

Not ‘I say that p’, but “‘p” says that p’

Wittgenstein and Hegel on the identity of ‘the Notion’ and ‘the I’

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1. Setting the stage

I could use other titles for the following considerations as well. Here are some, all as obscure as the one I have finally chosen: “Wittgenstein, Hegel, and Fichte on the relation between ‘the Notion’ and ‘the I’”; “What does Hegel mean when he says that the Notion, if developed into reality, is nothing but self-consciousness?”; and: “What does Fichte’s formula $I = I$ try to convey?” But these possible titles are all too long. The fifth is the shortest. But it sounds fairly ridiculous: “The Notion and I”.

Descartes somewhere says that after he had read a couple of books by scholastic philosophers, he only had to look at the titles in order to know the content. This is not only true for a genius like Descartes. It is just what good titles are good for. Therefore, chances are high that you might want to stop following me further, either because you already know what I am about to say, or because you expect some higher nonsense from such a talk. If the latter should be so, I could at least refer to other philosophical writings about the same topic. In his *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, Robert Brandom talks about the structure that “*constitutes the nature of the I as well as of the notion*” and cites the following passage from Hegel’s *Science of Logic*:

“... neither the one nor the other can be truly comprehended unless the two indicated moments are grasped at the same time both in their abstraction and in their perfect unity”,

He continues thus:

“The unity of the recognitive structure leads Hegel to talk (in my view unfortunately) of the essentially related moment of the structures as *identical*. They

are not identical in the ordinary sense but they are also essentially distinct. But he wants us to recognize them nonetheless as identical in a speculative sense.”¹

I must confess that I do not like the words “speculative” and “metaphysical” too much. At least as Arthur Schopenhauer and Otto Weininger have used the word “metaphysical”, it is a kind of miracle operator. It seems to turn utterly wrong statements, for example about gender and race, into allegedly true statements ‘in a metaphysical sense’. Since Ludwig Wittgenstein stands in the tradition of the mentioned authors somehow, it is important to see what it means when he uses the words “metaphysical” or, for that matter, “transcendental”. And we should get clear about sentences in the ‘speculative’ sense, too.

2. Wittgenstein’s flight from intensions

I also must admit that the phrase in the title only sounds like what Wittgenstein says in his *Tractatus*. For I have turned his arguments into the first person. The real context is this:

“... at first sight it looks as if it were possible for one proposition to occur in another in a different way (sc. other than as a truth-argument, PSW). Particularly with certain forms of proposition in psychology, such as ‘*A* believes that *p*’ or ‘*A* has the thought *p*’ etc. it looks as if the proposition *p* stood in some kind of relation to an object *A*...”²

“But it is clear that ‘*A* believes that *p*’, ‘*A* thinks that *p*’, ‘*A* says that *p*’ are of the form “‘*p*’ says that *p*’: and here we have no co-ordination of a fact and an object, but a co-ordination of facts by means of a co-ordination of their objects.”³

“This shows that there is no such thing as the soul – the subject, etc. – as it is conceived in contemporary superficial psychology.

A composite soul would not be a soul any longer.”⁴

Wittgenstein starts with the assertion that sentences *p* occur in other sentences only in the form that they contribute, as truth-arguments, to the truth value of the whole sentence. Then he dismisses the seemingly obvious

¹ Brandom 2002.

² Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.541 (= Wittgenstein *PT*, 6.002/3 *Prototractatus*).

³ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.542.

⁴ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.5421.

counterexamples provided by the expressions of *propositional attitudes* by claiming that, 'clearly', it is not me as a singular and individual person who says or thinks *that p*, but *I* as a speaker only *say* "*p*", and "*p*" *says that p*. The same holds for thinking. The relevant notion of thinking here is silent talk. And this should be viewed as a *spontaneous production* of "*p*" in the sense of Kant's *spontaneity*. This means that I produce the sentence "*p*" at will. This is the active part of 'spontaneity'. There is a passive part as well. I can choose "*p*", for example instead of "*q*", only if the possibility of choosing is available to me. I choose it in the realm of possible utterances that have 'occurred' to me by some 'power of memory and imagination'. Therefore we should utter a sentence only after due reflection, for example on better possibilities like keeping silent. Already the Ancient Greek philosopher Bias is famous for this advice. It refers to the well-known and at the same time underestimated practice of silent verbal planning.

Now, Wittgenstein claims that (in the end) not *I* am the 'bearer' of content, neither my soul nor my brain, but the *sentence* "*p*". And when I think *p*, we should not view this as a co-ordination of a *mental fact* or *mental event* or *propositional content* in *the mind* or in *the brain*, on the one side, an *object* or *fact* in the world on the other, as usual theories of intentionality do until today. We should rather understand it "*as a co-ordination of facts by means of a co-ordination of their objects*". This last sentence, though at first sight fairly obscure, refers to active projections of a sentence (or of any sentence-like symbol) "*p*" onto the world. When I, for example, judge "*p*" to be true, the direction of fit leads from the world to the sentence. But such a projective co-ordination can also be an *action*. Then the direction of fit is turned around. The 'thinking' of the sentence "*p*" is used as an orientation in my action, for example in *making* "*p*" *true* or trying to do so.

In any case, Wittgenstein insists that *projecting sentences* must be understood *as acting*. But the actions can be wrong. This possibility of being right or wrong presupposes, in turn, what I would like to call a 'canon' (or rule) for a *proper or correct understanding* or *projection*. In other words, I cannot arbitrarily 'interpret' a sentence and project it according to my private interpretation onto the world. There is proper and improper understanding. Hence, understanding is a normative, and even ethically thick (and action guiding) concept, not just an empirical one (not just referring to events or passive 'occurrences'). This normativity of the correct interpretation of

sentences consists, in the end, in correct verbal and practical inferences. I agree with this much of what Brandom says.

The important point is, however, this. We can give an immanent and adequate account of this normativity only when we move from talking about a generic *I* to a generic *We*. Brandom's idea to give an account for the normativity of intentionality by just adding a second person into the game does not suffice. For your merely actual acknowledgements of my speech acts do not make them 'true'. Or more precisely, actual feelings of satisfactions or dissatisfactions must be distinguished from the normativity or propriety of correct or true 'inferences' drawn from my or your utterances. It is understandable that Brandom's account wants to avoid the obscure, and admittedly difficult, notion of a *generic We* in capital letters and replace it throughout by an obviously more down-to-earth *sortal* reading like in "us two" or "each of us". But it may be that a proper analysis of meaning, truth, and inference cannot avoid the more complicated way of generically talking about *Us*, at least in some cases, when we have to avoid misunderstandings produced by an all too simple reading.

Be that as it may, our usual abstract way of talking *about propositions* and *meanings* as *intensional objects* already presupposes a linguistic operation of abstraction that leads us from the *use of sentences and words* to talk *about this use*, or from practical understanding to talking about content. This move is similar to the move from using a predicate (like in 'x is a horse') to talking about a predicate (like in "the concept of a horse is no predicate"), as Frege tells us. Wittgenstein dismisses, accordingly, any mystical 'ontic' talk about meanings and any identification of meanings with *psychological entities or events*, just as Quine later did as well, in his flight from intensions and his criticism of all sorts of *mentalism*, including Jerry Fodor's *language of thought* or *mentalese*.

Wittgenstein's last claim, however, comes fairly abrupt: "*A composite soul would not be a soul any longer.*" We probably have to insert a kind of missing link. For Wittgenstein protests here against silent presumptions in what he calls "*contemporary superficial psychology*", which analyses and dissects the soul, as if it were a complex, composite, thing. Instead, he holds that the very idea of the *classical* soul conceptually contains the idea of simple unity, which Hegel also defends.

But what does this unity consist in? My guess is this: It is just the *logical role of the speaker who takes responsibility for the 'truth' of the utterance*, which can mean that it is a true assertion or a 'true promise' (which will be fulfilled, if circumstances allow) or a 'true' generic statement (which gives us some good orientation) or whatever 'truth', 'propriety' or 'correctness' is relevant. In the following, I try to elucidate this idea in some more details. And I want to refer to some rather systematic points of comparison between what Wittgenstein says about *propositional attitudes* and what Hegel says about 'the Notion' and 'the I'.

If I am allowed to call *the content of all possible "p's" the Concept or Notion* with capital C or N (using Hegel's short hand), Wittgenstein seems to say that *I* and *the Notion* are *essentially distinct*. This stands, as it seems at the outset, in sharp opposition to Hegel's claim that *the Notion* and *the I* are identical. Brandom, wisely, wants to say both.

3. Hegel on the nature of the Notion and the I

But what does Hegel really talk about when he says in his Science of Logic:

"The Notion, when it has developed into a *concrete existence* that is itself free, is none other than the *I* or pure self-consciousness. True, I *have* notions, that is to say, determinate notions; but the *I* is the pure Notion itself which, as Notion, has come into *existence*"?⁵

In order to shorten things, I replace the literal translation of what follows by a paraphrase. That is, I attribute to Hegel himself the following claim:

If we want to make the nature of the I explicit, that is the essential features of being a person having the competence of conceptual understanding, we may, and must, already presuppose that we know implicitly, in our usual way of talking about ourselves, what it is that has to be made explicit. The essential features are: *I* is, first, a *pure unity* which in its actions (like speaking and thinking) somehow implicitly refers to itself. But this self-reference is by no means immediate (but mediated). Moreover, it is a form of reference to ourselves in which we abstract from all particular determinations and content.⁶

⁵ Hegel *WL*, 1969, 253 = Hegel *Ph*, 1977, 583.

⁶ Miller translates: „When, therefore, reference is made to the fundamental determinations which constitute the nature of the I, we may presuppose that the reference is something

Hegel obviously wants to clarify here what we talk about when we use the word “*I*”. He already has made clear at many other places that it would be misleading to do so by sentences like: ‘I am my body, or my brain, or my memory’. Even the usual talk about the whole person is just an obscure gesture of hand-waving rather than a satisfying answer. In order to see this, we have to ask ourselves what belongs to the whole person. To answer this question, we could start with referring to our eyes and hands, ears and brain, history and future and continue quite for a while. But if we proceed that way, it will finally dawn on us that, in a sense, *the whole world, or rather: my world*, somehow also belongs to me.

In fact, Hegel’s conceptual development of the notion of ‘(self-)consciousness’ in his master-piece ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ contains not only a dismissal of ‘empiricist’ readings of consciousness as mere awareness and of any ‘introspection’ into one’s own psychology, but also a critique of Kant’s talk about a transcendental I in his Critique of Pure Reason. The very first sentence in the Chapter on “Spirit” reads thus: “Reason is Spirit when its certainty of being all reality has been raised to truth, and it is conscious of itself as its own world, and of the world as itself.”⁷ In its context, this means, according to my interpretation: Generically, self-reflection of some arbitrary human person has to focus not only on the formal, logical and conceptual, conditions of possible experience or world-knowledge, but on the whole world including the world of all human cooperation in which she takes part, and which is the topic of her self-knowledge. Just as we should not just say ‘here’ and point to ourselves when asked where we are, but show the place on a map of the world, true self-consciousness is knowledge of who *we* are and how *we* together form a world of humans. It may include answers to question like how we refer to the world as *our* world and how I belong to this world. In other words, Hegel’s notoriously ill received label “Spirit” refers to a *generic We* as the generic subject of self-reflection on *Us* and *our world*. This *Spirit* or *We* is not only the *object* of our (reflective) knowledge, but the *subject* of our joint knowledge and actions. In other words, Hegel’s

familiar, that is, a commonplace of ordinary thinking. But *I* is, *first* this pure self-related unity, and it is so not immediately but only as making abstraction from all determinateness and content and withdrawing into the freedom of unrestricted equality with itself.” (Hegel *Ph*, 1977, 563).

⁷ Hegel *Ph*, 1977, 262.

differentiation distinguishes *Reason* from *Spirit* in the following way: *Reason* is a label for the 'transcendental' (generic, conceptual) *I* as used when we generically talk about the forms of rational competence each of us possesses. It stands in the context of a reflection in the mode "*I about myself*". *Spirit* is the (generic, conceptual) *We* in a (generic) reflection, which takes place in the mode "*we about ourselves*". Only in this mode, we can articulate generically the different *roles* persons play in their world in an explicit and generic way, like, for example, the role of *I* and the role of *You*, as speaker and hearer. Only then we can generically focus on differences of *status*, say, between women and men in traditional societies. In order to articulate this, we already need the distinction between a *private* and a *public world*, between community and society (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, according to Ferdinand Tönnies' famous distinction, which follows Hegel in spirit and form), between the divine laws of implicit family or tribal bonds and the explicit human laws of the state as the domain of all public institutions etc.

If this is so, how can we distinguish the 'whole person' from her 'whole world'? Before I continue with Hegel, this is a good place to have a second look at what Wittgenstein has to say about *Mind and World*.

4. Wittgenstein on subjective idealism as therapy

Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus* bluntly: "*I am my world*"⁸. This world is limited by my language, since language determines my conceptual understanding:

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." (...).⁹

"...what solipsism *means* is quite correct; only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself."

"That the world is *my world*, shows itself in the fact that the limits of that language (*the language which I understand*) means the limit of *my world*." (...).¹⁰

"I am my world. (The microcosm.)"¹¹

⁸ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.63.

⁹ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.6.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.62.

¹¹ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.63.

“The thinking, presenting subject; there is no such thing.”

“If I wrote a book ‘The world as I found it’, I should also have therein to report on my body and say which members obey my will and which do not etc. This would be a method of isolating the subject or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject: that is to say, of it alone in this book mention could *not* be made.”¹²

“Here we see that solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism. The *I* in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it.”¹³

“There is therefore really a sense in which in philosophy we can talk of a non-psychological *I*.”

“The *I* occurs in philosophy through the fact that the ‘world is my world’.”

“The philosophical *I* is not the man, not the human body or the human soul of which psychology treats, but the metaphysical subject, the limit – not a part of the world.”¹⁴

The last sentence about the ‘philosophical *I*’ concedes, so to speak, that we can (or must) distinguish it from the empirical person or the psychological soul. This is so, even though any talk about a ‘metaphysical subject’ is nonsensical in the sense of the ‘official’ story told in the *Tractatus*. This story tells us which sentences really do have world-related sense and meaning and which do not. As we know, *all* the sentences in the *Tractatus* are senseless, because they (or at least most of them) are, as Wittgenstein will later say, ‘grammatical’ and as such do not talk about empirical facts in the empirical world, but (most of them) express presuppositional conditions for possible empirical content (or decent conduct, attitude, and judgment, when it comes to ethics and aesthetics, for that matter). In the same vein, Hegel labeled (virtually all) the sentences of his *Science of Logic* as ‘speculative’ and ‘infinite’. As such they must be distinguished from ‘empirical’, ‘finitely determined’ and ‘world-related’ sentences of the real sciences.

Let me add some further points to what Wittgenstein has said above:

¹² Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.631.

¹³ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.64.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 5.641.

1. How *I* (or you or he) can 'relate' to the world (in knowing or believing, intending or acting) is limited by my (or your or his) conceptual (grammatical) competence. And this is mediated by language.
2. Wittgenstein later comments on the passages of the *Tractatus*. These very commentaries on 'solipsism' develop into his considerations about private languages and private experiences. He reacts to the following counter-argument against the claimed impossibility of private ostensive definitions and private knowledge of my own pain:

"But aren't you neglecting something – the experience or whatever you might call it –? Almost *the world* behind the mere words'?"

"But here solipsism teaches us a lesson: It is that thought which is *on the way* to destroy this error. For if the world is idea it isn't any person's idea. (Solipsism stops short of saying this and says that it is my idea.) But then how could I say what the world is if the realm of ideas has no neighbor? What I do, comes to defining the word 'world'."¹⁵

3. In other words, the passages on subjective idealism or solipsism try to show that we can, and must, go one step further and cancel any talk about the *I*. This is so because this *I* "*shrinks to an extensionless point*". There only "*remains the reality co-ordinated with it.*" When Carnap says that there is no real difference between idealism and realism he seems to say just the same.
4. But nevertheless, or rather, because of this consideration, there is "*really a sense in which in philosophy we can talk of a non-psychological I,*" namely when we address the conceptually defined limit of a possible relation of any individual person to the real, objective world.

5. Fichte's formula I = I

Now we can come back to Hegel, who continues the consideration presented above by the phrases, which Brandom comments upon:

¹⁵ Wittgenstein *PO*, 1993, 253-256.

“(...) *Secondly*, the *I* as self-related negativity is no less immediately *individuality* (...) *individual personality*”.¹⁶

“This absolute *universality* which is also immediately an absolute *individualization*, and an absolutely determined being only through its unity with the positedness, constitutes the nature of the *I* as well as of the Notion; neither the one nor the other can be truly comprehended unless the two indicated moments are grasped at the same time both in their abstraction and in their perfect unity.”¹⁷

Note that when Hegel talks about the nature of something, he uses the word in the ancient meaning of *natura* and *physis* referring to how something really is or shows itself in contrast to how we decide to talk about it by formally turning it into an object of our reflection. Wittgenstein accounts for a related (but not exactly the same) difference by distinguishing between *showing* and *saying*.

The ‘identity’ of the Notion and the *I* results, for Hegel, first, from the fact that the nature or way of existence of the *I* and of the Notion share the features of *generality* (or rather *genericity*) and *unity* (which is, when applied to the Notion, a kind of *consistency of judgment and inference*) and that, second, they both are a ‘Being-in-and-for-itself’ (*Anundfürsichsein*), which is just ‘positedness’. This sounds highly obscure. And I will not continue to decipher Hegel’s idiosyncratic prose here. This would take too long. I would have to start with an explanation of the relation to Kant’s transcendental deduction and the role played by the principle of apperception. This principle says, as we know, that any of my presentations (*Vorstellungen*) can be accompanied by an ‘I think’ in the sense of a possible conceptualization or even symbolic (linguistic) representation of the relevant content. I try to circumvent these problems by presenting the basic idea of Hegel’s logical analysis of the nature of the *I* as it goes back to Fichte. For where Hegel obscurely talks of a free formal identity of the *I* with itself, he refers to Fichte’s seemingly tautological formula $I = I$. Nevertheless, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel try to express the identity of free individuality and genericity by

¹⁶ Hegel *Ph*, 1977, 583.

¹⁷ Hegel *Ph*, 1977, 583.

this formula.¹⁸ I claim that this is so because they read it as a schematic representation of *propositional attitudes*.

It is altogether clear that Fichte's formula " $I = I$ " must be read as kind of logical shorthand. For understanding it, we should remember how we usually use logical shorthand's in philosophy today. Obviously, our formulas for predication $P(x)$, conjunctions $p \& q$ or identity $N=M$ are no good point of comparison. But, as we shall see, Frege's judgment-stroke actually is. Frege wants to indicate by " $\vdash \phi$ " the performance of a judgment. But we also know that Wittgenstein criticized just that in the *Tractatus*:

"Frege's sign ' \vdash ' is logically quite meaningless: in the works of Frege (and Russell) it simply indicates that these authors hold the proposition marked with the sign to be true. Thus ' \vdash ' is no more a component part of a proposition than is, for instance, the proposition's number. It is quite impossible for a proposition to state that it itself is true."¹⁹

However, in Frege's later writings the sign ' \vdash ' is absolutely essential. This is so because Frege simplifies his logical notation technically by turning the biconditional into an equality and replacing predicates and relations by characteristic functions, as any mathematician would do. In fact, the distinction between sense and reference, which appears to many readers as obscure and metaphysical, should rather be understood as a part of explaining this notational developments. I.e., Frege invites us to identify sentences with names of truth values and to view the logical connectives as truth value operators corresponding to truth-functions. Therefore, in Frege's later writings, only an expression of the form ' $\vdash \phi$ ' represents a full judgment. As such, it does not at all, in fact never, say of *itself* that it is true, as Wittgenstein suggests. It rather says that the *possible* judgment ' $\vdash \phi$ ' is true. Hence, Wittgenstein's criticism misses the point.

¹⁸ Hegel is notorious for using obscure logical metaphors. The next part of the sentence is an example: "The pure I goes back into the freedom of unlimited identity with itself". In my interpretation, the simile just says that when we talk about the pure I we talk about the abstract role of being a free agent, who can perform any possible speech act or action at will – such that, of course, the question arises what such possibilities are. The answer is that these possibilities exist generically, in a general and joint practice or We-mode, and that I, as an individual person, have access to some of these possibilities and take some part in applying and developing the practice.

¹⁹ Wittgenstein *TLP*, 4.442 (2) = Wittgenstein *PT*, Prototractatus 4.43119.

But be this as it may, I follow, at least for some time, Wittgenstein's reading and Frege's earlier use of ' $\vdash\phi$ '. According to it, by writing down " $\vdash\phi$ ", Frege says that ϕ is the case. This means that Wittgenstein reads Frege's 'performative operator' such that its '*real form*' rather looks like this: " $\vdash_I\phi$ ", if I am allowed to use the seemingly strange index *I* in order to represent me as the speaker in written form, which is, as we all know, hopelessly nonsensical. I do so nevertheless, for it shows us something.

In fact, from her perspective, the speaker could always accompany her own claims by saying 'I say or think that ϕ '. And for any utterance, there is always a speaker or author. This holds also for written texts.

As a speaker, I usually do not want to say only that I *mean* ϕ to be true. I say that ϕ is the case. Frege, for one, never only wanted to express that he, Frege, thinks ϕ to be true. Rather, he wanted to say that ϕ *is* true.

We see now that the function of my admittedly queer and nonsensical index "*I*", which I still attach deliberately, is only to make explicit somehow *that there are no free-floating utterances or judgments*. But there are free floating *sentences* – taken as merely syntactical figures or schemes. And there are free floating propositions in the sense of *possible* judgments, for which the early Frege wrote ' $-\phi$ '. We can cite or mention *sentences* or propositions, use them as T- or truth-conditional arguments in logical complex sentences, for example in conditionals. But we cannot do this in the same way with real *judgments* $\vdash_I\phi$. In fact, there is no *nesting* allowed for the sign ' \vdash ' at all.

If we examine my newly created, nonsensical, form of judgment ' $\vdash_I\phi$ ' a little more closely, we see, and this is what Wittgenstein would have been right to point out, that there would be no real difference between " $\vdash_{we}\phi$ ", and " $\vdash_I\phi$ ". For if I say that *we* can hold ϕ true or anyone can hold ϕ true, it is still *I* who says that. In this sense, " $\vdash_I\phi$ " and " $\vdash_{we}\phi$ " are equivalent. As a result, we can, as it seems, just skip the index. And this is what Frege does, of course. Wittgenstein goes a step further and skips the judgment-stroke ' \vdash ' altogether. But this has the unfortunate result that we must identify his talk about sentences in the *Tractatus* with *concrete sentences* (as Friedrich Kambartel has called them), i.e. with *judgments*, which are performative actualizations of schemes of judgments represented by sentences. Hence, there is a deeply ambiguous reading of 'sentence' or '*Satz*' in the *Tractatus*:

A sentence is sometimes a whole judgment, sometimes a possible judgment or proposition, sometimes a purely syntactic form. For only a sentence in the latter sense can be a real part of other sentences.

My comparison of " $\vdash_{we} \phi$ ", " $\vdash_I \phi$ " and " $\vdash \phi$ " shows that I as the speaker always have to claim that ϕ and defend $\vdash \phi$ as a judgement such that any other person would and could agree to $\vdash \phi$ as well, at least in cases in which my claim is questioned. I.e. I have to defend $\vdash_{we} \phi$. But this is precisely the sense in which *I represent in each judgment a We. And any We in a judgment refers to the I who claims or posits it.* This explains, as I take it, the formula of the I that is We and the We that is I in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.²⁰

Moreover, since there is an *implicit I* in any claim (about the world), there is a sense in which the logical form of any judgment is not just $\vdash \phi$ but $\vdash_I \phi$. We can make this implicit self-reference even more explicit by lifting the '*I*' into the sentence. As a result, we arrive at the form: $\vdash_I \phi(I)$ in the sense of "I posit ϕ and commit myself to defend its truth"²¹, whatever *this* may mean in more detail (for example, when we distinguish different forms of proprieties). Precisely this is the general logical form, which Fichte wanted to express by the formula "I = I", even though he knew quite well, as we do, that his formula does not really fit either, especially because no mention is made at all of the particular proposition ϕ . But even then, all these formulas turn out to be nonsensical, if we press them too hard.

On the other hand, Fichte's formula is clearly designed to express the following most general form of any act of conceptually (in)formed reference to the world: Any such reference involves an *I* as an *empirical and real person*, which *identifies herself* with a *transcendental I*, i.e. with a *generic*

²⁰ Hegel *Ph*, 1977, 110.

²¹ In the case of the 'implicit' self-reference in actual performances like "I hereby promise that...", self-identification (like in: was it I who did this?) as addressed by various authors, from Locke to Parfit, or from W. James resp. E. M. Anscombe to S. Shoemaker, G. Evans or J. McDowell does not pose a relevant problem. Later, of course, I or you can refer anaphorically back to me as the speaker. In assertions about myself, however, self-identification can play an important role, including the whole variety of what it means to identify myself, say, with me as I appear on a picture or photograph or with the actor of some acts, which, according to some possibly true stories told about myself or according to my fallible memory, allegedly were *my* acts. Cf. also Lütterfelds 1989, 82.

role of form of action which she actualizes in the act. This happens, for example, when I claim something or when I think of something, or even when I habitually believe something.

This provides us with the key to understanding Hegel's claim that the truth of consciousness is self-consciousness. As such, it is a purely grammatical remark. It says that if we make the form of any statement $\vdash\phi$ explicit, we finally end up at a form like $\vdash\phi(I)$ or "I = I". By the way, we should read the word "consciousness" not as "awareness" here but as a title for *controlling* forms and norms of correct actions in a pre-formed and normative practice. Control of proprieties or truth of speech acts, judgments, inference, and the like is just a special case.

Now it seems, of course, that Wittgenstein would totally disagree with the idea that the basic form of a proposition or judgment is $\vdash\phi(I)$ or I = I. But let us look to where this leads us.

The formulas at least show us something about the form of statements *about myself*. At least in such statements *I* obviously appear twice, implicitly in the speech act and explicitly in the sentence. When I talk about myself, some reference to me (like "I" or "me") occurs in the sentence explicitly. The expression refers in a somehow anaphoric way to me, the implicit speaker. This anaphoric reference or 'identity' is explicitly posited in my very act of claiming that the statement about myself is true. This case is to be taken as a general representative of related cases like the one in which I just recognize or acknowledge a statement made by others, or when I am about making a sentence true in my action. The whole gloss about 'positing' in Fichte and Hegel now can be read as an attempt to make explicit what is going on here: In claiming $\vdash\phi$ or $\vdash\phi(I)$ I 'posit' the sentence ϕ resp. $\phi(I)$, just as Frege explains his sign for force.²²

²² I say, for example, that the sentence is true (or should be made true, in the other cases), that we have attached to it the value true, that we can rely on its truth (or that we have accepted what it says as an obligation, as far as it goes), whatever this means in detail.

6. From the primacy of the actor to the primacy of practice

It was Fichte who realized that in judgments of the form "I have the property E" the word "I" has two functions at once: It refers *in praxi* to me as the speaker and it is the *syntactical subject*, i.e. the *semantical object* I am talking about. In a judgment about myself I attribute properties to myself. Fichte expresses this fact by saying that I (as a performative subject) make myself into the object (of a judgment). Thus, I refer at the same time to some semantical object and to myself. As we can see, this reflection on the very form of reflection on me is totally formal and abstract.

Fichte's further idea of the primacy of the actor, speaker or performative subject with respect to any object of knowledge and judgment can now be reconstructed as a kind of speech act theoretic transformation of Descartes' original insight into the primacy of the thinker, the 'res cogitans': Any performance of a judgment or action presupposes a speaker as an actor. For Fichte and his followers, this consideration gets its importance in the context of an 'anti-empiricist' or anti-Humean distinction between merely animal perception and man's relation to the world.

Understandably, Hegel is neither content with the way Descartes and Kant 'prove' the presupposed existence of a thinking *I*, nor with Fichte's formula $I = I$. But he stills defends the insight that any reference to objects presupposes performative acts and, hence, the two-headed structure of being a speaker or actor. In making this form of performative acts explicit, we have at the same time to distinguish between and identify the individual performative subject or speaker and the generic role (behind the scene, so to speak), the generic or formal *We* of joint conceptual understanding, *the Notion*.

In the end, Hegel says, like Wittgenstein, that we can skip the *I* and keep the *thinking* or the *Notion*. In doing so, both refer in partial approval back to G.C. Lichtenberg's aphorism 'we should say *it is thinking, like it's raining*'.²³ This 'it' is the realm of the conceptual, which constitutes the

²³ "Es denkt, sollte man sagen, so wie man sagt, es blitzt." McDowell 1998, 365, in his comment on this very sentence, also stresses the truism that there is no utterance without a speaker. Hence, we have to give Lichtenberg's bon-mot a new reading, which, hopefully, avoids mystifying events in our brains, but keeps its Anti-Cartesian impetus intact. In fact,

mental, i.e. consciousness, self-consciousness, and mind altogether. In the end it is *Spirit*, if we read it as the generic *We* that corresponds to the generic *Concept* in the following way: *Spirit* is the *We-mode*, in which *we use concepts*.

Obviously all this refers in a way to Kant's transcendental principle of apperception. The Notion is nothing but the generic form of rational understanding and reasonable comprehension of concepts. Since the Notion as the realm of concepts, contents and so on exist only in the forms in which we actualize them, the Notion and the transcendental or metaphysical I in the sense of the limit of the world are just the same, as Wittgenstein, and Hegel both agree.

7. The vanishing I

A last remark concerns a thought that leads from the early romantics and Fichteans, including Friedrich Schiller, via Schopenhauer down to Wittgenstein. It could be called the *paradox of analysis with respect to self-reflections*. It says that it is systematically impossible to make the implicit totality or *pleroma* of my 'inner world' and my performative and practical attitudes as a whole explicit. A famous epigram by Friedrich Schiller expresses this indeterminacy of myself with respect to my subjective states of mind in quite some nice way:

"Why is it that the mind cannot appear to the mind? If the soul starts to *speak*, not the *soul*, alas, is speaking any more."²⁴

In performing actions, especially speech acts, *I* as a concrete personal subject always actualize *generic forms*. Therefore, in any attempt to express myself, it is, so to speak, not a totally singular *I* but already a general *We* who is the real grammatical subject. The word "I" refers to *any* of us, to any possible speaker; and what we call the content of what I say can be understood by anybody. Therefore, Hegel says that what *I mean* and what only belongs to *me*, in the sense of a purely singular *Me* and my totally

Lichtenberg himself seems to over-emphasize the 'passive' and underestimate the active moment in our verbal planning, as explained in my two-part analysis of 'spontaneity' in speech acts above.

²⁴ Schiller 1943, 302, see also vol 2, 322.

individual *meaning*, is the most unimportant thing. It is not at all, as it appears in Schiller's verse, the most important thing.

We might have problems to articulate this thought in all due clarity. In any case, it says the following: It is only a sentimental idea to deplore the conceptual limits of making ourselves understood. For perspectivity is a necessary and conceptual feature of experience as such. We must accept it as a brute and conceptually basic (grammatical) fact. Therefore, the question what it is like to be somebody else, or what is it like to look at the world from another perspective and to have the corresponding qualitative experiences is a conceptually misguided question. The reason is simple: any attempt to 'have exactly the same feelings' (sensations or perceptions) as other subjects or creatures is 'grammatically impossible'. This is only the other side of the private-language-argument. This says that there are no private meanings, rules, or canons of truth. Truth is a matter of *Us*, not just a relation between me and the world.

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