

# The Athenian Owl and the Gallic Rooster—Dusk or Dawn?

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When Zeus, the father of the gods, once suffered from a severe headache, the blacksmith Hephaestus split the head of Zeus with an axe and a woman emerged from it. The headache was followed by the proverbial headbirth. Minerva or, as the Greeks called her, Pallas Athena was an extremely powerful figure in mythology – she once defeated Poseidon in competition and hurled Sicily against the enemy. When aggrieved, she turned into a poisonous spider. Heracles gave her the apples of the Hesperides, Perseus the head of Medusa. And because Paris had disdain for her, she fully sided with Athens against Troy and thus provided a decisive contribution to the downfall of the Trojans. She symbolizes the political unity of the polis and, last but not least, she gave people knowledge at the request of Prometheus and is considered to be the goddess of wisdom and protector of philosophers and poets. As is well known, she was the basis for Hegel’s favorite metaphor. The goddess of science sits enthroned on the old bridge in Heidelberg and is the patron of Heidelberg University. Together with the painting *Pallas Athene* by Ferdinand Keller, which can be seen in the entrance hall of Heidelberg University, and perhaps also together with Archenholtz’s famous *Minerva* magazine, this inspired Hegel’s illustration of the owl of Minerva’s flight at dusk. Famously, the holy animal was given one of Pallas Athena’s favorite places on the Acropolis. In the sharp and glinting eye of the owl, the wisest bird, the ancient Athenians saw an image of the owl-eyed goddess’s essential characteristics.

In Hegel's metaphor, the thought is represented using the images of a *goddess*, an *animal*, with a time of day, *dusk*, or the color *grey in grey*. World history must first reach a certain stage of its development before sufficient knowledge is possible. The general, universalistic concept of freedom, the idea of the freedom of all, could not dominate in the ancient world. Mere notice of the seedling alone does not ensure sufficient knowledge about a tree, a newly created political formation does not yet ensure knowledge of its developed form. According to Hegel, the idea of freedom is still to be formed internally in the mind and to be externalized in the world. Hegel alludes to the idea that his time represents the actual *beginning* of the modern world, although he also uses the metaphor of ages with regard to history — childhood, adulthood, and old age. Hegel claims that he presented a philosophical theory of this world, of a time in which the basic patterns of this modern period, especially the key concept of freedom, developed, thus allowing the owl of science to begin its flight. This substantiates the interpretation of the French Revolution: For the first time, a constitution is based on law, man turned his head, i.e., his mind, upside down, and this Minerva-like headbirth is what the prelude of modernity is based on.

Rousseau established pure thinking as a principle, in the domain of the will, the practical, and he established free will as the concept of man. Therefore, the polis is based on thinking. "It is only as having the power of thinking that the will is free." With Rousseau, the principle of freedom emerged; again, the metaphor of rising, of beginning — the dawn of the eve of history. Rousseau was considered a fool by many, but proclaimed 'tis folly to be wise, the massive effect of which unfolded before the revolution. With the revolution as a glorious sunrise, the beautiful dawn of freedom, man had come to recognize that thinking should rule spiritual reality. The modern world is to be understood as the "dusk" of history. It is the beginning of the possible realization of individual freedom in a free community.

## *Metaphors and Ideas*

It is about the meaning of metaphors, images, or ideas in philosophy. The metaphor represents a short symbol that is concentrated in an image, an imagery which the content “shines through.” The meaning is illustrated in the form of a related, similar externality. The visualization results from a translation, a paraphrase. It is a brief comparison. Only the picture is shown, but the intended meaning must remain dubious or ambiguous.

The deliberations are based on Hegel’s famous metaphor of the flight of Minerva’s owl, which begins at dusk. This places us at the crux of the topic, with the relationship between imagery and thought, in Hegelian terminology with the relationship between idea and concept.<sup>1</sup> For deliberations of the subsequent problem areas of the relationship between philosophy on the one hand and poetry and religion on the other, between imagery and logic, between argumentation and narration, between figurative and discursive recognition, the confrontation between Hegel and Nietzsche seems to be a fruitful approach—between Hegel’s *phalanx of the concept* and Nietzsche’s *army of metaphors*. The question about the form of representation, the expression, the mode of communication turns out to be a central challenge for philosophy and is not just a matter of design or external decoration.

Kant, whom Hegel follows here, clearly formulated this in his famous essay “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy”: “The essence of a thing consists in its form [...] insofar as this essence is supposed to be known by reason” (Kant 1993, p. 70). It is thus a question of the possibility of distinguishing between literary and philosophical texts, of the possibility of differentiating between the various forms or “languages,” of the problem of a possible transformation, of *translating* between these forms of expression, and a question of transitional or mixed forms. What

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<sup>1</sup> The following deliberations are based on Vieweg 2007 and Vieweg 2011.

about the presence of concepts in mythological literary texts, what about the presence of metaphors in philosophical argumentation? To illustrate this using a picture of a bridge: 1) Can you understand the two sides as different bridgeheads? 2) Is there a safe transition, one-way or two-way? 3) What type of text must camp out on the bridge?

To approach the question of the status of mythopoetic texts and philosophical texts, let us take a brief look back at Kant and Hegel, who were sufficiently confronted with such *boundary crossings* and attempts to *blur boundaries*: In the said essay, Kant sharply rejected attempts to transfer the *aesthetic mode of representation* to philosophy. The only philosophical thing is to bring the matter “into clear concepts according to logical methodology” (ibid., p. 71). Kant confronts the alleged philosophy of the oracle, which, like men of genius, grasps the object through “a single piercing glance within them,” with the philosophy of work à la Aristotle, characterized by the discursive endeavors based on the ability of knowledge through concepts, which must laboriously climb many levels to achieve progress in knowledge: Philosophy as the “Herculean labour of self-knowledge,” which has to justify its positions “before they are allowed to celebrate the truth of their assertions” (ibid., p. 58). The “enthusiast” can neither make his thoughts understandable nor communicate them, he needs—like Jacobi—a mystical touch, an overleap (*salto mortale*) from concepts to the unthinkable, a power of seizing upon that which no concept attains to and therefore arrives to no true knowledge of the object, but to a surrogate thereof, to “supernatural information” or “mystical illumination,” which he simply accepts. Due to the absence of “precise proofs,” analogies, figurative expressions, and “probabilities” are offered as arguments (pp. 62–63). According to Kant, the proposal to begin philosophizing poetically is just like “the suggestion that a businessman should in the future no longer write his account books in prose but rather in verse” (p. 72).

Philosophers who poetize with concepts prefer the pyrrhonic modes of representation as mixed forms between argument and visualization—tropes, hypotyposes, stories, parables, and the essay as a literary philosophical experiment. However, Hegel considers his *Phenomenology of Spirit* unmistakably as the completion, *sublation of scepticism*, both in terms of content and form, the special *language of scepticism*. Since he considers irony to be the modern variation of the sceptical, this is also sublated. Hegel proved to be the most astute and powerful critic of scepticism and irony and relied on argumentation, discourse, application, and knowledge, he legitimized in a new way the relevance of conceptual thinking, which is, in a way, essentially different from the previous concepts of metaphysics and cannot simply be thrown into this old pot.

According to Montaigne, the way out for the sceptic lies in a *completely new language*. Nietzsche rebels in a similar way: Philosophy is “trapped in the webs of language.” Derrida also calls for such *new vocabulary*, e.g., the clear opposition of metaphors and concepts must be replaced by a different connection, because the *metaphor is a concept typical for metaphysics*, the use of which signifies accepting the rules of the game of the old, i.e., argumentation. It can be concluded from this astute observation that even Nietzsche’s commendable approach to generalizing the metaphorical falls into this trap of conceptual thinking. In principle, the “boundaries” would have to be shifted and metaphysics would first have to be unmasked as *white mythology*. It should be denied its discursive-argumentative requirement and it should be read as a literary mythological text. In this metaphysics, the “white man” takes his own mythology, i.e. Indo-European mythology; his logos, that is, the mythos: “White mythology—metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest” (Derrida 1982, p. 213). All sceptics and ironists advocate poetic

philosophemes, philosophical poems, and therefore out themselves as inhabitants of the bridge, following in the footsteps of their Pyrrhonical ancestors, such as Timon, Montaigne, Schlegel, and Nietzsche.

*The Pit (Shaft) and the Pyramid—  
Derrida on Hegel's Understanding of Representations*

In his striking essay “The Pit and the Pyramid,” Derrida gives extraordinary credit to Hegel for providing clarification regarding our subject (1982, pp. 69–108). Hegel’s thoughts on the subjective spirit in the *Encyclopaedia* are considered to be the foundation of modern semiology—*the basic features of a new theory of the sign and linguistics are supposed to be laid down there.* (By the way: This should be written in the registry of those analytical philosophers who are ignorant of Hegel and who think they are the only custodians of language.) R.-P. Horstmann emphasizes that not only in Nietzsche’s but also in Hegel’s criticism of ancient metaphysics “the role of language has a special function,” that Hegel’s diagnosis of the efficiency of traditional metaphysics is closely tied “to his excursions in the philosophy of language” (Horstmann 1993, p. 299). However, Derrida’s illuminating study, the title of which alludes to two metaphors by Hegel, is limited to the passages on philosophical psychology and thus leaves aside the equally substantial thoughts on the relationship between literature, religion, and philosophy, and, therefore, also the question of *objectivity*. It is limited to the *formal*, although Derrida quotes the following passage from Hegel himself: “The creations of imagination are on all hands recognized as such combinations of the mind’s own and inward with *the matter of intuition*; what further and more definite aspects they have is a matter for other departments” (TWA 10, p. 268; Derrida 1993, p. 80). He is indifferent to the creations of imagination. Therefore,

Derrida's criticism of Hegel's positions discussed here does not adequately focus on Hegel's significant texts.

To examine the Hegelian concept, however, it is essential to refer to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the final chapter of the *Encyclopaedia*, the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, so that the question of the *content* and the *objectivity* of those forms can be raised. To present the thesis in a somewhat striking and provocative way: Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not an ironic change of vocabulary, not an ever-changing army of metaphors, it is not an odyssey and certainly not a theodicy, not a journey of a Gulliver or Wilhelm Meister, not a career in an ascending line [*Lebenslauf nach aufsteigender Linie*], and also not a story of divine history; although Hegel's *Phenomenology* includes all these forms and links them together, it represents, through its *final and decisive transition*, the attempt to *sublate* the mythopoetic contents and forms in the language of the concept.

### *Transferring or Translating as Sublation*

For Hegel, the category that connects the textual status of the poetic with that of the mythological and religious is *representation*. Ricoeur rightly identified the term *representation* as an "enormous nebula" and reminded us of the different meanings of its determination in various philosophies (Ricoeur 1986, p. 300). A precise clarification is also needed for Hegel's use of this word, and with regard to its history, Sextus Empiricus should, in addition to Hume and Kant, also not be forgotten. Individual determinations of representations, as they can be found in the chapter of the *Encyclopaedia* titled *Subjective Spirit* (§§ 387–482), are not specifically reconstructed here but should be inherently demonstrated as the higher language of the representation, as inscribed in the forms *art* and *religion*. This is particularly legitimized by the weight of

the content—the decisive content must be considered during the assessment of art and religion as *objectivity*, as the objective spirit precedes art and religion. The representations of the objective contain Hegel’s philosophy of freedom in the narrower sense; it is precisely such thinking of freedom that is an empty position for all protagonists of the aesthetic mode of representation, which is why those who are concerned try to bypass this step to the content. One cannot leave the realm of ideas or metaphors; of all things, this is what echoes in the old idioms of “rigid, insurmountable necessity” and in the mentality of setting boundaries, which is a clear relapse into old metaphysics and dogmatism.

First, a short, provisional definition of Hegel’s understanding of representations: Representations stand between the sensuous-descriptive and the concept, they represent the *middle*, the *in-between*, the *transition*, the transfer between the *individual of the intuition* and the *universality of the concept*. They are primarily visualizations of the universal and generalizations of the figurative, illustrations of meanings, and metaphors of concepts. They are expressions, representations in the sense of visualizations, the verbalization of the figurative. Language gives representations “a second and higher existence than they naturally possess—invests them with the right of existence in the *ideational realm*” (TWA 10, p. 271, my emphasis). 1) The image, 2) imagination,<sup>2</sup> and 3) memory are discussed as stages in the coherent development of the representation conceived by Hegel whereby the latter, mostly as the name-creating, creates the transition from the figurative to the free concept in its essential “non-representational” dimension. Finally, the unity of the individual, the particular, and the universal is not achieved in the representation; due to its oscillation, it (itself) forms a transition, a bridge, and, for this reason, remains in the *antinomic*, in *ambiguity*, in the *either-or*. The ironist Schlegel

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<sup>2</sup> Productive imagination forms the “formal of art,” and art presents the “true universal in the form of *sensuous Dasein*” (TWA 10, p. 267).



formulated this excellently when he discussed the impossibility and the necessity of a complete message. This was the basis for the corresponding intermediate forms, the hybrids, such as tropes, hypotyposes, fragments, aphorisms, and essays.

In addition to the outlined concept of translation, the precise distinction between philosophy and literature, between argumentation and narrative, remains of utmost importance. The elixir of life in philosophy is conceptual thinking; it finds its expression in the concept and its systematic genesis, not even in “complementary” literary forms—philosophy is not *a story* of “what happens, but knowledge of what is true in it, and from the truth, it should further understand what appears in the story as a mere event” (TWA 6, p. 260). There is a danger that arises from the fascination with the colorful variety of images originating from the infinite trove of memories and with the visualizations of the universal and the generalization of the figurative, and this danger is that one will succumb to the “seduction of the representation.” But the dubiousness or ambiguity cannot be pushed away.

Kant and Hegel vehemently point out that the use of analogies, metaphors, fragments, aphorisms, the “aesthetic mode of representation” is (plainly) an indication of a shortcoming, a sign of an “*absence of precise proofs*.” All of those who poetize with concepts believe that they are, *at crucial points, freed from their reasoning in the form of providing proof, justification and argument*, and thus find themselves in the replacement of truth by something accepted as truth, the affirmation or enthusiastic visions, the death of all philosophy.

In contrast to this, Hegel developed a concept of translating the aesthetic-mythological mode of representation into conceptual thinking and vice versa. When performing back-translation from a concept into a representation, philosophy uses the literary-mythical form to bring philosophemes closer to the imagination, to clarify the imagination using various visualizations to improve comprehensibility.

As was said initially regarding Hegel: There is still a difference between us *being* thinkers and *imagining* ourselves as such or *knowing* that we are thinkers. Hegel demands arduous work on a concept, the necessary sublation of representations in conceptual thinking. He aptly identifies the differences between art, religion, and philosophy, and outlines the shortcomings and limits “of poetizing with concepts.” The literary and religious form, however, “is not suitable to Philosophy. Thought which has itself as an object must have raised itself to its own form, to the form of thought.” The protagonists of the “army of metaphors” have an Achilles heel: They operate with a concept of a metaphor rather than a metaphor of a metaphor.

### *Hegel and the “End of History”*

For Hegel, the basic object and, therefore, the guiding principle of the historical is the spirit, according to its essence, the concept of freedom.<sup>3</sup> The history of the world presents “the gradation in the development of that principle whose substantial purport is the consciousness of Freedom” (TWA 12, p. 76f). The analysis of the successive grades, in their abstract form, belongs to Logic. The fixation of the three main stages of the world history orient themselves according to the status of freedom: 1) the freedom of the particular individual (only the isolated, the particular—the emperor’s principle or autocracy), 2) the freedom of the particular (“some” particulars, such as politicians), 3) universal freedom (“all”). The goal or end purpose of history was considered to be *universal freedom*, the *freedom of all*, the modern world as the “end of history,” the freedom of everybody. The principle of modern states as “last states” has “enormous strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to attain fulfilment

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the topic see Vieweg 2012, pp. 499–521.

in the *self-sufficient extreme* of personal particularity, while at the same time *bringing it back to substantial unity* and so preserving this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself” (TWA 7, p. 407). Free will is considered to be the substantial basis for all rights, for this principle of freedom, the last stage of the history of the world, the modern world. These represent the *end of history*, the last historical world formation. This neither implies a “utopian moratorium” (Ernst Bloch) nor an “elimination of future” (Ortega y Gasset) nor an opening to new stages. Hegel’s concept of history is opposed to the idea of the world development of the principle of freedom that is higher than that of modern freedom, a concept that does not refer generally to human events but to a gradation, to a “*layering*,” and that significantly differs from world history as it is used today. One could call this historical “*world-layering*” if perceived from the geological point of view; this layering has reached its *final, concluding* “layer”—through the universal consciousness of freedom, history reaches, with this highest stage, *its own reason and then*—as a finite process, as a gradation—it also falls to its own ruin.

The modern state must follow its concept. Regarding this, Hegel noted: “Man must form himself. He is historical, i.e. he belongs in time, in *history before freedom*—this is where history is.” (TWA 7, p. 124, my emphasis). What Hegel calls history is, technically speaking, *the prehistory of humankind*. Hegel’s writings about the end of history do not, by any means, contain a definitive conclusion of human events in the sense of a status of perfection, in the sense of the actual presence of the best of all worlds or this-worldly paradise. In modern times, human events take place within the achieved framework of the world in the form of *globalization* as the internationalization of essential day-to-day life. The modern principle of freedom can be formed internally in the mind and externally in the world. The end of history is about the global shaping of universal freedom. The recognized concept of freedom can be given its appropriate, adequate shape.

The peak of the gradation has been reached, and now, according to the principle of freedom, it is about the formation of this plateau that has been clambered onto. Metaphorically, the realization of the concept of freedom begins its true flight, which is now very fast. After the previous slowness, after the previous snail's crawl, the spirit has now picked up its stride. A shape of life, namely history in its form as a gradation, has become "ripe"; it can no longer return to its earlier, supposedly idyllic forms, there can be no departure to substantially new stages. People are "only" left with knowledge and the global realization of the idea of freedom as the true principle for the human community.

The end is in no way death or a standstill; Hegel uses this word in the sense of Friedrich Schiller, whose inaugural lecture at Jena University was titled *What does it mean and to what end does one study universal history*—the end as the purpose. Even in his every-day speech, Hegel used the word in the following sense: "I expect you, to this end, at around 3 o'clock." The end of history can be interpreted—and this is the main intention of Hegelian thinking—as the actual beginning of human existence, as the beginning of an age in which a human, every person is considered to be a *new, highest, and ultimate saint*. This is the central point of this conception, the understanding of modernity as the beginning of a truly human-designed, free existence. The ideas of freedom, law, and humanity are to be developed as basic principles of self-understanding and self-interpretation as well as of institutional and cultural formations. Freedom should become the principle based on which the moral cosmos is oriented; this is probably the only thing that Hegel says about the future. He delivers neither a utopian promise of an earthly paradise, for the establishment of which final holy battles are fought nor a consolation of a heavenly kingdom. It is not about a prophetic whisper or mystical visions of the future in the form of belief in a future world or age or utopian communist empires. Understanding and shaping freedom, *conditio humana*—these are the challenges that humanity faces. From a Hegelian perspective, this

is not a comfortable undertaking, a simple stroll, a walk through the beautiful groves of ancient Greece, a quick stop at St Peter's Basilica, it is no walk through the gentle wine-growing hills of Tuscany or the gardens of Buddhist monasteries in Kyoto, it is not a stroll through Ljubljana or Jena, but rather it is the most difficult and riskiest challenge for humanity. This undertaking is like a big dare, like a tightrope walk without a safety net, climbing Mount Everest without a roped party, or us jumping from the ski jump in Planica. It is similar to a company that has already made great strides but is moving as if it was still in its infancy, still at the beginning—this was painfully evident in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—and the success of which cannot be certain.

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