a "middle class" that is "neither enervated by luxury nor barbarized by want."¹⁶ The Jacobin leadership, however, by pandering to the masses and embracing Rousseau's flawed understanding of the social contract, had created a "wild democracy" that had reduced a "civilized nation to the deepest barbarity."¹⁷

The months that followed bore out Oelsner's fears. He was appalled by the September Massacres, which he interpreted as part of a plot by the "triumvirate" of Danton, Marat, and Robespierre to create a situation of total anarchy as a pretext for imposing a dictatorship.¹⁸ He denounced the trial and execution of Louis XVI as contrary to public morality, though he granted that Louis was guilty of having conspired against the freedom of his people.¹⁹ By the summer of 1793, he was grasping at straws: he regarded Charlotte Corday's assassination of Marat as an "ideal of virtue" that might move others to take arms against Robespierre and he praised her calm demeanor on the scaffold as an inspiration to future generations.²⁰ But, by the time of Marat's death, the Gironde had already been expelled from the Convention, and twenty-nine of the Girondist deputies had been arrested. Oelsner was detained for eight days in August, 1793 during a round-up of foreigners; fearing for his life, he destroyed all of his unpublished notes upon his release.²¹ He nevertheless remained in Paris through the autumn, as his former colleagues perished beneath the guillotine, and stayed on into the spring of the next year, finally fleeing the city, nearly penniless, in May, 1794. Moving between Basel, Zürich, and Berne, he continued to write articles that articulated the Girondist critique of the Terror and opposed the arguments of German Jacobins such as Georg Forster who saw the Terror as necessitated by external threats to the Republic. He viewed Robespierre's fall in July, 1794 as a vindication of his argument that the events of 1793-94 represented a detour from the proper course of the Revolution and in April 1795 he returned to Paris — where he would spend most of the rest of his life — to resume the pursuit of the goals that had been thwarted with Robespierre's rise to power.²²

"Carrier has been Guillotined"

It is unclear whether Hegel learned of the trial and execution of Jean-Baptiste Carrier from Oelsner or from the unnamed "French newspapers" to which he alluded in his letter to Schelling. It is certain that he could not have learned about it from *Minerva*, since the January issue, which contained the journal's first discussion of Carrier's trial, would not have been in his

hands when he wrote to Schelling.²³ When learned of Carrier's trial matters less, however, than *what* he took from it, and the revelation from the trial that seems to have had the greatest significance for the imagery he employed in the *Phenomenology* leaps out from the frontispiece of the January 1795 issue of *Minerva*. One glance at it, and it is obvious why the image of the "gulp of water" stands on an equal footing with the guillotine in Hegel's portrait of the Terror.

[Insert reproduction of frontispiece somewhere below this point]

The frontispiece, an engraving entitled "Republican Marriages and Fusillades in the Vendée in 1794," depicts a scene of monstrous barbarity. In the left background a line of Republican soldiers fires on a group of unarmed civilians, both men and women. The viewer's eye, however, is immediately drawn to what is taking place in the right foreground. On a barge stands a couple, stripped naked and bound together. The woman's leg is on the gunnel of the boat and her head is thrown back as she and her partner recoil from Republican soldiers who, with upraised swords and rifle butts, force them out of the boat and into the river. To their left, in the bow of the boat, sits another naked couple; their hands are tied behind their backs and they are bound facing one another, locked in a pathetic embrace as they await their fate. The river below is filled with other men and women, tied together, struggling in vain against their bonds and against the current. The bow of the boat plows into the lifeless bodies of a couple who have already perished in the river.

The frontispiece depicts the most notorious of the official charges brought by the Revolutionary Tribunal against Jean-Baptiste Carrier, the Committee of Public Safety's representative *en mission* to the *armée révolutionnaire* in Nantes: that, under Carrier's orders, troops carried out "republican marriages," which "consisted in stripping a young man and a young woman naked, binding them to one another, and throwing them into the water."²⁴ Inside the January *Minerva*, a complete list of the charges against Carrier could be found. Drownings turn up with numbing regularity. It was charged that, one night, Carrier "had three beautiful women drowned, after he had made use of them."²⁵ On another occasion, he had a certain woman taken off the street, brought to him, and "after he had enjoyed her, he had her drowned."²⁶ At his

command, “pregnant women were drowned with a number of good patriots.”²⁷ He ordered that another man to be drowned because he tried to prevent Carrier from raping one of these pregnant women.²⁸ When a young woman sought permission to give her imprisoned brother some bread, he replied that no bread was necessary since he had enough water to drink and, the next night, drowned the prisoner.²⁹ When wagons carrying 300 more prisoners arrived and their guards inquired where they should be placed, Carrier ordered that they all be “thrown into the water.”³⁰ Night after night he emptied his prisons, arranging mass drownings of prisoners, indifferent to the fact that his victims included “women, girls, and children.”³¹ For thirty-seven pages the accusations rolled on, painting the portrait of a monster.

Whether Carrier actually did all of things he was charged with doing has remained a subject of debate. The Tribunal concluded that his role in instigating “Republican Marriages” could not be proven, and some subsequent commentators have questioned whether *any* “Republican Marriages” took place.³² But certain facts are beyond dispute.³³ He arrived in Nantes in October 1793, sent by the Committee of Public Safety to oversee the response to the insurrection in the Vendée. The previous March, masses of peasants protesting the Civil Constitution of the Clergy took up pitchforks, sickles, and hunting rifles and overran two district capitals north of the Loire, killing four administrators. While troops were able to restore order relatively quickly in the regions north of the river, the poorly armed Republican troops to the south, many of them pinned down on the coast anticipating an invasion from England, proved to be no match for armies of peasants who sometimes numbered as high as a hundred thousand and overran most of the towns in the region, with bloody massacres at Cholet in the Maine-et-Loire and Machecoul in the Loire-Inférieure.

By the time Carrier arrived, the tide had begun to turn against the insurgents, who suffered a major setback at Cholet on October 17. Almost immediately upon his arrival, acting on the rumor that there was a plot afoot against him, he had 132 of the leading citizens of Nantes arrested and sent on foot to Paris to stand trial; thirty-five died during the brutal forty-day forced march. Fearing that the captives who filled the prison in Nantes were plotting an insurrection,

and if successful might link up with rebel forces, Carrier directed the commandant to execute between 800 to 900 prisoners.³⁴ Firing squads were soon supplemented by mass drownings in the Loire, in which prisoners were strapped into boats which were then sunk in the river — Carrier’s term of art for the technique was “vertical deportation.”³⁵ Finally, in retaliation for the massacres of republican officials and soldiers, Carrier converted much of the Vendée into a free-fire zone, ordering troops (as he reported to the Committee of Public Safety) “to put to death in all the insurgent regions everyone of either sex who is found there.”³⁶ “It is a humanitarian principle with me,” he explained in a letter to the Convention, “to purge the earth of the liberty of these monsters.”³⁷ In the midst of this mayhem, rumors about “Republican Marriages” and tales of Carrier’s own personal depravity began to circulate.

He was recalled to Paris early February, 1795, after Marc-Antoine Julien, sent by Robespierre as part of an effort to gain control over the actions of representatives *en mission*, submitted a report about the situation in Nantes that must have confirmed the Committee of Public Safety’s worst fears about the activities of its representatives in the provinces.³⁸ Julien reported that the army in Nantes was without discipline, that the bodies of the executed lay unburied polluting the air while the Loire flowed red with blood, and that Carrier himself was “invisible to all constituted bodies,” having secreted himself in “a seraglio, surrounded by insolent sultanesses” and accessible only to his staff, “who ceaselessly fawn upon him.” Carrier’s spies were everywhere, Julien reported, and even good patriots were harassed. “Public spirit is dead,” he concluded, “liberty no longer exists. In Nantes I have seen the *ancien régime*.”³⁹

Carrier survived the purges and executions of the Spring of 1794 that accompanied Robespierre’s attempt to centralize control over the Terror and lived to play a role in the toppling of Robespierre at the end of July (one can assume that an interest in self-preservation may have provided an incentive).⁴⁰ But he could not avoid being implicated in the investigations into the functioning of the Terror that began with Robespierre’s fall. Appropriately enough, the trial of the citizens that Carrier had sent from Nantes to Paris started the process that led to his own

execution. Their trial began in early September and almost immediately turned into a trial of those who had oppressed them.⁴¹ Reports of both the horrors of their forced march to Paris and of the atrocities committed by Carrier in Nantes filled Paris newspapers and were promptly picked up by *Minerva*, which published a diary of one of the citizens, along with other reports of their ordeal.⁴² The citizens were acquitted and proceedings were begun against the Revolutionary Committee of Nantes on October 14 and against Carrier himself on November 24. The Committee responded to the accusations against them by blaming Carrier. Carrier, in turn, responded by claiming that the crimes he was alleged to have committed were either fabricated or — when he could not deny their veracity — had been necessitated by the exigencies of the situation. He also insisted, attempting to implicate those who would judge him, that he had kept the Committee of Public Safety informed of his actions, and at least some of his reports had been read before the Convention itself. His defense was not convincing enough to save him from the guillotine, but it did raise enough questions about how much the Committee of Public Safety and the Convention knew about what he was doing to lead some to conclude that the atrocities in Nantes could not be attributed to the depravity of one individual, but instead suggested that the entire ruling apparatus was responsible.⁴³

“The Complete Infamy of the Robespierrists”

It is thus hardly surprising that Hegel should view Carrier’s trial with interest. For anyone even remotely concerned with developments in France, the trial was an event of enormous significance. Nor is it surprising that he would opine to Schelling that the trial “revealed the complete infamy of the Robespierrists.” On that there was also general agreement: the trial of Carrier raised fundamental questions about the course of the Revolution since Robespierre’s rise to power. But during the winter of 1794-1795 there was still a certain ambiguity as to what exactly constituted the “infamy” of Robespierre and his followers. A number of different answers were possible, and the contest between them suggests the different ways in which those who had lived through the Terror sought to make sense of it.⁴⁴

Julien's complaint against Carrier was that he had brought the *ancien régime* back to life. In this interpretation, in which the image of Carrier as a "new Nero" figures prominently, Carrier's infamy rests with his failure to control the actions of the army, his cultivation of a sumptuous life style, and his sexual depravity. His sinking of boats filled with priests and prisoners figures less prominently in this accounting than his drowning of the women he had "used" or his failure to prevent his troops from performing "Republican Marriages." Those who saw Carrier's infamy as residing in his reestablishing of something resembling *ancien régime* might excuse the mass drownings of priests and prisoners as necessary for the reestablishment of control over the region.⁴⁵ The prisons, they could concede, were overcrowded and the prisoners might well have been plotting to turn on the outnumbered forces who guarded them. Certainly, the slaughter of Republican officials the previous Spring served as a grim reminder of how fragile control over the region was.⁴⁶ Further, the fact that there was already an elaborate vocabulary at hand which portrayed the *Vendéens* as subhuman — they were "brigands," "fanatics," "an abominable race infatuated by royalism and superstition" — may have made it easier to overlook some of Carrier's actions.⁴⁷ But the drowning of the women he had "enjoyed" or his troops' drowning of young couples for sport were acts that defied any calculus of necessity. They recalled a type of violence whose roots went deep in the *ancien régime* — a violence that the Terror was intended to replace.

The *Phenomenology* was remarkably acute in its understanding of the logic of the Terror. Its purpose was to substitute a "cold and empty" death for a type of death that was anything but cold or empty: the spontaneous and grotesque popular violence that exploded in the first two years of the Revolution. Recall the fate of Bertier de Sauvigny and Joseph François Foulon, both of whom were murdered by crowds in the summer of 1789. After Foulon, who was accused of complicity in a plot to starve the population, was decapitated by the crowd that had "arrested" him, his mouth was stuffed with hay and his head was mounted on a pike that was carried through the streets. The trunk of his body was pulled along behind, until nothing was left but a bloody pulp. Along the parade route, the crowd presented the head to his son-in-law, Bertier de

Sauvigny, who was in turn mutilated, with his head and heart mounted on pikes and paraded through the streets.⁴⁸

Compared to spectacles such as these, the guillotine could at least claim to be a more civilized means of disposing of the enemies of the state. It extended to all citizens a form of execution that had once been the prerogative of the nobility. During the *ancien régime*, decapitation had been viewed as less demeaning than hanging (and, presumably, less painful), but it required a complaisant victim capable of remaining motionless on the block while the executioner went about a task that required a certain measure of skill. The guillotine asked less of its victims (tied to a plank their necks would remain in the proper position even if they were so ignoble as to faint or struggle) and less of those who operated it (physical skill and a properly sharpened sword were no longer part of the job description of the executioner).⁴⁹ Indeed, the “spectacle” of the guillotine was so rapid — the blade fell, there was quick spurt of blood, and the show was over — that those who came to observe the first executions were disappointed. Hence the ritual of a long procession of the condemned through the streets *prior* to execution was substituted for the parade of body parts that had been a standard feature of popular violence. A final display of the severed head became the responsibility of the executioner, who was now unique in being the only one permitted to touch the body of the executed.⁵⁰

The public’s passion for blood spectacles was nothing new. It had roots in the practices of the *ancien régime*: the famous execution of the would-be regicide Damiens was, after all, anything but “cold and empty.” It went on for hours, much to the satisfaction of the crowd if to the consternation of the executioners, who had a difficult time finishing their task. That the Revolution was, from the start, bathed in blood, is beyond dispute. But to say, as Simon Schama does, that “The Terror was merely 1789 with a higher body count” misses an important nuance.⁵¹ The body count during the Terror *could* be higher because the character of the violence had changed. The popular violence of the first years of the Revolution, like the public cruelties of the *ancien régime*, was excessive in intensity but — at least until the September Massacres — relatively restrained in the number of victims. Cruelty this spectacular was, if nothing else,

rather time-consuming. In attempting to wrest control of violence from the population and to provide a state-sanctioned cruelty that would spare the people the necessity of being cruel, the Terror wound up installing a form of execution that was a good deal more efficient than the forms it replaced, hence the possibility of a “higher body count.” When death becomes as easy as chopping cabbages, the technical means were at hand for slaughter on a mass scale.⁵²

Thus, at the moment when Hegel was telling Schelling that Carrier’s trial revealed the “complete infamy of the Robespierrists,” two different interpretation of what was “infamous” about Carrier’s actions were possible, differences that were mirrored in the two different forms taken by his peculiar innovation in the technology of revolutionary murder — execution by drowning. The mass drownings of prisoners and priests were even more brutally efficient than the guillotine, permitting a small number of terrorists to dispose of a large number of victims in a relatively short span of time.⁵³ In contrast, “Republican Marriages,” like Carrier’s alleged murder of the women he raped, evoked a cruelty of a rather different sort: more intimate, more lurid, and more leisurely. In the list of formal charges against Carrier the attention devoted to this second type of drowning almost crowds out the mass drownings of prisoners, just as the representation of “Republican Marriages” in *Minerva* thrusts the mass executions by firing squads into the background. One possible explanation for this peculiar emphasis lies in the general character of the Thermidorian reaction to the Revolution itself.

Julien’s claim in his report to Robespierre that Carrier had restored the *ancien régime* bears an uncanny resemblance to the accusations that would eventually be raised against Robespierre himself. In his exhaustive examination of the evolution of political discourse during Thermidor, Bronislaw Baczko has traced the history of the curious rumor that spread through Paris on the night of 9 and 10 Thermidor: that Robespierre planned to marry the daughter of Louis XVI and proclaim himself king.⁵⁴ For those who found the rumor plausible, Robespierre’s infamy resided in his attempt to become not simply “the new Cromwell, the new Cataline” — the epithets hurled at him on the morning of 9 Thermidor — but rather the next Louis. Thus, at least in the first round of charges, Robespierre’s infamy, like Carrier’s, lay not in his having driven the

flawed logic of the Revolution to its bloody conclusion, but rather in his having turned traitor against the otherwise praiseworthy ideals of the Revolution.

Strange though charges of this sort might be to us, they would not have been unfamiliar to Hegel. He could have heard such an analysis first hand from Oelsner who, as we have seen, viewed the Terror as the creature of the machinations of Robespierre, Danton, and Marat. He could also have read such an analysis in the curious pamphlet translated in the December 1794 *Minerva* bearing the title: “The Jacobins as Aristocrats, Federalists, and Counter-revolutionaries. Finally their horrible secrets are revealed!”⁵⁵ It charged that the Jacobin Society was “the cradle of a new aristocracy” which, under the leadership of Robespierre, entered into a secret plot (allegedly supported by Pitt and other enemies of the Revolution) with Federalist societies in Dijon, Marseilles, and Grenoble.⁵⁶ Its aim was to provoke a counterrevolution against the principles of “liberty and equality” that the Revolution had established and to create a system where the Jacobins and their allies had control over all public offices.⁵⁷ It argued that Robespierre and his allies — and the pamphlet places Carrier in the inner circle of Couthon, Duhem, St. Just, Barère, and Collot-d’Herbois⁵⁸ — had nothing to lose by promoting anarchy and counter-revolution, since this gave them the excuse to expel the Gironde and to launch the Terror.⁵⁹

As Baczko has suggested, conspiracy stories such as these flourished in the wake of Robespierre’s fall in part because they provided an explanation for the Terror that stayed within the terms of discourse that had been laid out by the Terror itself. Fears of foreign plots, rumors about efforts to reestablish the monarchy, secret alliances between counter-revolutionary movements in the provinces — these were all standard elements of Jacobin rhetoric. At the onset of the Thermidor, the path of least resistance would be to turn this analysis against those who had once deployed it. To focus on the Carrier’s excesses or to see Robespierre as a would-be tyrant was thus to mount a criticism of those who put the Terror into practice which left the broader question of the relationship of the Terror to the Revolution unexamined. It condemned excessive or counter-revolutionary violence but left the Revolution unscathed. Only later would another

analysis of the Terror emerge, one that traced the roots of the Terror not to the infamy of a few individuals who lusted after power, but which instead came to the more disturbing conclusion that perhaps it was something in the Revolution itself that propelled it into the Terror.

The fact that Carrier's trial held such an interest for Hegel shows that in December 1794 he was, in his own way, working through the same sets of questions that dominated debate in Paris during Thermidor. The letter to Schelling, however, was silent on a crucial point: just what constituted the "infamy of the Robespierrists"? Was it that they, as Oelsner maintained, had betrayed the Revolution by seeking to establish a new aristocracy that would mimic all the worst features of the *ancien régime*? Or was it that they demonstrated a basic failing within the revolutionary project itself? In the *Phenomenology* Hegel cast his lot with the latter account. But it is not at all clear that he had reached this conclusion by the end of 1794. Indeed, the evidence we have suggests that the path which led him to this conclusion is a bit more complicated than is sometimes assumed.

Robespierre as Theseus, or the Necessity of Infamy

The argument that the Terror necessarily followed from the premises of the Revolution emerged only gradually in Hegel's notes and drafts over the dozen years of work that separated his letter to Schelling from the completion of the *Phenomenology*. One particularly significant step in the development of Hegel's view of the French Revolution is preserved in a fragment, originally published in Karl Rosenkranz's biography of Hegel, that dates from either Hegel's days in Berne or Frankfurt. In it, Hegel contrasted the way in which modern states respected property rights with the attitude of ancient republics, whose constitutions "frequently encroached upon the strict rights of property." Observing that in the Athenian *polis*, the Roman republic, and the Florentine city-state the "disproportionate wealth of a few citizens" posed a threat to public liberty, Hegel suggested, "It would be an important inquiry to see how many of the strict rights of property would have to be sacrificed if a stable form of a republic were to be introduced." He concluded, "Perhaps the system of the sans-culottes has been done a grave injustice by those who

see rapacity as the sole motive underlying their wish for a greater equality of wealth.”⁶⁰

Hegel’s suggestion that the “sans-culotte” concern with equality might have a basis other than a desire for plunder is significant both for what it rejects and for what it implies. The image of the rapacious sans-culotte had figured prominently in representations of Republican Marriages. One popular engraving of a Republican Marriage depicts a sans-cullote soldier carrying away the clothing of a couple prior to their being bound and drowned.⁶¹ The theft of clothing also played a role in accounts of executions performed by the *armée révolutionnaire* in the Vendée. In the engraving in *Minerva* depicting fusillades and Republican Marriages the victims of the firing squads appear to have been stripped of their clothing, presumably by an army that was collecting booty. The sadistic eroticism of Republican Marriages was thus alleged to be the creature of a desire that went deeper than a perverse sexual cruelty: sans-culottes were men who, above all else, craved the property of others.

By the time of the fragment quoted above (which at the latest dates from 1798) Hegel had come to see “the system of the sans-culottes” in a somewhat different light. The concern with property could not be written off to their rapacity. Instead it spoke to central concerns within the republican tradition: How could a citizenry which was concerned with amassing private gain possibly cultivate the civic virtues that were demanded for the survival of a republic? How could one speak of a “public interest” in a community where, because of massive differences in wealth, individuals lived lives that had little in common? To ask such questions was to begin to see the actions of the sans-culottes as motivated by something other than a desire for individual gain. They were playing out in history the same complex relationship between equality and liberty that Hegel had encountered in his reading of Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Thus the sans-culottes began, for Hegel, to shed the image of rapacity and instead became good republicans.

The image of Robespierre also underwent a significant modification in Hegel’s writings during the decade prior to the completion of the *Phenomenology*. Robespierre enters the Jena lectures on the “Philosophy of Spirit” of 1805-1806 not in the role of a Cataline who betrays the

republic but rather in the unlikely guise of a modern Theseus, the figure who stands at the very origin of free cities.⁶² Discussions of Theseus had long occupied an important place in Hegel's writings.⁶³ For Hegel, the legendary founder of Athens symbolized the step that inaugurated political life: he brought scattered clans living in a state of rural dispersion together into a *polis* and infused them with a sense of political solidarity by establishing a civic religion. The task facing a modern Theseus would be even more daunting: Hegel's reflections on modern political life time and again emphasized how self-seeking, private individuals — which he, following Rousseau, dubbed the *bourgeois* — could not achieve the public-mindedness that was the hallmark of the *citoyen*.⁶⁴ His unpublished essay *The German Constitution* (written between 1800 and 1802) surveyed a hopelessly divided Germany and concluded that it would take a new Theseus to make Germany into a unified state, noting that “an event of that sort has never been the fruit of deliberation, but only of force.”⁶⁵

The tension between *bourgeois* and *citoyen* returns in different forms throughout Hegel's writings from the Jena period. His discussion of natural law theories in the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* (1802-3) juxtaposes a class of individuals who live for the sake of the polity as a whole to those who look out only for their own interests.⁶⁶ Its companion piece, the unpublished *System der Sittlichkeit* (1802), posits a similar dichotomy between a “system of need” — which is concerned with the reproduction of material life — and the systems of “justice” and “discipline” — which seek to bind otherwise separate individuals together into a community with a common purpose.⁶⁷ The same concerns reappear in Hegel's lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit, culminating with the comparison of Robespierre and Theseus at the close of the 1805-1806 series. The problem, as before, is how to infuse individuals with a sense of a common purpose. Echoing the Machiavellian language of *The German Constitution*, Hegel observes that states can only be established “through the noble force of great men.”

In this way Theseus established the Athenian state. And thus, in the French Revolution, a fearful force sustained the state This force is not despotism but tyranny, pure horrifying domination. Yet it is necessary and

just, insofar as it constitutes and sustains the state as this actual individual.⁶⁸

Tyranny, however, does not last. It is overthrown not “because it is abhorrent, vile, and so on” but rather because it has become “superfluous.”

The memory of the tyrant becomes abhorrent. ... Robespierre was dealt with in this way — his power left him because necessity had left him, and thus he was overthrown by force. That which is necessary happens — but every part of necessity is usually allotted only to individuals. The one is accuser and defender, the other a judge, the third a hangman — but all are necessary.⁶⁹

Robespierre’s “infamy,” like the rapacity of the sans-culottes, now appears in a different light. We have moved away from an evaluation of the Terror which, like Oelsner, would search for the point where the evil of particular individuals misled the Revolution into Terror. Terror now became a necessary part of politics — it is the force that rips individuals out of themselves and binds them together into a republic.

An interpretation of Hegel’s relationship to the Revolution that portrays him as an early enthusiast who, dismayed by the Terror, came to see the failings of its naive attempt to revive ancient republican virtue thus misses a few odd twists in the evolution of his thinking. Hegel, like others, hailed the Revolution at first, then — again like others — was appalled by the revelations of the Thermidor period. But then, pursuing a path that others did not follow, he came to regard the atrocities of the Terror as somehow *necessary*. For this reason, his interpretation of the French Revolution cannot be likened to that of Burke or to German Burkeans like Friedrich Gentz, A. W. Rehberg, or Ernst Brandes. While much of Hegel’s language resembles Burke’s, his account is, in a fundamental sense, opposed to that of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.⁷⁰ For Burke the Revolution was a mistake, the result of a terrible foolishness that ought to, and perhaps could, have been avoided. While Hegel agreed that Revolution culminated in disaster, he was not so sure that this was a catastrophe that could

— and perhaps even ought to — have been avoided. The account of the Terror in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was devoted to elaborating this most peculiar of claims.

The Legacy of Enlightenment: Unsatisfying Death and Furious Destruction

Images of death — and, more specifically, murder — turn up with unsettling regularity in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Sometimes organic metaphors are deployed: in the struggle to grasp an object a concept is driven beyond itself, and “this uprooting entails its death.”⁷¹ Sometimes Hegel’s language is theological: the whole process of concepts going beyond themselves is likened to the “stations” on the *Via Delorosa* and *Phenomenology* itself is characterized as the “Golgotha of the absolute spirit.”⁷² The book devotes a whole section to the failings of phrenology, a science that sought to explain spirit by interrogating a *caput mortuum*.⁷³ And, in an episode on which Alexandre Kojève built an entire career, two individuals, intent on proving their self-sufficiency, stage a fight to the death. Hegel’s “Science of the Experience of Consciousness” is clearly not a *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*.

Like the more familiar discussion of the dialectic of Lordship and Bondage, one of the central themes of Hegel’s account of the Terror is that murder is, ultimately, a rather unsatisfying experience. In the dialectic of Lordship and Bondage, two antagonists, seeking recognition as autonomous beings, battle to the death. As is well known, the winner also loses: dead men grant no recognition. And so we move onward through the frustrations of mastery and servitude (recognition by a slave doesn’t count for much either), the travails of the Unhappy Consciousness, the bizarre world of the “spiritual animal kingdom,” the tragic collisions of Antigone and Creon, the frustrating exchanges between *Moi* and *Lui* in *Rameau’s Nephew*, the inconclusive struggle between Enlightenment and Superstition and finally come, still unsatisfied, to the chapter on “Absolute Freedom and Terror” where we find ourselves contemplating “a *death* that has no inner depth or fulfillment; ... the coldest, shallowest of deaths.”⁷⁴ The Terror thus enters the pages of the *Phenomenology* as one more example of the fruitless effort to master objectivity by killing it.

The Enlightenment plays a pivotal role in Hegel's account of the path that leads to the Terror. For us the idea that there is some type of connection between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution is so hackneyed as to be unexceptional. But this overlooks how vital a question this relationship still was in 1806. For well over a decade the issue of whether enlightenment caused revolutions had been hotly disputed. Some defenders of enlightenment had viewed the very idea of revolution as suspect. Writing a year before the French Revolution, the enlightened Berlin clergyman Andreas Riem described the "Patriot Rebellion" in Holland as the work of "unenlightened demagogues" and viewed the American war of independence as a misfortune that could have been avoided had there been more enlightened leadership in England and in the colonies.⁷⁵ Johann Heinrich Tieftrunk, the editor of the first collection of Kant's works, came to much the same conclusion in a 1794 essay. Far from promoting violent revolutions, he argued, "True enlightenment ... is ... the only way to work against them successfully."⁷⁶ A year later, Johann Adam Bergk, a younger and more politically radical follower of Kant, came to rather different conclusions. He argued that revolutions occurred when the "moral enlightenment" of a people has evolved to the point where they were capable of recognizing rights and duties and of demanding that material conditions "correspond with the pronouncements of conscience." Revolutions are unavoidable "if the nation recognizes or senses the injustices that burden it and mock its humanity." Enlightenment thus stands "justly accused as the cause of revolutions," but for Bergk there can be no question of restraining enlightenment, since "once enlightenment spreads its roots in a nation, it is easier to exterminate mankind than to exterminate enlightenment."⁷⁷

The debate over the linkage between enlightenment and revolution persisted into the new century, with Jakob Salat — one of those inconsequential but prolific philosophers who populate the early nineteenth century — producing a steady flow of books and articles on the possible dangers of enlightenment, the folly of trying to resist enlightenment, and the question of whether enlightenment leads to revolution.⁷⁸ Distinguishing between enlightenment as a final "and in itself entirely innocent" step in the chain of causes that produces revolutions and enlightenment

as “in itself” a cause of revolutions, Salat argued that in the French case the primary causes of revolution were to be sought in the political and religious circumstances that had for so long retarded the spread of enlightenment in France.⁷⁹ While he maintained that a fully enlightened state would face no difficulties, Salat was willing to grant that the process of a people’s *becoming* enlightened was fraught with dangers. But the only recourse against these dangers was to deploy a “higher level” of enlightenment against those “misuses” of enlightenment that were possible at “lower stages” of enlightenment (unfortunately, Salat was never terribly clear as to how to distinguish “higher” from “lower” or “use” from “misuse”).⁸⁰ For Salat, then, the French Revolution was the result of a delayed and botched enlightenment, driven onward by the “half-true philosophy of a Helvetius, Voltaire, Diderot, Raynal, D’Alembert, etc.”⁸¹ An enlightenment carried out under the aegis of a “Mendelssohn, Garve, Jacobi, Kant” or a “Herder, Dalberg, Wieland, Reinhold, Fichte, Schiller, etc.” held brighter prospects.⁸²

Hegel was familiar with Salat’s work and utterly contemptuous of it. A brief notice in the March 1802 issue of the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* expressed disgust at the “sanctimonious moral drivel and asthenic salads [*moralische Salbadereien und asthenische Saläte*]” that Salat had served up in his attempt to present the “Berlin *Aufklärei* in its most trivial form as a moral and human enlightenment [*Aufklärung*].”⁸³ Hegel’s animus against Salat may in part be attributed to Salat’s role as a defender of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and, hence, an opponent of the philosophical system Hegel and Schelling were attempting to articulate.⁸⁴ But Hegel’s contempt may also be explained by the fact that in praising the Berlin *Aufklärer* for avoiding the failings of the French *philosophes* Salat was defending a version of the Enlightenment with which Hegel had once identified, but which he had come to reject. As a gymnasium student in Stuttgart, Hegel had filled his notebook with extracts from the writings of representatives of the Berlin Enlightenment. Indeed, an entry from May 1787 contains an almost complete transcription of Moses Mendelssohn’s famous 1784 response to the question “What is Enlightenment?”⁸⁵ At seminary in Tübingen, Hegel had come to question this entire approach, and devoted a pivotal section of the “Tübingen Essay” of 1793 to a critique of enlightenment

accounts of religion, concluding that enlightenment could not supplant faith because it was fundamentally incapable of moving men to moral action.⁸⁶

Whatever the motivation for Hegel's disgust with Salat's account of the relationship between enlightenment and revolution, what is striking about the rival version Hegel offered in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is how thoroughly it ignored the distinction that Salat and others before him had drawn between the consequences of the French and the German Enlightenment. Hegel approached the Enlightenment not by analysing the writings of particular thinkers, but rather by tracing the implications of the category that he sees as governing enlightenment's interactions with the world: "utility." The category of utility views the world as an entity whose "being-in-itself" consists of its "being-for-another": the world has meaning only in so far as it serves the purposes of an other. But this "other," Hegel argues, cannot be an individual subject, pursuing particular projects, but rather must take the form of a "universal Subject" possessing a "general will, the will of all *individuals* as such."⁸⁷ Thus Hegel's argument moves rather swiftly from a working out of the implications of the concept of "utility" to a discussion of the difficulties that plague the idea of a "general will."

This connection between "utility" and "general will" is not as tenuous as it might seem on first glance, especially if we remember that when Hegel spoke of "utility" he had in mind thinkers like Barnave or Siéyès rather than Hume or Bentham.⁸⁸ It is also worth remembering that Rousseau himself had begun the *Social Contract* by insisting that his aim was to reconcile what "right sanctions" with what "is prescribed by interest," so that considerations of "justice" and "utility" would not be separated. Thus, in Hegel's view, the critical failing of the Enlightenment's notion of utility resided in the difficulty of reconciling the aggregate of particular, individual utilities (what Rousseau would call the "will of all") with the "general will."⁸⁹ Such a feat is possible only if a political system can be created in which each individual separately wills what all other members of the community will and in which every act by the collectivity appears as "the direct and conscious deed of each."⁹⁰ As the French Revolution amply demonstrated, this is not easily done.

In Hegel's account of the education of Spirit, the French Revolution represents the point at which Spirit "comes before us as *absolute freedom*."⁹¹ It is a world in which everything that Spirit encounters must appear as "simply its own will, and this is a general will." Hence, the traditional division of individuals into differing estates or corporative bodies collapses, as each individual consciousness "raises itself out of its allotted sphere, no longer finds its essence and its work in a particular sphere, but grasps itself as the concept of will, grasps all spheres as the essence of this will, and therefore can realize itself only in a work which is a work of the whole."⁹² Once we have reached this stage in Hegel's analysis, the initial distinction between a subject seeking to realize projects and a world of objects held to be useful for the achievement of these projects is supplanted by an ultimately more sinister division: "the difference between the *individual* and the *universal* consciousness."⁹³ In the fatal dialectic that unfolds, any attempt by the individual consciousness to maintain itself apart from the universal consciousness — whether in the form of membership in a particular estate or class, representation in a particular branch of a government divided into legislative, judicial, and executive branches, or even as an appeal to a spiritual "beyond" which grants some sort of dignity to the individual person — is relentlessly crushed.⁹⁴ The historical references for this part of Hegel's account are not difficult to grasp: the reconstitution of the Estates General as the National Assembly abolished the old corporative distinctions, the ideal of direct democracy pushed the Revolution beyond the English solution of a mixed constitution, and the elaborate revolutionary festivals sought to find substitutes, within the political domain, for rituals that had bound congregations together in the pursuit of otherworldly ends. Hegel's central point is that while efforts such as these were successful in tearing down what preceded them, they proved to be singularly incapable of creating a new order. "Universal freedom," he argues, "can produce neither a positive work nor a deed; there is left for it only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury* of destruction."⁹⁵

The political implications of this failure are clear enough. Whenever the government, claiming to act in the name of the "general will," executes a plan of action, it reveals itself to be nothing more than a "faction" which stands opposed to the amorphous and disembodied "general

will.”

What is called government is merely the *victorious* faction, and in the very fact of its being a faction lies the direct necessity of its overthrow; and its being government makes it, conversely, into a faction, and guilty.⁹⁶

Once toppled, a faction has no way to deny its guilt. It stands condemned for the specific deeds and actions which it carried out, and it faces an accuser that, since it has not yet acted and hence remains “only an unreal pure will,” will always have the purest of intentions.

Being suspected, therefore, takes the place, has the significance and effect, of *being guilty*; and the external reaction against this reality, which rests on the simple inwardness of intention, consists in the cold, matter-of-fact annihilation of this existent self, from which nothing can be taken away except for its mere being.⁹⁷

Regimes replace regimes, the accusers become the accused, and those who yesterday were the executioners today mount the scaffold. Hegel had learned the lessons of the Carrier trial well.

The Terror, for Hegel, thus came to be defined by its sole accomplishment: a death that is so empty and unfulfilling that the state can never be done with its work, “for what is negated is the empty point of an absolutely free self.”⁹⁸ The very emptiness of what is destroyed — “an absolutely free self” rather than a particular human being, defined by particular characteristics — sets the stage for a slaughter that is unending simply *because* it is so empty. The image of the *Kohlhobel* effortlessly — and repeatedly — cleaving a head of cabbage captures Hegel’s point with chilling accuracy. Murder has been sanitized: in operating a guillotine, the executioner no longer aims a sword at the neck of a fellow human; instead he cuts a rope that releases the blade that removes a head. In the mass drownings in the Vendée, Carrier’s men removed the pieces of wood that covered holes that had been drilled in the bottom of the boats to which their victims were chained; in contrast to the depiction of “Republican Marriages” in *Minerva*, they do not have to force struggling bodies into the water. Those slaughtered are no longer specific individuals, responsible for specific deeds. Rather, their sole crime is that of having been defined as

something other than the general will. In rising against the Republic, the “*inexplicables Vendéens*” had renounced their status as citizens protected by law and become “brigands” at war with society.⁹⁹ The Terror thus takes up a project which, in principle, can never be completed: the destruction of everything that stands opposed to the general will.

How, then, can the Terror ever be brought to an end? The *Phenomenology* briefly toys with a vision of history as a grueling process in which peoples, having experienced the rule of an absolute tyrant and felt the fear of death forsake the dream of absolute freedom and “return to an apportioned and limited task.”¹⁰⁰

Out of this tumult, Spirit would be thrown back to its starting point, to the ethical and real world of culture, which would have been merely refreshed and rejuvenated by the fear of the lord and master which has again entered men’s hearts.¹⁰¹

We escape from this grim prospect of a history which continually replays a “cycle of necessity” only because the culture which the Terror has destroyed is, according to Hegel, “the grandest and the last.” In its demise we come face to face with the “sheer terror of the negative” in the form of “death without meaning.” With the destruction of everything that once opposed the general will, Hegel tells us that, “There has arisen the new shape of Spirit, that of the *moral* Spirit.”¹⁰² Suddenly freed from the unpleasant prospect of having to go back to the world of ethical life and start over again, the Spirit somehow finds an escape hatch that leads to the world of “Self-Certain Spirit. Morality.”

Transitions are not the *Phenomenology*’s strong point, and the leap which takes us from the Terror to the “moral view of the world” is not one of the more convincing moments in Hegel’s strange *Bildungsroman* of the Spirit. The account of culture has seemingly reached a fatal impasse when suddenly the argument resumes on a completely different level. In the discussion of morality that follows, the opposition between general will and particular will is internalized within the conscience of the individual in the form of the struggle between the moral law and individual inclination. We have left the domain of history and politics behind, and the

Phenomenology concludes with discussions of moral life, art, religion, and philosophy. In the ascent to “absolute wisdom” political problems have been left behind; which is not to say that they have been solved.

Salat's Revenge: The Unnecessary Revolution

Lecturing on the philosophy of history to his students in Berlin a decade and a half later, Hegel explained, “It has been said that the French Revolution resulted from philosophy.” While he granted that such assertions could not be denied, he reminded them that the philosophy which produced the Revolution was “only abstract thought, not the concrete comprehension of absolute truth.”¹⁰³ While he continued to stress, in those same lectures, that the Revolution was the epochal event that inaugurated the modern age, something has changed between the *Phenomenology* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. In the *Phenomenology*, Enlightenment begat the Revolution which climaxed with the Terror, an event which ran down the curtain on the world of culture. In his later lecture cycles, Enlightenment, Revolution, and Terror were less tightly woven together.

The *Phenomenology* offered an account of “*Die Aufklärung*” that was seemingly inhabited solely by French thinkers. This allowed for much too neat an account: each of the three “worlds” surveyed in the chapter on *Geist* corresponds to a different culture. The world of the “*True Spirit. Ethical Life,*” which for Hegel was exemplified by the *Antigone*, is Greek. The world of “*Self-Alienated Spirit. Culture,*” which stretches from rise of the absolutist state, through the Enlightenment, to the Terror, is French. The world of the “*Self-Certain Spirit: Morality,*” from Kant to the Beautiful Soul, is German. When Hegel discussed eighteenth century philosophy in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* he provided a more nuanced account, stressing that the Enlightenment had both French and German branches and that they lead to rather different results. Hence, there is no longer an inevitable path that leads from the Enlightenment to the Terror.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* emphasized the atypicality of the French experience: they were cursed with a philosophy that could not help

but remain “formal” and “abstract” since it sprung from a culture that had never undergone a Reformation. As a result, the French Enlightenment was thrown into a struggle against both Church and State, while in Germany Enlightenment was carried out “on the side of theology” and was thus more favorably disposed towards the political and social order that confronted it.¹⁰⁵ Hegel’s later discussion of the relationship between enlightenment and revolution provided a much better history than the breathless survey offered in the *Phenomenology*. It acknowledged the diversity of forms taken by the Enlightenment and gave due consideration to the unique set of circumstances that produced the French Revolution. Yet it is an account that could hardly claim to be novel. Though Hegel nowhere acknowledges it, much of what he was saying had already been said (among many others) by that purveyor of “asthenic salads,” Jakob Salat.¹⁰⁶

The author of the *Phenomenology* had no solution to the fateful problem that drove the Revolution into Terror. The older Hegel was able to loosen the knot that bound the Enlightenment to the Revolution because, in the years following the publication of the *Phenomenology*, he had found a different way of treating the problem of reconciling the particularity of the individual with the general will of the community. In the various system drafts that led up to the *Phenomenology* he had regularly invoked the image of Theseus when forced to explain how the self-seeking *bourgeois* could be turned into a public-minded *citoyen*. In lectures given at Heidelberg between 1818 and 1819 he used, for the first time, the category of “civil society” [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] to denote a domain, situated between the private world of the family and the public domain of the state, where individuals meet as free and independent creatures of need and carriers of rights, giving free play to their uniqueness and peculiarity while, behind their backs, the universal shapes and forms them according to a system of laws that it is the task of political economy to map.¹⁰⁷ Through the anonymous mechanisms of civil society “particularity is educated up to subjectivity” and the *bourgeois* learns to become a *citoyen*.¹⁰⁸

With the problem of reconciling *bourgeois* particularity and civic universality apparently solved, the Terror lost much of its sting. By 1820 Hegel was able to conclude (prematurely, as it turned out) that the age of revolutions was at last over. The riddle which had tormented it had

been solved: where the Terror could only crush individuality, the modern state had found, in a civil society distinct from the state, a way to allow for the free play of every type of idiosyncrasy without threatening the coherence of political life.¹⁰⁹ In the modern world, it was possible to live simultaneously as a *bourgeois* and a *citoyen*. With this solution, Hegel's long struggle to make sense of the Terror had come to an end.

Notes

¹ Das einzige Werk und Tat der allgemeinen Freiheit ist daher der *Tod*, und zwar ein *Tod*, der keinen inneren Umfang und Erfüllung hat; ... er ist also der kälteste, platteste Tod, ohne mehr Bedeutung als das Durchhauen eines Kohlhaupts oder ein Schluck Wassers." G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), III:436 [trans. by A. V. Miller as *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 360] (translation modified).

² As a Swabian, Hegel would have been familiar with the *Kohlhobel*, a kitchen implement used to slice cabbage. Its triangular blade bears an uncanny resemblance to guillotine. I am indebted to my colleague Brittain Smith for a short course on Swabian cooking implements.

³ J. N. Findlay's discussion of the passage in the "Analysis" appended to the Miller translation limits itself to a brief paraphrase: "the universal must seek the death of its individual instances, and this in the most brutal and direct, and senseless way." The passage is quoted, with little in the way of commentary, in Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, trans. R. D. Winfield (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 45, Lewis Hinchman, *Hegel's Critique of the Enlightenment* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1984), 150, and Quentin Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993), 240. Steven B. Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 89 cites the passage in the course of a discussion of Hegel's rejection of Rousseau's notion of the General Will. Howard P. Kainz, *Hegel's Phenomenology Part II* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), adds references to Jacques Roux and the Abbé Sieyès (83), but when quoting the actual passage appends a footnote digressing on Jean-Paul Sartre's alleged sympathy to "the revolutionary use of torture and terror" (89-90). Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 185 quotes the passage and mentions the guillotine but provides no guidance about the gulp of water. Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford:

Oxford University Press, 1983), 563 ignores the gulp of water and terminates his quotation of the passage with the cabbage head, which he describes as a “grisly allusion to the guillotine.” Jean Hyppolite omits the entire line about cabbage heads and gulps of water when quoting the passage in his *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 459.

⁴ Jean Hyppolite, “The French Revolution in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*,” in Hyppolite, *Studies in Marx and Hegel* trans. J. O’Neill (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 36

⁵ In an odd exception to the rule, Luc Ferry takes leave of chronological considerations to argue that “the chapter of the *Phenomenology* devoted to the analysis of the Terror begins with a critique of the *Social Contract* that is essentially a reformulation of section 258 of the *Philosophy of Right* and of the whole *Philosophy of History*,” “Hegel” in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 945-6. Ferry does not explain how Hegel was able to “reformulate” what he had not yet written.

⁶ Johannes Hoffmeister, ed. *Briefe von und an Hegel* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), I:12 [Hegel, *The Letters*, trans. C. Butler and C. Seiler (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 29].

⁷ For a biographical sketch of Oelsner see Werner Greiling’s introduction to the Reclam edition of Oelsner’s *Luzifer* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1987), 11-18. Klaus Deinert, *Konrad Engelbert Oelsner und die Französische Revolution: Geschichtserfahrung und Geschichtsdeutung eines deutschen Girondisten* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1981), provides a detailed account of the development of Oelsner’s political thought. Oelsner also figures prominently in Thomas P. Saine’s discussion of German reactions to the French Revolution, *Black Bread – White Bread: German Intellectuals and the French Revolution* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1988), see especially 28-30, 185-95, 291-4, 358-62.

⁸ For a discussion of Archenholz and his journal see Saine, 27-28, 361-2 and Jacques D'Hondt, *Hegel Secret* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 7-43.

⁹ Oelsner subsequently published the letters as the second part of his *Luzifer, oder gereinigte Beiträge zur Geschichte der französischen Revolution* (1797), [reprint: Kronberg: Scriptor-Verlag, 1977]. Deinert's study provides a detailed summary and commentary on Oelsner's reports; for a briefer discussion in English, see Saine, 29-30, 185-95, 291-4, 358-61.

¹⁰ See D'Hondt, 7-43.

¹¹ The first issue of the journal translated the portion of Volney's *Ruins* that was read before the meeting of the National Assembly (*Minerva*, January 1792, 47-60). For a discussion, see D'Hondt, 83-113.

¹² The extract from Rabaut's *Precis*, which was published in the journal prior to its French publication, appeared in *Minerva*, March, 1792. Parallels to Hegel's *Phenomenology* are discussed in D'Hondt 114-153. Rabaut apparently regarded Oelsner as his protégé.

¹³ Archenholz, "Die Jacobiner. Eine historische Skizze," *Minerva* 3 (August 1792). For a discussion of the article, see Saine, 296-99.

¹⁴ Oelsner, *Luzifer*, II:61

¹⁵ Letter of August 14, 1792 [Oelsner, *Luzifer*, II:77-78]. For a discussion of Oelsner's account of the events of August 10, see Deinet, 138-149 and Saine, 358-361. The image of philosophy permeating the atoms of civil society is echoed in Hegel's likening of the spread of enlightenment to the diffusion of perfume. See *Werke*, III:402 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 331].

¹⁶ Oelsner, *Luzifer*, II:77-78; 295

¹⁷ Letter of September 30, 1792 [Oelsner, *Luzifer*, II:200]. As Deinet (158-161) notes in his discussion of this letter, Oelsner followed the critique of Rousseau that had been articulated within Girondist circles by Siéyès and Condorcet.

¹⁸ For a discussion of his interpretation, see Deinet, 161-69

¹⁹ Letters of December 11, 1792 [Oelsner, *Luzifer*, II:315] and January 22, 1793 [Oelsner, *Luzifer*, II:373]. For a discussion, see Deinet, 191-6.

²⁰ Oelsner's article on Corday was published anonymously in Ludwig Ferdinand Huber's journal *Friedens-Präliminarien* in 1795. The August 1793 *Minerva* published letters by Charlotte Corday and the transcript of her hearing, along with a translation of a pamphlet by Adam Lux, a young German who was so entranced by Corday's demeanor during the procession to her execution that he praised her as greater even than Brutus, an action that assured his own arrest and execution. For a discussion of these materials, and the cult of Charlotte Corday among German liberals, see Saine, 369-74.

²¹ Deinet, 221; Greiling, 12.

²² For a discussion of Oelsner's work at the outset of the Thermidor, see Deinet, 221-224

²³ Thus D'Hondt (39) is incorrect in writing that the characterization of the significance of the Carrier trial was "directly taken from *Minerva*." Like many eighteenth century journals, *Minerva* appeared at the end of the month listed on its masthead (for this reason, the December 1794 issue could include a letter from Schiller dated December 10, 1794).

²⁴ "Carrier", in *Minerva*, January, 1795, 102.

²⁵ "Carrier", 103.

²⁶ "Carrier", 106.

²⁷ "Carrier", 95.

²⁸ "Carrier", 95.

²⁹ "Carrier", 99.

³⁰ "Carrier", 97.

³¹ "Carrier", 96, 104.

³² Le Comte Fleury's generally hostile account *Carrier à Nantes* (Paris: Plon, 1901) found little evidence for "Republican Marriages" (121-125), a conclusion that was seconded by

Gaston Martin's more apologetic *Carrier et sa mission à Nantes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1924), 267-270 and by Jean-Joël Brégeon, *Carrier et la Terreur Nantaise* (Paris: Librairie Académique, 1987), 171-2. It should be stressed that it is possible to question whether "Republican Marriages" were carried out without denying that troops sent to put down the rebellion engaged in far more horrifying atrocities against women; for a discussion see Jean-Clément Martin, *La Vendée et la France* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), 241-6.

³³ For what follows, see (in addition to the studies of Carrier by Brégeon, Fleury, Gaston Martin, and Jean-Clément Martin cited above) Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution After Robespierre*, trans. Michel Petheram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 138-142, Donald Sutherland, "The Vendée: Unique or Emblematic?" in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture. Volume 4: The Terror*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (New York: Pergamon, 1994), 99-114, and the brief survey of literature on the Vendée war in François Furet, "Vendée," *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* 165-176.

³⁴ Carrier described the action in a report to the Committee of Public Safety; see Sutherland, 103.

³⁵ Somewhat guarded reports of these drownings may be found in Carrier's letters to the Committee of Public Safety of 20 Frimaire II (December 10, 1793) [reprinted in F. A. Aulard, ed., *Recueil des Actes du comité de salut public* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1895), 9:315], 21 Frimaire II (December 11, 1793) [reprinted in *Recueil des Actes*, 9:331], and 2 Nivôse II (December 22, 1793) [summary printed in *Recueil des Actes*, 9:588].

³⁶ Letter to the Committee of Public Safety of 21 Frimaire II (December 11, 1793) [reprinted in *Recueil des Actes*, 9:331].

³⁷ Letter to the Convention of 30 Frimaire II (December 20, 1793) [reprinted in *Recueil des Actes*, 9:550].

³⁸ For a discussion of Julien and his report, see Baczko, 140-41, R. R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1941), 222-24, and J. M. Thompson, *Robespierre* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968), II:145-6.

³⁹ The report is reprinted in E. B. Courtois, ed. *Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée de l'examen des papiers trouvés chez Robespierre et ses complices* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Year III), 359-62. Portions are quoted in Baczko, 140-141.

⁴⁰ Thompson, 147-9, 233-5.

⁴¹ See Baczko, 142-3.

⁴² *Minerva*, November 1794, 206-248. Hegel could have read this issue by the time of his letter to Schelling.

⁴³ For discussions of Carrier's trial see Baczko, 164-181 and Donald Sutherland, "Le Procès de Carrier: La terreur blanche et l'échec de l'homme nouveau" in *La Révolution Française et les processus de socialisation de l'homme moderne* (Paris: Editions Messidor, 1989), 517-524.

⁴⁴ For a survey of the different lines of interpretation, see Mona Ozouf, "The Terror After the Terror: An Immediate History", in Baker, 3-18

⁴⁵ Indeed, Julien's report itself grants that Carrier's actions were not without merit. See Courtois, 360-61.

⁴⁶ See Sutherland, "The Vendée," 103-104.

⁴⁷ For a survey of the vocabulary employed to describe the *Vendéens* (and an attempt to trace the origins of this vocabulary to the Enlightenment) see Jean de Viguierie, "La Vendée et les Lumières: Les Origines Intellectuelles de l'Extermination," in *La Vendée dans l'Histoire: Actes du Colloque* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), 36-51. Reynald Secher, *Le Génocide Franco-Français: La Vendée-Vengé* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986) argues that the actions against the Vendée must be treated as an incident of "genocide." His account has been criticized by Charles Tilly, "State and Counterrevolution in France," in Ferenc Fehér, ed. *The French*

Revolution and the Birth of Modernity (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 58-63.

⁴⁸ For a recent retelling, see Simon Schama, *Citizens* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 405-406, 446-447.

⁴⁹ See Daniel Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 11-25 and Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class, and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 106-111.

⁵⁰ Arasse, 93-118.

⁵¹ Schama, 447.

⁵² See Outram, 110, 121 and Brian Singer, "Violence in the French Revolution: Forms of Ingestion/Forms of Expulsion" in Feher, 150-173.

⁵³ His letters to the Committee of Public Safety of 20 Frimaire II (December 10, 1793) [*Recueil des Actes*, 9:315] and 2 Nivôse II (December 22, 1793) [*Recueil des Actes*, 9:588] marvel at the efficiency of the Loire in carrying out the work of the Republic.

⁵⁴ Baczko, 1-32.

⁵⁵ Baraly, "Die Jacobiner, als Aristocraten, Föderalisten und Contrerevolutionairs. Endlich sind ihre schrecklichen Geheimnisse enthüllt!," *Minerva*, December 1794, 385-398. The article is a translation of *Les Jacobins aristocrates, fédéralistes et contre-révolutionnaires* (Paris: Impr. de la Grande Comète, 1794), an eight-page pamphlet written by Jean Bapiste Moise Jollivet under the pseudonym "Baraly" and published after 9 Thermidor.

⁵⁶ *Minerva*, December 1794, 386, 388-389, 396.

⁵⁷ *Minerva*, December 1794, 391-2.

⁵⁸ *Minerva*, December 1794, 394.

⁵⁹ *Minerva*, December 1794, 394, 396.

⁶⁰ *Werke*, I:439.

⁶¹ The print is reproduced in Schama, 790.

⁶² Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III, Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1976), 8:258-260 [translated by Leo Rauch as *Hegel on the Human Spirit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 155-157]. For a discussion of this passage, see Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism*, 95-97.

⁶³ See my discussion in "A *Paideia* for the 'Bürger als Bourgeois': The Concept of 'Civil Society' in Hegel's Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* II:3 (1981), 483-5.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the development of Hegel's views on civic virtue, see Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). It is peculiar that this excellent study, which meticulously explores Hegel's debts to Scottish moral philosophy and to German writings on the problem of Christian piety, pays little attention to Hegel's interest in the French Revolution.

⁶⁵ Werke, II:580 ["The German Constitution," trans. T. M. Knox, in Z. A. Pelczynski, ed., *Hegel's Political Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 241].

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Werke*, II:489-96 [trans. T. M. Knox, *Natural Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 99-104].

⁶⁷ Hegel, *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. G. Lasson (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1923), 465-76 [trans. H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox as *System of Ethical Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 147-156].

⁶⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 8:258 [*Hegel on the Human Spirit*, 155 (translation modified)].

⁶⁹ *Gesammelte Werke*, 8:260 [*Hegel on the Human Spirit*, 157 (translation modified)].

⁷⁰ For a comparison, see J.-F. Suter, "Burke, Hegel, and the French Revolution" in Z. A. Pelczynski, ed. *Hegel's Political Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 52-72.

⁷¹ Hegel, *Werke*, III:74 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 51].

⁷² Hegel, *Werke*, III:72, 591 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 49, 493].

⁷³ Hegel, *Werke*, III:248 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 198].

⁷⁴ Hegel, *Werke*, III:436 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 360].

⁷⁵ Andreas Riem, "On Enlightenment" translated by Jane Kneller in James Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 177.

⁷⁶ Johann Heinrich Tieftrunk, "On the Influence of Enlightenment on Revolutions" in *Ibid.*, 224. The rather guarded support for the French Revolution among members of the Berlin Enlightenment is discussed in Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 309-317.

⁷⁷ Johann Adam Bergk, "Does Enlightenment Cause Revolutions?" in *What is Enlightenment?*, 228-9, 231.

⁷⁸ Jakob Salat, *Auch die Aufklärung hat ihre Gefahren!* (Munich, 1801), Salat, *Die Philosophie mit obskuranten und Sophisten in Kampfe. Nachtrag zu Auch die Aufklärung hat ihre Gefahren!* (Ulm, 1802), Salat, *Auch ein paar Worte über die Frage: Führt die Aufklärung zur Revolution?* (Munich: Lindauer 1802), Salat, *Winke über das Verhältniss der intellektuellen und der verfeinernden Kultur zur Sittlichen* (Munich, 1802), and Salat, *Die Aufklärung in Baiern im Kontraste mit der Verfinsterung im ehemaligen hochstift Augsburg* (Deutschland, 1803).

⁷⁹ Salat, *Auch ein paar Worte*, 4-9.

⁸⁰ Salat, *Auch ein paar Worte*, 20-24.

⁸¹ Salat, *Auch ein paar Worte*, 43-44. Salat explicitly exempts "the noble Rousseau" from criticism.

⁸² Salat, *Auch ein paar Worte*, 43.

⁸³ Hegel, "Ausbruch der Volksfreude über den endlichen Untergang der Philosophie," in *Werke*, II:276. The essay (which appeared unsigned in the journal) is credited by Moldenhauer and Michel to "Hegel in collaboration with Schelling."

⁸⁴ Jacobi had been treated rather roughly in Hegel's 1802 *Glauben und Wissen* and Salat, in collaboration with Kajetan von Weiller, responded with *Der Geist der allerneuesten Philosophie der Herren Schelling, Hegel und Kompagnie: eine Uebersetzung aus der Schulsprache in die Sprache der Welt*, (1803-1805) [Reprint: Brussels: Culture et civilization, 1974]. Hegel wrote a response which, however, was never published and was subsequently lost. See Hegel: *The Letters*, 92, 98-99.

⁸⁵ For Hegel's transcription of the Mendelssohn essay (which dates from May 1787) see Johannes Hoffmeister, *Dokumente zu Hegels Entwicklung* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1936), 140-143. Other extracts and notes from thinkers associated with the Berlin Enlightenment can be found in Hoffmeister, 144-147. For discussions of the influence of the Berlin Enlightenment on the young Hegel, see H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Towards the Sunlight* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 14-30 and the more tendentious study by José María Ripalda, *The Divided Nation. The Roots of a Bourgeois Thinker: G.W.F. Hegel* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977).

⁸⁶ Hegel, *Werke*, I:21-33 [translated in Harris 489-499]. For an analysis of the significance of this text, see Harris, 119-153.

⁸⁷ Hegel, *Werke*, III:432 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 356-357].

⁸⁸ See Judith N. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), 175.

Hegel's interest in Siéyès may have its roots in his encounter with Oelsner. During the period Oelsner spent in Switzerland he wrote a defense of Siéyès that was published, in German, in the journal *Klio* (1796), I:1-16, 127-66. Oelsner has also been credited as the author of an anonymous French pamphlet *Notice sur la vie de Sieyes* (Paris: Maradan, Year III), which is said to have been "written in Paris, in Messidor, Year II of the Republican Era (old style, June 1794)."

⁸⁹ Hegel himself, however, was strangely unappreciative of Rousseau's distinction between these two notions; for a fine discussion of Hegel's staggering obtuseness on this point, see Robert Wokler, "Hegel's Rousseau: The General Will and Civil Society," *Arachne: Texter*

fran Institutionen för Idé- och Lärdomshistoria vid Göteborgs Universitet #8 (Göteborg, 1993), 7-45, esp. 14-22.

⁹⁰ Hegel, *Werke*, III:433 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 357].

⁹¹ Hegel, *Werke*, III:432 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 356].

⁹² Hegel, *Werke*, III: 433 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 357].

⁹³ Hegel, *Werke*, III: 433-434 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 357].

⁹⁴ Hegel, *Werke*, III: 434 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 358].

⁹⁵ Hegel, *Werke*, III: 435-6 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 358].

⁹⁶ Hegel, *Werke*, III: 437 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 360]. For a discussion of Hegel's account of the regime as a "faction," see Hyppolite, "The French Revolution in Hegel's *Phenomenology*" 57-59.

⁹⁷ Hegel, *Werke*, III: 437 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 360] (translation modified).

⁹⁸ *Werke*, III:436 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 360].

⁹⁹ Xavier Martin, "La Déclaration des droits de l'homme et la Vendée" in *La Vendée dans l'Histoire: Actes du Colloque* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), 253-273.

¹⁰⁰ Hegel, *Werke*, III:438 (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 361). For a discussion, see Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure*, 460-464 and Hyppolite, "The French Revolution in Hegel's *Phenomenology*," 58-60.

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *Werke*, III:438 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 361].

¹⁰² Hegel, *Werke*, III:439-40 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 362-63].

¹⁰³ Hegel, *Werke*, XII:527-528 [Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 446].

¹⁰⁴ For a brief discussion of this point, see Shklar, 173.

¹⁰⁵ Hegel, *Werke*, XII:526 [*Philosophy of History* 444].

¹⁰⁶ Salat's stress on the connection between religion and politics (*Auch ein paar Worte ...* 4-9) bears comparison to Hegel's own discussion of the relation between "reformation" and "revolution." See Hegel, *Werke*, 12:535-6 [*Philosophy of History*, 453-4].

¹⁰⁷ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. K. H. Ilting (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1974), I:189.

¹⁰⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* §187. For a discussion, see Schmidt, "A *Paideia* for the 'Bürger als bourgeois,'" 489-493.

¹⁰⁹ For an elaboration of this point, see Ritter, 52, 68.