nature. Human beings are finite spirits and nature is not spirit at all (or, more precisely, it is spirit that is not aware of itself as such).

Hegel maintains that the Judeo-Christian account is correct in maintaining that God is infinite (ontologically unlimited and unrestricted) but wrong in explaining God's infinity in term of transcendence. God's infinity is rather to be explained by reference to his immanence within the world as a whole. Nature and mankind, properly understood, are manifestations of God. God, properly understood, is wholly manifested in nature and through mankind. The complex formed by God-as-manifested-in-nature-and-through-mankind (which is to say: absolute spirit) is identical to both the world-as-a-whole insofar as it expresses God and God as manifested or realized. God (absolute *Geist*) is infinite, then, in that everything that exists is a manifestation of his existence. There is nothing other than God that limits or restricts him because there is nothing *other* that could limit or restrict him (see WL, 1:149–66/137–50). Absolute *Geist* depends on nothing, needs nothing, and is bound by nothing in the sense that it depends on, needs, and is bound by nothing that is *other than itself*.

Human beings are *vehicles* of absolute *Geist*, then, in that it is through them that absolute spirit actualizes itself and attains self-consciousness. They are *essentially* vehicles of absolute spirit in the sense that actualizing absolute *Geist* constitutes their highest vocation.

II. The *Doppelsatz*

The *Doppelsatz* (or double dictum) – "What is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational" (PR, ¶12) – is one of Hegel's most famous, most provocative, and most discussed philosophical slogans.[4] Its two brief lines provide an extraordinarily provocative, memorable, and condensed formulation of three crucial aspects of Hegel's philosophical point of view. They encapsulate Hegel's basic (1) conception of reason, reality, and their relation, (2) methodological approach, and (3) normative outlook. Because of this, the *Doppelsatz* provides a wonderful device for exploring Hegel's thought. Not surprisingly, the dictum also poses a number of interpretive difficulties. Written in Hegel's technical vocabulary, it is extremely abstract and compressed, richly ambiguous, and, furthermore, exists in a number of different formulations. These difficulties can, however, be turned to our advantage, for working through them will help us gain access to Hegel's thought. My discussion will be loosely organized around the three aspects of Hegel's philosophical point of view mentioned above.

4 See, e.g., Haym 1857, 365–9; Rosenzweig 1920, 2:77–80; Fackenheim 1969–70, 691–8; Löwith 1941, 153–62, 1964, 135–50; Henrich 1983, 13–17; Wood 1990, 10–11. The term *Doppelsatz* belongs to Henrich 1983.

1. Before turning to the first of these three aspects (Hegel's conception of reason, reality, and their relation), I want to make a few remarks about the two main terms of the *Doppelsatz*: 'rational' (*vernünftig*) and 'actual' (*wirklich*).

'Rational', as Hegel uses the term, has both an epistemic and a normative aspect; roughly speaking, it means both rationally intelligible and reasonable or good.[5] In ordinary speech 'actual' (*wirklich*) and 'existing' (*existierend*) are often used interchangeably, which can give rise to the (false) impression that the *Doppelsatz* asserts that everything that exists – including, in particular, every existing state – is reasonable or good. Read in this way, the *Doppelsatz* expresses a horrifically conservative doctrine, one that rules out the possibility of criticizing existing social institutions and practices altogether. But in Hegel's technical vocabulary, the words 'existing' (*existierend*) and 'actual' (*wirklich*) are not interchangeable. Indeed, Hegel draws a sharp distinction between the two. He defines *Wirklichkeit* ('actuality', 'reality') as the "unity of essence [*Wesen*] and existence [*Existenz*]" (EL, §142). The essence of things (taking 'things' here in the broadest possible sense) consists, roughly speaking, in their inner or underlying rational structure. (Hegel's assertion that things, generally speaking, have an inner or underlying rational structure represents one of the respects in which his view is idealistic.) Things are actual (*wirklich*) only to the extent that they express, manifest, realize, and correspond to their inner essence. What makes them actual – to the extent that they are actual – is not that they exist but rather that they exist *and* express their inner essence. Thus, in Hegel's terminology, not everything that exists is actual. To the extent that things fail to live up to their essence, they fall under the categories of 'mere appearance' (*bloße Erscheinung*) and 'illusion' (*Schein*).

Although Hegel recognizes that the philosophical distinction he draws between 'existence' and 'actuality' is technical, he contends

5 See Inwood 1983, 497.

that it has roots in educated speech, which, he maintains, declines to give the name real (*wirklich*) poet or real (*wirklich*) statesman to a poet or statesman who can do nothing really meritorious or reasonable (EL, §142Z). Hegel also holds that his technical sense of 'actuality' corresponds to what he calls the 'emphatic sense' of the ordinary word. This reflects his general view that philosophy captures the 'speculative content' of ordinary language. In any case, the upshot of all this is that the *Doppelsatz*, properly understood, does not affirm the rationality of everything that exists. The dictum makes the far more restricted claim that what is *actual* is rational. Hegel says quite explicitly: "everything which is not rational must on that very ground cease to be held actual" (EL, §142Z, translation modified). And so the *Doppelsatz* does not entail that existing political states are rational merely because they exist. It is worth pointing out that Hegel does provide a criterion for distinguishing those features of the modern state that are actual from those that are not.[6] It consists in the account of the underlying rational structure of the modern social world provided in the *Philosophy of Right*. To the extent that institutions conform to the arrangements described in the *Philosophy of Right*, they are actual. To the extent that they fail to conform, they are not.

Now as we have seen, the German word *Wirklichkeit* can be translated as either 'actuality' or 'reality', and *wirklich* can be translated as either 'actual' or 'real'. 'Actuality' has quite appropriately become the standard translation for *Wirklichkeit*, as Hegel uses it, and 'actual' the standard translation for his use of *wirklich*. One reason for this is that 'actual' preserves the contrast with potential and undeveloped that is central to Hegel's conception of *Wirklichkeit*. A thing is *wirklich* to the extent that it has developed its potential. Another reason for translating *wirklich* with 'actual' is to respect Hegel's general practice of using the term *Realität* to mean something rather different from *Wirklichkeit* (e.g., to contrast with 'negation' or 'ideality'). If one has to choose one single word to represent *Wirklichkeit*, 'actuality' is the word to pick.

But things are not quite as tidy as this suggests. Hegel does, after all, often use 'realize' (*realisieren*) and 'realization' (*Realisation*) interchangeably with 'actualize' (*verwirklichen*) and 'actualization' (*Verwirklichung*). And he explicitly recognizes the possibility of employing *Realität* and *real* in a sense that is virtually identical to

6 Cf., for a differing view, ibid., 502.

his use of *Wirklichkeit* and *wirklich* (EL, §91Z). Moreover, whereas *Wirklichkeit* is a perfectly ordinary German word – like 'reality' in English – the English word 'actuality' is specialized and learned. It is far more idiomatic to speak of a real statesman than an actual statesman. Moreover, 'reality' not 'actuality' is the honorific term in English. We may or may not care whether things are actual, but we do intuitively care whether they are real. 'Actuality' lacks the intuitive force – the ring – of 'reality'.

The most important limitation of the standard translation of *Wirklichkeit*, however, is that it obscures the crucial fact that when Hegel talks about *Wirklichkeit*, he means to be talking about what *we* would call *reality*. I do not mean to suggest here that Hegel's conception of *Wirklichkeit* captures our commonsense conception of reality, but rather that he thinks of his philosophical conception of *Wirklichkeit* as providing a philosophical account of the ordinary notion of reality. One point the *Doppelsatz* makes is that what is rational is *real* and what is *real* is rational – a point that cannot conveniently be expressed without rendering *wirklich* as 'real'. And so, although I will usually follow the standard practice of translating *Wirklichkeit* with 'actuality' and *wirklich* with 'actual', I will at times use 'reality' and 'real' as alternative translations. Doing so will make it possible to see that *reality* is one of the many things the *Doppelsatz* is about.

One might doubt this, for one might doubt whether the *Doppelsatz* is about anything other than the use of words. The claim that what is real is rational can be read as an explication of Hegel's use of 'real' (*wirklich*) – and hence as analytic.[7] After all, his definition of *Wirklichkeit* establishes a definitional connection between what is real and what is rational. Within Hegel's technical vocabulary, things are *by definition* real to the extent that they fulfill their essence. The essence of a thing is *defined* as its underlying *rational* structure. And so it follows immediately from Hegel's definition of 'reality' and 'essence' that things are rational to the extent that they are real. For this reason, Hegel's claim that what is real (or actual) is rational has often been held to be an empty tautology. And by the same token someone might contend that nothing is gained by speaking of reality rather than actuality: since Hegel stipulates that 'real' should be used in the way he does, no substantive claim is being made. The *Doppelsatz* does not say anything about reality after all. All that is at issue here is *words*.

7 Cf. Haym 1857, 368.

But this reading of the *Doppelsatz* is mistaken. Although it is true that Hegel defines *reality* in such a way as to establish a definitional connection between what is real and what is rational, his definition of 'reality' is philosophically subsequent to his philosophical conception of reality. The real philosophical work is done by the conception (a conception that Hegel defends in the *Science of Logic* and throughout his system as a whole), not the definition. Hegel's purpose in *defining* the word 'reality' is simply to express his philosophical conception in a convenient terminology. The point of the *Doppelsatz* is not to establish a *definitional* connection between the words 'real' and 'actual' but rather to assert a *metaphysical* connection between reality and reason. And so Hegel's claim that the real is rational is not empty. It instead provides a summary statement of his philosophical conception of reality and as such makes a substantive claim – a claim about the nature of the real, which, as we shall see, has important normative implications.

2. I turn now to Hegel's conception of reality. The key fact here is that this conception ascribes an intrinsically normative or teleological dimension to the real. Things are *real*, in Hegel's view, to the extent that they live up to their own underlying norm or end – their essence or concept. This conception of reality differs from the commonsense view, according to which things can be perfectly real despite being defective or imperfect. Hegel maintains that to the extent that things fail to correspond to their essence they lack reality, and he holds more specifically that to the extent that an existing political state fails to correspond to the essence of the state, it is not a real state in the relevant sense of the term. Moreover, the defects and imperfections of existing political states lack reality in his view. They exist and may cause suffering, but they are not real. What makes things real – to the extent that they *are* real – is the fact that they exist and correspond to their essence. This, then, is the conception of reality that Hegel's definition is meant to capture.

It may be helpful to think of Hegel's conception of reality as reflecting both a step toward and a step away from Platonism. Hegel takes one (obvious) step toward Platonism in refusing to identify the real with what is "palpable and immediately perceptible" (EL, §142Z, translation modified) and in consigning much of what is given in experience to the metaphysical status of "transitory *existence*, external contingency, opinion, appearance without essence, untruth, deception, etc." (PR, §1R). The disdain Hegel sometimes

shows for what merely exists certainly has a Platonic feel. But Hegel also takes another (and somewhat less obvious) step *away* from Platonism in insisting that what is real *must* be externally realized. Things are real only to the extent that they have an external, spatiotemporal existence.

Hegel's conception of reality is thus Janus-faced: one side looks toward the ideal; the other side looks toward existence. In responding to the objection that he claims that everything that exists is rational, Hegel emphasizes the side of his conception of reality that faces the ideal. But it is crucial not to overlook the other side, the side that looks to what exists. The whole point of Hegel's conception of reality is to bridge the gap between what is ideal and what exists. As Hegel understands it, reality is to be identified neither with the essence of things considered apart from their existence nor with the existence of things considered apart from their essence. The reality of the state consists in the essence of the state insofar as it is realized in existing states and existing states insofar as they realize the essence of the state. Reality, for Hegel, is the *unity* of essence and existence. It is also the unity of "the inward" (inner rational structure) and "the outward" (the external embodiment of that structure) (EL, §142).

Thus, for Hegel, reality is immanent within the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world is not identical with reality, for it contains much that is not real. A large portion of this world consists of mere appearances: appearances that fail to live up to their essence and appearances that have no essence. But the real is not a Platonic, ontological "beyond" (*Jenseits*) either. It is not a realm of ideas that are not realized in this world. Nor is the real a Kantian, epistemic "beyond": a thing in itself that lies beyond the bounds of human cognition. The real has external existence in the phenomenal world and is accessible to human cognition. One grasps the reality of things by seeing how their existing features express and embody their essence and how their essence is expressed and embodied in their existing features.

Hegel contends that the final and correct way of comprehending reality is to grasp it as what he calls "the idea" (*die Idee*) (EL, §236). 'The idea', in Hegel's technical vocabulary, consists of the concept (*der Begriff*) (singular) – the underlying rational structure of the world as a whole – together with its actualization (*Verwirklichung*) in nature, history, and the social world. In his view, 'the idea' is real, indeed fully and completely real, and in fact is the only

true reality. The upshot of all this is the familiar point that Hegel's basic conception of reality is idealistic. It is not idealistic in denying the existence of matter or in taking the world to be a posit of the mind of the individual. It is idealistic in at least the three following respects: (i) it attributes an intrinsically normative or teleological dimension to reality; (ii) it maintains that things are real only to the extent that they fulfill their inner essences; and (iii) it contends that 'the idea' is the only true reality. It is this idealistic conception of reality that makes it possible for Hegel to say that "the true ideal [*das wahrhafte Ideal*, i.e., 'the idea'] . . . is what is real [*wirklich*], and the only real" (VGP, 2:110/2:95).

From the standpoint of philosophically informed common sense, the philosophical account of the modern social world that Hegel provides in the *Philosophy of Right* will appear to represent an idealized characterization of the institutions and practices with which Hegel was familiar because many of the features it includes were absent in particular cases. Prussia, for example, lacked a constitutional monarchy, a representative bicameral assembly, and public jury trials. But it should be clear from the account of Hegel's conception of reality just provided that Hegel does not regard the *Philosophy of Right* in this way. To characterize an account as *idealized* is to suggest that it is an abstraction, that it abstracts from reality in certain important respects. And although Hegel recognizes that the *Philosophy of Right* abstracts from various *existing* features of the modern social world, he emphatically denies that it abstracts from its reality (*Wirklichkeit*). He would insist that the discrepancies between his philosophical account of the social world and particular existing institutions do not reflect the failure of his account to capture reality but instead the failure of those institutions to realize their essence. Treating Hegel's account of the modern social world as an idealization may represent a fruitful, *deflationary* way of reconstructing his approach – one that enables us to take his investigation seriously while ignoring his philosophical conception of reality. But we cannot understand what Hegel is doing in the *Philosophy of Right* unless we appreciate the truly remarkable fact that he genuinely takes his philosophical account of the modern social world to be thoroughly realistic.

3. Hegel's conception of reason has two closely related elements: (i) an account of the conditions of normative validity and (ii) a view of reason as an active force or power. Hegel's conception of normative validity reflects his general commitment to the principle of

internal criticism: the idea that criticism must be given in terms that appeal to principles or practices to which the agents to whom it is addressed are already committed. He maintains that norms ('oughts,' ideals, principles) are valid only if they are rooted in the essence of the things to which they apply. A norm that is rooted in the essence of a thing can be said to have a foothold in the thing's "own rationality" since, in being rooted in the thing's essence, it is rooted in the thing's rational structure. Roughly speaking, a norm is 'rooted' in the essence of a thing if it figures centrally in the characterization of the thing's kind and plays a central explanatory role in accounting for the thing's normal operation, that is, activities through which it realizes its essence. Thus to say that the ideal of providing mutual love, understanding, and support is rooted in the essence of the family – a view Hegel holds – is to say that having this end is part of what it is to *be* a family and that, by realizing this end, families realize themselves *as* families. A family *has* the end of providing mutual love and so forth if it is "organized around" this end. It is organized around this end if it exhibits an underlying structure that, if ideally realized, would realize it. Norms that are not rooted in the essence of things to which they are applied are *mere* oughts or ideals, in Hegel's view. Being alien to the essence of things to which they are applied, such norms lack any rational grip or force.

It should be noted that Hegel's claim that norms are valid only if rooted in essences entails that norms must be rooted in the actual in order to be valid. By 'essences' Hegel means *realized* (or actualized) essences: his general view being that essences must be actualized in existing features of the things whose essence they are. But the realized essence of things constitutes their actuality (*Wirklichkeit*). And so, for Hegel, actuality (or reality) is the source of valid norms. One sense, then, in which the rational is actual is that valid norms are rooted in the real.

Hegel's conception of normative validity is illustrated by the distinction he draws between what he calls "ideals of imagination" (*Ideale der Phantasie*) and "ideals of reason" (*Ideale der Vernunft*) (VG, 75/65). *Ideals of reason* are so called because they are rooted in the reality of things. It is precisely because they are rooted in the real (existing rational practices) that they are genuine and "binding upon reality at large" (VG, 76/65). *Ideals of imagination* derive their name from the fact that they are grounded solely in individual imagination or fantasy. Hegel holds that ideals of imagination are *mere* ideals – ideals that lack any genuine claim to be satisfied and whose non-

fulfillment does not constitute an objective wrong. Ideals of reason, on the other hand, are genuine, or true, ideals. They have a "genuine claim to be satisfied" and their nonfulfillment constitutes "an objective wrong" (VG, 76/66). This distinction allows Hegel to recognize that there is a class of ideals that are *not* rooted in reality (a fact that gives rise to the general impression that there is a fundamental split between what is ideal and what is real) while also maintaining that there is another class of ideals that *are* rooted in reality (a fact that shows that there is no fundamental split between the ideal and the real).

Now in conceiving of valid norms as rooted in the essence or reality of things, Hegel already conceives of reason as a force or power. In order for the ideal of mutual love, understanding, and support to be rooted in the essence of the family, existing families must realize this end at least to some degree. In order to *be* families, they must be organized around this end, and in order to be *organized around* this end, they must have some success in realizing it. If it were literally true that a family failed utterly to realize this end, it could not be said to be a family at all. Thus, in Hegel's view, valid norms are not powerless. The very conditions that make them valid guarantee that the things to which they apply will exhibit at least some tendency to realize them. Another sense in which the rational is actual, then, is that valid norms are realized at least to some degree. None of this is to say that the validity of a norm guarantees its *ideal* satisfaction – that is, that the things to which it applies realize the norm in a perfect and complete way. Even if the ideal of mutual love and so forth *is* rooted in the family, no existing family will perfectly realize this ideal, and some existing families will diverge radically from the ideal. The Karamazov family represents a real possibility, but the Waltons and Huxtables are fantasies of television.

Now, obviously enough, the claim that valid norms will be realized to *some* degree is both vague and weak. How well must a family actualize the ideals of the family in order to be said to realize this ideal 'to some degree'? A possible answer would be: well enough to be properly called a family. Deciding whether a given family actualizes the ideal of the family well enough to be properly called a family is a matter of judgment. And there may be cases – say, with extremely dysfunctional families – in which it is not clear whether a given 'family' really is a family. But, presumably, most families actualize the ideal of the family well enough to be families properly so called. The vagueness of the idea of realizing a norm to some degree is perhaps somewhat less threatening than might first appear.

The worry about weakness is more serious. Whatever the minimal level of success may be, it must be very low, for, presumably, it is a level that even the Karamazovs can satisfy. There are highly dysfunctional families that are still families. And so the worry is that the minimal level of success is so minimal as to make the standard it provides empty or to divest this standard of all value. If the minimal level of success is a standard even the Karamazovs can satisfy, one might well wonder whether the standard is worth taking seriously.

Here it must be pointed out that Hegel also maintains that things will generally realize those norms that are rooted in their essence to a *significant degree.* This idea is obviously vague, but it may be possible to clarify its force by giving some sense of the range of cases within which it falls. A family that realized the ideal of mutual love, understanding, and support *only* to the minimal degree required in order for it to be a family would not realize this ideal to a significant degree. The Karamazovs provide a literary example of a family of this sort. But a family could be said to realize this ideal to a significant degree without realizing it perfectly and completely. A family does not have to be just like the Waltons or the Huxtables to be properly said to realize the ideal to a significant degree. Nor must a family realize this ideal on the whole. But a normal family – a family that could properly be called normal – would realize the ideal to a significant degree. Although it might exhibit serious problems and difficulties, it would, nonetheless, embody the ideal of mutual love, understanding, and support in a real and substantial way.

In any case, the idea that things will generally realize those norms that are rooted in their essence to a significant degree flows out of Hegel's conception of normative validity. Hegel is committed to the view that there is a nonaccidental connection between 'normal' in the sense of 'conforming to norm' and 'normal' in the sense of 'what generally transpires'. He thinks that in order for a norm to be in place – to be valid – the pattern of action the norm prescribes must generally (but not universally) take place. Part of what it *means* for a pattern of action to constitute a thing's 'normal operation' is for that pattern to be a pattern that things of its kind generally exhibit. Thus the ideal of providing mutual love, understanding, and support would not be a norm rooted in the essence of the family if families did not generally realize this ideal to a significant degree.

Another sense in which the rational is actual is that valid norms are realized to a significant degree.

Turning briefly from Hegel's conception of reason back to his conception of actuality, it is worth noting that Hegel contends that existing things exhibit a tendency to realize valid norms. His conception of the actual entails that, to the extent to which things are actual, they will realize – or tend to realize – those norms that are rooted in their essences. Hegel conceives of essences as rational tendencies: tendencies to realize the structures in virtue of which things are rationally intelligible, reasonable, and good. And so to say that norms must be rooted in the essences of things to which they apply is to say that they must be rooted in things that are so constituted as to exhibit a tendency to realize them. Hegel maintains that reality is essentially rational in the sense that it displays an *inherent tendency* to realize valid norms.

In order to appreciate this point, it is crucial to realize that Hegel offers two distinct lines of argument. One line flows out of his conception of normative validity:

> In order for the rational to be rational (i.e., in order for norms to be valid), the actual must be rational; it must provide the foundations for valid norms and realize these norms to some, and indeed a significant, degree.

The other line flows out of his conception of the actual:

> Since essences are tendencies to realize structures in virtue of which things are intelligible, reasonable, and good, the actual will necessarily exhibit a tendency to be intelligible, reasonable, and good.

Although the first line entails that we cannot specify the content of valid norms without looking to the reality of the things in question, the second line maintains that – quite apart from the question of determining what the content of valid norms is – we can say that, insofar as things are real, they are constituted so as to realize valid norms. Thus the *Doppelsatz* allows of both an epistemic and a metaphysical reading. On the epistemic reading, the *Doppelsatz* maintains that what is actual is rational because what is rational is actual: the fact that the conditions of normative validity are met provides an epistemic guarantee that the actual will be rational. On the metaphysical reading, the *Doppelsatz* maintains that what is rational is actual because what is actual is rational: The nature of

actuality provides a metaphysical guarantee that the rational will be actual.

4. Having now considered Hegel's conception of reason and reality, we are now in a position to consider variant formulations of the *Doppelsatz*. In his 1817–18 Heidelberg lectures, Hegel stated:

> What is rational must happen, since on the whole the constitution is only its development. (VPRW, 157)

Then, in the Heidelberg lectures he gave in the following year, Hegel asserted:

> What is rational becomes actual, and the actual becomes rational. (VPRHN, 51)[8]

On the face of things these two formulations (which I will refer to rather inelegantly as the 'development' and the 'becoming' versions) seem rather different from (what I will call) the 'canonical' formulation we have been considering up until now.

To begin with, the word 'actual' (*wirklich*) is completely absent from the development version, which might be taken simply to refer to what exists. Thus one might think that the development version baldly proclaims that the existing constitution (*Verfassung*) – that is, the de facto arrangement of the state – is the development of the rational. But this reading is not plausible. Quite apart from the fact that it involves attributing a claim to Hegel that is absurd by any reasonable standard, it clearly runs against the grain of his thought. The distinction he makes between existence (*Existenz*) and actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) is after all a central feature of the 1812–13 *Science of Logic* (WL, 2:186–217/541–53). In any case, the development version does not provide a blanket affirmation of what exists. It does not say that *the constitution* is the development of the rational, period. What it says is that the constitution is the development of the rational *on the whole* (*überhaupt*). The qualification is absolutely crucial, for it reflects the Hegelian distinction between existence and actuality. Those aspects of the constitution which *do not* represent a development of the rational are merely existent. Those aspects which *do* represent a development of the rational are actual. Only those aspects of the constitution that are actual are held to be a development of the rational. Hegel may not have used the *word*

8 Wood's translations (1990, 13).

'actual' (*wirklich*) in the development version, but his *conception* of actuality is there all the same. As far as this point goes, there is no fundamental difference between the development and canonical versions of the *Doppelsatz*.

Now, like the canonical version, the becoming version of the *Doppelsatz* does use the word 'actual' (*wirklich*). But the use to which it puts this word might suggest that, unlike the canonical version, it identifies the philosophical categories of actuality and existence. After all, it is clear that part of Hegel's point in saying that "what is rational becomes actual" is that what is rational *comes into existence* and that part of his point in saying that "the actual becomes rational" is that *what exists* becomes rational. Nonetheless, we should not conclude that the becoming version identifies existence and actuality in any serious way. Hegel is deliberately speaking loosely in this version of his dictum so as to make his point maximally provocative and forceful. He is using the word 'actual' to mean 'existent', and hence violating his own self-imposed linguistic strictures, but he is *not* identifying the existent with the actual. This verbal looseness also allows him to suggest a thesis that gives the becoming version much of its force: namely, that in coming into existence, the rational (the underlying rational tendencies of things) becomes actual and that in becoming actual the existent becomes rational. Things are complicated somewhat by the fact that in the becoming version, Hegel also means 'actual' (in his technical sense of the term) by 'actual'. Part of his point in saying that what is rational becomes actual is that what is rational becomes *more actual* in the sense of coming to be more adequately realized in existing things. And part of his point in saying that what is actual becomes rational is that what is actual becomes *more rational* in the sense of coming to fulfill its essence in a more adequate way.

This leads us to the truly striking difference between the two variants and the canonical version. Whereas the two earlier versions speak of what must *happen*, what *develops*, and what *becomes*, the final version speaks of what *is*. The rhetorical effect of this contrast is enormous. And the contrast might well seem philosophically fundamental. Unlike the canonical version, which can so easily be read as flatly proclaiming the rationality of the present, the development and becoming versions seem to suggest that the future – not the present – is the true locus of rationality. And unlike the canonical version, which seems to present the rationality of the actual as a static state of affairs, both the development and the becoming versions clearly represent the rationality of the actual as a *process*. Moreover, considered from the perspective of Hegel's immediate political circumstances, the development and becoming versions can be read as expressing Hegel's optimism in the Prussian reform era. Similarly, the canonical version can be read as endorsing the Prussian restoration. Furthermore, the development and becoming versions can easily be read as generic expressions of political reformism – as suggesting quite generally that social change is necessary and rational – and the canonical version can easily be read as a generic expression of political conservatism – as suggesting quite generally that the status quo is fine as it is.

But striking as these differences are, their philosophical significance is, I think, easily exaggerated.[9] The canonical version is not meant to deny that rationality or actuality is to be understood in terms of processes. The canonical version assumes that the actuality and the rationality of social institutions are both realized by the processes through which the institutions maintain and reproduce themselves. The family, for example, maintains and reproduces itself by raising its members to act in such a way (fulfilling their duties as family members) that they will maintain and reproduce the family. Hegel believes that it is precisely because social reproductive processes are taking place that the rational *is* actual and the actual *is* rational. And although the canonical version does not emphasize this point, it does presuppose it. The development and the becoming versions may be forward-looking in a way in which the canonical version is not, but neither version flatly denies the rationality of the present. The view that the present is not rational but the future will become rational is fundamentally un-Hegelian. Hegel is deeply opposed to any suggestion that the rational (or the ideal or the divine) is to be found somewhere other than in the present – in some *Jenseits*, or beyond. The development and the becoming version do express a certain optimism about the future, but this optimism must be understood to be rooted in a basic faith in the present. The underlying image here is not the Marxian one of the present age containing the seeds of its own destruction (like capitalism) but of the present containing the seeds of it own development. The outlook is reformist rather than revolutionary. And although the *language* of the canonical version may be static, the *conception* of reason that underlies it is no less dynamic than the

9 Cf. Henrich 1983, 13–17; Wood 1990, 11–14.

conception of reason that is expressed in the development and becoming versions.

Indeed the basic conception of reason at work in the development, becoming, and canonical versions of the *Doppelsatz* is the same. Reason is, among other things, the basic tendency of the social world to become more rational. One crucial respect in which the social world becomes more rational, in Hegel's view, is that its arrangements come to reflect an increasingly more adequate conception of the human spirit.

Hegel contends that this transformation takes place through the process of historical development he calls "world history" (*Weltgeschichte*). Each stage of world history is represented by a determinate national principle (*Volksgeist*), expressed in the particular ordering of the family, economy, and government and in the particular forms of art, religion, and philosophy, that corresponds to the highest level of self-understanding available to human beings at the time (VG, 74–5/64). That nation whose principle corresponds to the highest level of self-understanding available to human beings at the time will become historically dominant (see VG, 59/51–2). Its world historical task consists in the development of its national principle (VG, 67/58); in developing this principle, it furthers the self-understanding of the human spirit. Once a historically dominant nation has fully developed its national principle, it enters a period of decline, and the task of developing a more adequate conception of the human spirit transfers to another nation (VG, 69/60). The succession of stages of world history corresponds to the succession of increasingly more adequate conceptions of the human spirit, developed by a succession of historically dominant nations. The basic tendency of the social world to become more rational consists, then, in its tendency to develop social arrangements that correspond to increasingly more adequate conceptions of the human spirit. It is this tendency that Hegel has in mind when he characterizes reason as an "infinite power" (VG, 28/27). One of the many senses in which the rational is actual, then, according to Hegel, is in its tendency to actualize itself in increasingly more adequate ways through the course of world history.

Both the development and the becoming version of the *Doppelsatz* express this conception of reason more or less on their face. In saying that the rational must happen in the development version, Hegel means that it must happen in the course of world history. By the development of reason, he means a development that occurs

in world history. Similarly, when Hegel says that what is rational becomes actual and what is actual becomes rational in the becoming version, he is thinking of world history as the arena of these transformations. Although the canonical version makes no explicit reference to the dynamic character of reason and so may *appear* static, it is clear that Hegel is thinking of reason as a developmental power in this version as well. He clearly believes that the circumstance of the present the canonical version describes, in which the rational *is* actual and the actual *is* rational, is the result of the historical process through which the rational has *become* actual and the actual has *become* rational: the process of world history. Historically speaking, the fact that the rational is actual (the fact that the social world has exhibited a tendency to become more rational) explains why the actual (the present) is rational. Although the canonical version, in contrast to the development and becoming versions, does not emphasize the developmental character of reason, this is a difference of emphasis, not doctrine. The upshot of all this is that the development, becoming, and canonical versions of the *Doppelsatz* do not offer competing accounts of the fundamental nature of reason, reality, and their relation. Rather they express a common fundamental conception and differ only in the particular aspects of this common fundamental conception they happen to emphasize. The real value of looking at the different versions is that doing so enables us to see what these aspects are and so better appreciate the richness of Hegel's view.

Before going on to the methodological implications of the *Doppelsatz*, there is one further aspect of Hegel's conception of the social world's becoming more rational that I would like to explore. The final way in which, according to Hegel, the social world has become more rational is that the existing institutions of the modern social world realize their essence to a far greater degree than the institutions of the ancient world realized theirs. World history, in Hegel's view, is marked by a closing of the gap between the ideal and the existent. Indeed, Hegel's conception of world history can be understood as the story of the process through which this gap becomes progressively smaller.

I would like to approach this point by turning to one extremely illuminating context in which Hegel addresses it: namely, his discussion of the status and limitations of Plato's *Republic* in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*. It is in the Preface that Hegel makes his famous and remarkable claim that the basic character of the

Republic and the *Philosophy of Right* are the same: each of these works is "*its own time comprehended in thoughts*" (PR, ¶13). Far from being an "empty ideal," as is commonly thought, the *Republic* is "essentially the embodiment of nothing other than the nature of Greek ethical life" (PR, ¶12, translation modified). Commentators have understandably had difficulty in taking this claim seriously,[10] for two main reasons. First, this interpretation is radically at odds with Plato's own understanding. It is generally recognized that Plato took the *Republic* to represent a repudiation of the polis of his time. Second, the social world Plato describes in the *Republic* diverges radically from the existing Greek polis of his time. It is, for example, a social world without marriage, a world in which the two upper classes lack private property, and a world in which no one enjoys freedom of occupation. And so the question that naturally arises is: How could Hegel have seriously maintained that the *Republic* was its own time comprehended in thought? Presumably, the difficulties that make Hegel's interpretation problematic are too obvious for him to have overlooked them. How then could Hegel have seriously maintained that the *Republic* was "its own time comprehended in thoughts" *given* that he recognized that his interpretation faced these difficulties?

Hegel himself does not provide an explicit answer to this question, but I believe it is possible to construct the sort of reply he would give. Hegel would presumably concede that his account of the real import of the *Republic* is radically at odds with Plato's self-understanding, but he would argue that his understanding of what Plato was doing in the *Republic* is superior to Plato's. Hegel follows Kant in thinking that it is possible to understand a philosopher better than that philosopher has understood himself, and he would note that he, Hegel, has the advantage of writing at a time when philosophy has come to a full understanding of its own historical nature. Although for Hegel philosophy has always been historical – all philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought – it is only in the present age (in Hegel's time) that the historical character of philosophy has come to be recognized. Hegel would also concede that the arrangements of the social world Plato presents in the *Republic* differ radically from the existing institutions of Plato's time. Indeed, the word 'concede' here is something of a misnomer since this is a point that Hegel wants to assert. In any case Hegel would –

10 See, e.g., Inwood 1984, 53–4.

and, in effect, does – argue that this discrepancy is, in the first instance, a reflection of the defects of the *Republic* and, ultimately, a reflection of the defects of the Greek social world of Plato's time. This point bears elaboration.

Let us begin by observing that Hegel rejects the common view that the reason the *Republic* radically diverges from existing social arrangements is that the social arrangements it depicts are too good for the world. Writing in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel maintains that the *Republic* is a chimera "not because excellence such as it depicts is lacking to mankind, but because it, this excellence, falls short of man's requirements" (VGP, 2:110/2:95). That Hegel should judge that the Platonic ideal is defective should come as no surprise, given his understanding of the actuality of the rational. Indeed his criticism of this ideal flows from his conception of the actuality of the rational. "The true ideal," Hegel maintains, "is not what [merely] *ought* to be real [*wirklich*], but what *is* real, and the only real; if an ideal is held to be too good to exist, there must be some fault in the ideal itself, for which reality [*Wirklichkeit*] is too good" (VGP, 2:110/2:95, translation modified). But how can Hegel both maintain that the ideal provided in the *Republic* was defective because unrealizable and maintain that the *Republic* is a reflection of the substance of Greek ethical life?

Before we can answer this question, we need to look more closely at the reasons Hegel gives for maintaining that the ideal the *Republic* offers is defective. In addition to holding that this ideal is defective because it is unrealizable, Hegel also maintains that it is defective because it fails to include the "principle of self-subsistent particularity." And, indeed, he contends, these two defects are related. It is precisely because Plato's ideal state fails to include the principle of self-subsistent particularity that it cannot be realized.

We can begin to get a grip on the idea that the *Republic* is a reflection of the substance of Greek ethical life if we recall that Hegel maintains that the social arrangements of ancient Greece provided no room for human subjectivity or particularity. Indeed, he contends that, from the standpoint of Greek ethical life, "the principle of self-subsistent particularity, which had suddenly overtaken Greek ethical life in [Plato's] time" (PR, §185R), could appear "only as a destructive force" (PR, ¶12). Hegel maintains that the *Republic* represented Plato's response to the appearance of this "deeper principle." Plato, Hegel tells us, "absolutely excluded [this principle] from his state, even in its very beginnings in private property . . . and

the family, as well as in its more mature form as the subjective will, the choice of a social position and so forth" (ibid.).

Now Hegel holds that *this* response was fundamentally conditioned by the character of the social world in which Plato lived. It was because the principle of self-subsistent particularity could only appear as a destructive force from the standpoint of Greek ethical life that Plato regarded it as a threat. And it is because Plato regarded it as a threat that he felt the need to exclude it. Moreover, the underlying ideal of the Greek world, according to Hegel, was that of a "purely substantial state" (i.e., a state that provided no room for subjectivity and particularity), and it was *this* ideal that Plato captured in the *Republic*. Indeed, Hegel contends that it is precisely the *Republic*'s success in capturing this ideal that accounts for its "deep and substantial truth."

This brings us to the key point. Hegel contends that the ideal that the *Republic* captures – the ideal that was in fact embedded in ancient Greek life – was a defective ideal. It was defective precisely because it provided no room for the principle of particularity. And so, according to Hegel, the deep reason why Plato's ideal was defective was that it *reflected* the actuality of his social world – a world whose arrangements provided no place for human subjectivity or particularity. In Hegel's view, the strengths and weaknesses of Plato's *Republic* reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the social world within which he lived. The strengths of the state described in the *Republic* are the strengths of a purely substantial state, and the weaknesses exhibited by the *Republic* are the weaknesses of a purely substantial state. Thus, Plato's state *was* its own time comprehended in thought.

We can now return to the point that motivated this excursus. Although Hegel maintains that the *Republic* and the *Philosophy of Right* are alike in that both capture the underlying aspirations of the social worlds they depict, they differ in the following respect: The gap between the arrangements described in the *Philosophy of Right* and the institutions that existed in Hegel's time was much narrower than the gap between the arrangements described in the *Republic* and the institutions that existed in Plato's time. The gap between the *Republic* and the existing social world was enormous; the gap between the *Philosophy of Right* and the existing social world was small. Hegel holds that there is a substantial degree of correspondence between what he calls "the more advanced [*ausgebildeten*] states of our time" (by which he means the most advanced European states of his time) and the structures described in the *Philosophy of Right* (PR, §258Z; VPRG, 632; VGP, 2:36/2:25–6). He thinks that these states *on the whole* do fulfill the aspirations of the modern state.

According to Hegel, the closing of the gap between ideal and existing social arrangements is to be explained in part by the development of the ideals of human social life embedded in social arrangements over the course of world history. The ideal that was rooted in the arrangements of Plato's time – the ideal of a purely substantial form of social life – was defective. It failed to meet "man's requirements" because it provided no room for human subjectivity. And this defect led to the decline of ancient Greece. World history is, among other things, the story of the development of an ideal that meets human requirements, incorporating subjectivity and unifying it with substantiality. Thus Hegel says, "The principle of the modern state has enormous strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to attain fulfillment 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" (PR, §260). We shall return to this extremely suggestive passage in Chapter 6.

5. Let us now turn to the methodological implications of the view of reason and reality the *Doppelsatz* expresses. Hegel presents the dictum in the context of a discussion of the proper aim of philosophical investigation and the relation of philosophy to actuality: "It is *this very relation of philosophy to actuality* which is the subject of misunderstandings, and I accordingly come back to my earlier observation that, since philosophy is *exploration of the rational*, it is for that very reason the *comprehension of the present and the actual*" (PR, ¶12).

The starting assumption of this passage is that the aim of philosophy, including, in particular, social philosophy, is to explore "the rational." Hegel's concern is to explain why, since social philosophy has this aim, the philosopher is committed to comprehending what is present and actual in the social world. The *Doppelsatz* provides a summary statement of his answer: it is because what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational that social philosophy must look to the actuality of the social world. "To comprehend *what is* is the task of philosophy, for *what is* is reason" (PR, ¶13).

But what does comprehending "what is" come to for Hegel?

It is *not* a matter of grasping the existing world as such. To the extent that existing social institutions or their existing features fail

to manifest the underlying rational essence of the social world, they are of no philosophical interest. Considered in themselves, the "infinite wealth of forms, appearances, and shapes" that surround "its [rational] core are not the subject-matter of philosophy" (PR, ¶12). This might give the impression that comprehending "what is" amounts to comprehending the inner essence of things as such, and ignoring existing arrangements. But Hegel rejects this position as well. He contends that philosophy is concerned with the rationality of the social world insofar as it is actualized in existing institutions and practices. Hence philosophy *does* care about existing arrangements; it cares about them *as* manifestations of the rational. For Hegel, comprehending "what is" is a matter of grasping the inner essence of the social world insofar as it is manifest in existing institutions and grasping existing institutions insofar as they manifest the essence of the social world. It is in this way that one grasps what is actual.

As to how concretely the philosopher is to grasp the actuality of the social world, Hegel has fairly little to say. His general approach is to look to those features of the social world (i.e., the modern social world) that are most central and reasonable (e.g., the most reasonable features of "the more advanced" modern European states) and to construct an account on the basis of the results of this investigation. His background conception of reality guarantees that in identifying the most central and reasonable features of the present age (i.e., those corresponding to the most adequate available self-understanding of the human spirit) one will thereby identify the actuality of the present. The philosopher identifies what is actual by looking reasonably at the world.

Hegel's research program, if we can call it such, then, is surprisingly empirical. Although he maintains that we know more or less a priori that the actual social world is rational, he contends that the only way in which we can ascertain the details of its rationality is by *looking to* the social world. Moreover, he thinks that we have only *comprehended* [*begriffen*] the rationality of the social world when we have grasped these details. And while discerning the actuality hidden within existing social institutions and practices does require the employment of norms – the goal is, after all, to identify those features of the social world that are most *reasonable* – the norms we are to employ are norms that are rooted in the social world. We are not to approach the social world from the standpoint of our own individual and private "ideals of imagination" but from the standpoint of "ideals of reason" – ideals that are rooted in existing institutions and practices. And to find these ideals we must look to the social world. Thus the normative dimension of Hegel's research program is itself empirically grounded. But it would be a mistake to conceive of this program as purely empirical. In his view, grasping the rationality of the actual also involves grasping the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age), that it, the historically dominant social and political trends and the historically available possibilities. And this, in turn, requires interpretation. Thus, the sort of investigation Hegel proposes also includes a central and indispensable hermeneutic component.

It is worth emphasizing that Hegel's philosophical approach is fundamentally historical. Hegel contends that "since philosophy is the *exploration of the rational*, it is for that very reason the *comprehension of the present*" (PR, ¶16). This reflects his view that reason has an essentially historical dimension: what is rational becomes actual and what is actual becomes rational. As we have seen, the rational structure that underlies the social world is subject to a process of historical development through which it comes to reflect an increasingly more adequate conception of the human spirit. This structure actualizes itself through a series of historical stages. These stages constitute the actuality of the rational. At any given time, the rational is actual only as actualized in the social arrangements of that time. Grasping the rational, then, is a matter of grasping the historically specific form of the rational structure of the social world that has become actual in the present.

When Hegel says that philosophy "is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*" (PR, ¶13), he means that philosophy consists in the activity of comprehending in thought the (actualized) rational structure of the central social institutions of its own historical period. The reason philosophy cannot "transcend its contemporary world" is that the rational is available to cognition and actual only to the extent that it is actualized in the present. Hegel does not, however, conclude from this that philosophical accounts of the social world can never lay claim to any absolute standing, that they are "true" only relative to the historical situation in which they are written. He maintains that there is a form of social life that reflects the final and correct understanding of the human spirit and is realized in human history: the form of social life that is realized in the modern social world (see PR, §273R).

Hegel's philosophical approach involves a self-conscious blurring of the categories of the descriptive and the normative.[11] It is neither purely descriptive nor purely normative. It is not purely descriptive, first of all, because articulating the norms that are rooted in the modern social world is a fundamental component of comprehending its actuality. The *Philosophy of Right* is, among other things, an account of the underlying ideals and normative aspirations of the modern social world. Moreover, inasmuch as the *Philosophy of Right* is supposed to provide an account of the norms that are rooted in the actuality of the modern social world, it also provides an account of how the modern social world ought to be. But, of course, Hegel's approach is not *purely* normative. He maintains that the norms that the *Philosophy of Right* articulates are rooted in the existing structures of the modern social world and substantially realized. Hence the *Philosophy of Right* does "distance itself as far as possible from the obligation to construct a *state as it ought to be*" (PR, ¶13) in the sense of providing an account of the state as it ought to be that is different from what the (actual) state is. It purports to show how the social world *ought to be* by showing what the actuality of the social world *is*. Hegel's approach, then, is both descriptive *and* normative. It flows out of his normative conception of the real (the actual is rational) and his realistic conception of the normative (the rational is actual). Let us turn now to the basic normative outlook the *Doppelsatz* expresses.

6. The *Doppelsatz* maintains that the modern social world is as it ought to be. There are two key respects in which this is supposed to be so. First, the modern social world is 'as it ought to be' in that its essence or underlying rational structure is as it ought to be. Its essence is as it ought to be, and, indeed, is *absolutely* as it ought to be, because it reflects a correct understanding of the human spirit. By contrast, the essence of Plato's social world was as it ought to be merely *relative to its stage in world history* because it reflected the most adequate understanding of the human spirit available at the time, one that recognized the importance of "substantiality," or community. It was as it ought to be *merely* relative to its stage in world history because the most adequate understanding of the human spirit available at the time was limited, inasmuch as it failed to recognize the importance of subjectivity. Strictly speaking, the essence of both Plato's and Hegel's social worlds were as they ought to be relative

11 Cf., for a differing view, Walsh 1969, 7–8.

to their stages in world history, for both reflected the most adequate understanding of the human spirit available at the time. What was special about the essence of Hegel's social world was that it was as it ought to be both relative to its stage in world history *and* absolutely. Hegel holds that it was as it ought to be in these two respects because the most adequate understanding of the human spirit available at his time was correct: it recognized the importance of both substantiality (community membership) and subjectivity. Second, the modern social world is 'as it ought to be' in that its essence is substantially realized: the more advanced states in modern Europe conform to it on the whole. This is one of the features that Hegel takes to distinguish the social world of his time from the social world of Plato's time.

It will come as no surprise that the claim that the modern social world is as it ought to be is grounded in Hegel's conception of actuality. His conception of actuality entails that, to the extent that things are actual, they are 'as they ought to be' in the sense of conforming to their essence. Reality, in Hegel's view, is necessarily as it ought to be in that there is an intrinsic, metaphysical connection between reality and goodness (things being as they ought to be). Indeed, Hegel holds quite generally that the actuality of the social world is necessarily good. Obviously, this is a strong and provocative claim. What is less obvious is that it is extremely abstract. In particular, the claim abstracts from the question of how "mature" or well developed the essence of the social world is at any given point in history. It also abstracts from the question concerning how well at any given point in history the social world realizes its essence. The answers to *these* questions cannot be derived from an analysis or explication of the concept of actuality. And so Hegel's claim that the essence of the modern social world reflects the correct understanding of the human spirit and that this essence is substantially realized transcends what can be said on the basis of his conception of actuality. It derives from his philosophically informed investigation of the state of his social world, which involves, among other things, a detailed political assessment of the more advanced states, that is, the more advanced European states.

Hegel's claim that the essence of the modern social world is substantially realized because the more advanced European states conform to it on the whole bears comment. Hegel does *not* think that all existing or even most existing states must conform on the whole to the essence of the modern social world in order for that essence