HEGEL’S THEORY OF SECOND NATURE:  
THE “LAPSE” OF SPIRIT*

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While in neo-Aristotelian conceptions of virtue and Bildung the concept of “second nature” describes the successful completion of human education, Hegel uses this term in order to analyze the irresolvably ambiguous, even conflictive nature of spirit. Spirit can only realize itself, in creating (1) a second nature as an order of freedom, by losing itself, in creating (2) a second nature—an order of externality, ruled by the unconscious automatisms of habit. In the second meaning of the term, “second nature” refers to spirit’s inversion of itself: the free enactment of spirit produces an objective, uncontrollable order; “second nature” is here a critical term. On the other hand, the very same inversion of free positing into objective existence is the moment of the success of (“absolute”) spirit. The paper exposes this undecidable ambiguity of second nature and claims that its acceptance and development are the conditions of an adequate understanding of the constitution and forms of second nature.

In the reflection on virtue in classical antiquity, the concept of a “second” or “other” nature serves to describe the success of ethical education or enculturation (Bildung): the educational process (Erziehung) has come to a successful conclusion when it is capable of engendering in the human being (who thus turns into a member of an ethical-political community) the habit of the virtues as though it were an ”other nature.” Several varieties of neo-Aristotelianism currently offer adaptations of this classical view. In the following, I would like to contrast it with the examination of the concept of second nature as undertaken by Hegel—an examination that elaborates the irresolvable ambiguity of second nature: the concept of second nature marks, to Hegel’s mind, both spirit’s highest peak and its deepest lapse. In forming a second nature, spirit both realizes and misapprehends itself. I will begin by describing second nature as spirit’s misapprehension or inversion of itself (1); in a fairly abstract

* Translated by Gerrit Jackson.
discussion of the relationship of finite to absolute spirit, I will then sketch the undecided ambiguity of second nature (II). I will close with a brief look at the consequences of this general insight into the logical space of second nature between finite and absolute spirit, in order to gain insight into its constitution and forms (III).

I.

(1) In Hegel, as in classical thought, the concept of second nature has its place in the theory of education (Bildung: maturation, formation, enculturation); the concept of second nature is a pedagogical concept. Since the famous analysis in the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel understands education as the only way to resolve the paradox of liberation in which the slave (or servant) becomes inextricably entangled: the paradox that the slave can free himself only if he is already free. Education resolves this paradox of liberation by letting work produce the member of society or citizen (Bürger): in contradistinction to the slave, the citizen can free himself (in political terms) because he has already performed the (social) work to gain his freedom. Yet the paradox of liberation at once returns in education. In education, the citizen can work to gain his freedom from natural existence only by submitting to the necessity of social existence, to the power of social forms. Hegel indeed writes: "If someone is a slave, his own will is responsible." But that means that someone’s being a slave is due to his not having his own will; to be a slave means to have only a foreign will (that of the master). The citizen, by contrast, is subject to the authority of social forms by and with the consent of his own will. The estate of the citizen, of the member of civil society, is the state of "self-imposed immaturity." The servitude

1 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Werke in zwanzig Bänden (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969–71), vol. 7, Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, § 57 Z, tr. by H. B. Nisbet as Elements of the Philosophy of Right (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as Rph. References will be to the section numbers used in both editions. "A" indicates a quotation from the "Anmerkung" (remark), "Z" a quotation from the "Zusatz" (addition). I occasionally quote from Hegel’s handwritten notes (marked by "N"), which are included in the Werke, but not in the English translation.

in which he lives is truly "voluntary," for he "enslaves himself"; he engenders his subjection to the necessity of social forms by the very work he performs to free himself from the necessity of natural drives.

How can we understand this? How can we understand that those who live in servitude enslave themselves, that they impose this servitude, the privation of their freedom, on themselves, and voluntarily, by their own will? Wherein consists this "monstrous vice" in which free will turns against itself? It is to these questions that the concept of second nature promises an answer. By the elaboration of this concept, Hegel tries to understand how, in the process of education, freedom turns into necessity, and liberation from natural existence into a new, voluntary servitude.

(2) The theory of second nature examines the monstrous vice of voluntary servitude by conceiving it as a social vice—as the vice, and indeed, the monstrousness of the social. The self-imposed character of immaturity, and so the initial hypothesis of the theory of second nature, cannot be understood as long as the subject is considered only in its relation to first nature, be it the nature of the outward world or the subject's own inner nature. Within such a consideration, there is no way out of the antinomy in which Kant became entangled when he attempted to clarify what heteronomy, the unfreedom or servitude of the will, is. In his writings on moral philosophy, Kant distinguishes "two standpoints" from which a rational being can consider itself: "first, insofar as it belongs to the world of sense, under natural laws (heteronomy), and second, as belonging to the intelligible world, under laws which are independent of nature, not empirical, but rather grounded merely in reason." The will is heteronomous when it operates "under natural laws"—that is to say, when it is merely another element in the causal chain that constitutes the order of nature. But then the heteronomous will is no longer a will at all. That is why Kant, in his treatise on religion, abandons the dualistic construction of two standpoints and writes that "the basis of evil cannot lie in any object determining the power of choice through inclination, not in any natural impulse, but can lie only in a


4 Ibid., 43.

rule that the power of choice itself—for the use of its freedom—makes for itself, i.e., in a maxim.⁶ But if the freedom to make a rule for itself defines the will, there cannot be such a thing as an unfree will, and the structure of a self-imposed immaturity becomes unintelligible. Kant abandons the dualism of “two standpoints” in the treatise on religion, and for good reasons, but this dualism had defined the concept of heteronomy in his moral philosophy, and so he loses the capacity to even understand wherein heteronomy might consist. “Heteronomy” dissolves: into causal determination without will or into will without servitude.

The concept of second nature offers a way out of this Kantian antinomy: instead of conceiving of the heteronomy of the will as being determined by natural impulses (which would strip it of the essential features of a will), it explains it by the mode of being of the rule under which the will, free from natural impulses, operates. The concept of second nature describes how this rule, although the will has “made” it for itself, acquires a nature-like independence vis-à-vis the will before which it then finds itself helpless: the heteronomous will is the slave of its own rule, of a rule it has made for itself. That is how Hegel describes habit as second nature:

Therefore although, on the one hand, by habit a man becomes free, yet, on the other hand, habit makes him its slave. Habit is not an immediate, first nature, dominated by the individuality of sensations. It is rather a second nature posited by soul. But all the same it is still a nature, something posited that assumes the shape of immediacy, an ideality of beings that is itself still burdened with the form of being, consequently something not corresponding to the free spirit....⁷

The concept of second nature is meant to describe the phenomenon, and explain the logic, of the inversion of something the will has freely made for itself into an independent and immediate being to which we—we citizens or members of society—are subjected.

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⁶ Immanuel Kant, Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft, in Kant’s Gesammelte Schriften, 6:21, tr. by W. S. Pluhar as Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 21.

(3) What does it mean that spirit is “second nature”? In his theory of ethical life, Hegel characterizes it as meaning that “man is unconscious of himself.” (Rph, § 144 Z) It is part of the concept of spirit that action is rationally governed, based on reasons. This implies self-consciousness: the subject knows what it does because it knows why it does what it does. In spirit’s manifestation as second nature, by contrast, human beings are “unconscious of themselves” to the extent that their actions are not governed “by reasons.” (Rph, § 147 N) Still, their actions in spirit as manifest in second nature are not a purely externally determined, causal process. If they were, they would not be actions; second nature would not be a manifestation of spirit. Unconscious action in spirit as second nature is neither merely governed by reasons nor merely determined by laws of causation. It is a hybrid—a “spiritual mechanism”:

Spiritual mechanism also, like material, consists in this, that the things related in the spirit remain external to one another and to spirit itself. A mechanical style of thinking, a mechanical memory, habit, a mechanical way of acting, signify that the peculiar pervasion and presence of spirit is lacking in what spirit apprehends or does. Although its theoretical or practical mechanism cannot take place without its self-activity, without an impulse and consciousness, yet there is lacking in it the freedom of individuality, and because this freedom is not manifest in it such action appears as a merely external one.8

The mechanism of spirit cannot operate “without its self-activity,” and yet freedom “is lacking in it.” That would seem to be a simple contradiction in terms: does not the freedom of spirit consist in its self-activity?

The passage on habit9 in Hegel’s philosophy of spirit is the first place in which he undertakes to describe the “spiritual mechanism” that would resolve this contradiction without effacing the tension that constitutes the phenomenon. Hegel’s German term, “Gewohnheit,” translates the Greek hexis and the Latin habitus. Habit, then, is not merely a technique of dealing with the complexities of everyday life, a complement to reflective attitudes whose formation

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9 Another essential element in the theory of subjective spirit is the theory of memory.
is recommended by reasons of economy of time; habits in the Hegelian sense are not what sociologists call “routines.” Rather, habit is the primary manifestation of the human being’s relation to the world and to itself to the extent that this relation is “artificial,” which is to say, acquired in education; habit is the form in which this relation first appears and remains effective as a fundamental dimension of it.\textsuperscript{10} The actions that Hegel offers as examples of habit are as elementary as standing upright, seeing, or thinking; everything humans do was first habit, and will be habit to the last; “habit is a form that embraces all kinds and stages of spirit’s activity.” (Enz III, § 410 A)\textsuperscript{11}

Spirit begins in man as habit, and it remains essentially habit.

Habit, as the primary manifestation of human spirit, is a conjunction of incompatible elements. This hybrid constitution makes it difficult “to determine the concept of habit” (Enz III, § 410 Z); indeed, it is “one of the most difficult determinations,” and “in scientific studies of the soul and the mind, [it] is usually passed over.” (Ibid.) Habit is hybrid because, as the result of the bodily “habituation” of an artificial purpose, it is (i) spiritual; and, as the conjunction of its elements in merely external necessity, it is (ii) mechanical.

(i) The first essential aspect of habit is that in and through it “a subjective purpose [is supposed to be imposed] within bodiliness, which is to become subjugated and entirely pervious to it.” (Enz III, § 410 A) Habits are capabilities acquired by way of education and situated within the body. To have habits means that the “ideality” of spirit “has made itself so at home” in the physical body (Körper)—which thus becomes the subject’s body (Leib)—“that it moves about in it with freedom.” (Enz III, § 410 Z) This happens as a consequence of “repetition” and “practice.” (Enz III, § 410) The body has then become the habit’s “organ” or “instrument,” a seat of capabilities: “So, if I want to actualize my aims, then I must make my physical body capable.” (Enz III, § 410 A) Habit is the praxis of an ontological transformation: habituation turns the body, a given or predefined being that determines who I am and what I do, into a site of possibilities.

This transformation of the body, from (pre-)givenness to capability or possibility, reflects the fact that the purposes of habits are not already there by nature. Whatever I have learnt to do habitually, “my

\textsuperscript{10}In this regard, the concept of habit is connected to the use of “second nature” as a fundamental “pedological” concept; cf. Norbert Rath, “Natur, zweite,” in Historisches Wörterbuch für Philosophie, (ed.) J. Ritter and K. Gründer, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 6:484–94.

\textsuperscript{11}Translation modified: spirit for mind.\textsuperscript{11}
body is not by nature fitted for... For this service my body must first be trained." (Enz III, § 410 Z) It is an essential feature of habit, as the result of a transformation of the body, that it is an artificial, an acquired or spiritual, capability. This is evident in its purposes: that the body becomes by force of habit a seat of "possibilities" means not merely that we can do something with it; that is also true of natural abilities. It means that we can will something with it: in contradistinction to the purposes of natural abilities, the purposes of habits are "posited" or willed (for to will does not mean to have purposes; it means to set oneself purposes). That is what it means to say that the purposes of habits are purposes of "spirit." The term "spiritual" qualifies not the substance of habitual capabilities, but their mode of being. In habits, we have our bodies as possibility because we have their purposes as "possibilities": far from being given to us by nature, they are, as acquired purposes, posited or willed by us. Habits are "the soul's work of art": they are what the soul has made itself into. (Enz III, § 411)\(^\text{12}\)

(ii) The other essential aspect of habit is that the realization of these same posited and willed purposes takes on "the shape of something mechanical, of a merely natural effect." (Enz III, § 410 Z)\(^\text{13}\) Habits exist only in such a way that their purposes are posited by habituation and are thereby spiritual; at the same time, however, they are realized mechanically, like natural causes. Hegel initially explains this mechanical character of habit as meaning that the realization of purposes here requires "no particular effort of will." (Enz III, § 411 Z) Habitual purposes are realized of themselves—automatically, without reflection or resolution. This explication of the automatism of habit, however, remains superficial: the mechanical character of habit consists not merely in how the action is performed, but in how the action and its purposes are present to the self of habit. The mechanism of habit is an epistemological, not merely psychological, phenomenon.

Like all actions in which a possibility of behaviour is realized, capabilities acquired in practice are realized in situations. Whereas natural abilities, for instance, are instinctive reactions to triggers in the environment, spiritual capabilities acquired in practice are exercised in a situation. This exercise takes place based on the sub-

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\(^{12}\) I set aside here the re-doubling of habit into an animal and human, a natural and a spiritual form. On this point, see the extensive and precise reconstruction in Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), Part I.

\(^{13}\) Italics restored, according to the German original.
ject’s perception of the situation. Being perceptive, the relation to the situation is one element in the realization of spiritual capabilities; the act of perception itself is likewise the exercise of a spiritual capability. The realization of spiritual capabilities is thus related to the situation in which it takes place in such fashion that it knows of this situation. It is part of the practical knowledge in which the exercise of spiritual capabilities consists: knowledge regarding what is to be done in a particular situation in the light of universal orientations. The practical knowledge in the exercise of spiritual capabilities, then, contains two different conceptual “levels” or “stages”: it is knowledge of the universal in the particular; it is knowledge of what it is good to do in a situation that has a great variety of aspects and determinations. These two elements—the universal content and the particular object—“interact” in the exercise of spiritual capabilities in such a fashion that the universal knowledge of the good is applied in—and not to—the perception of the particular situation.

This brief recollection of the structure of practical knowledge allows us to describe what constitutes the mechanical nature of habit, in contradistinction to practical knowledge: in habit, the universal orientation does not “interact” with the relation to the particular situation. Habit is not the application of a universal conviction in the perception of a particular situation; in habit, no application of the universal takes place in particular. And that is not because habit lacks universal content but, quite to the contrary, because habit is only—is nothing but—universal content. Habit is mere universality:

The universal to which the soul relates itself in habit is...—in contrast to the self-determining concrete universal which is present only for pure thinking—only the abstract universality produced by reflection from the repetition of many individualities. It is only to this form of universal that the natural soul, dealing with the immediate and therefore with the individual, can attain. But the universal related to mutually external individualities is the necessary. (Enz III, § 410 Z)


15 For the perception of the situation is itself the perception of good and bad—“a perception of saliences.” (Ibid., 68)
Habit is doing forever the same, the exact repetition of the same universal. "It is of the essence of merely habitual practices that one performance is a replica of its predecessors."\(^{16}\) What habit lacks in comparison with the exercise of spiritual capabilities, then, is not universal content but, quite to the contrary, the perceptive relation to the particular. There is for or in habit no situation that would require particular perception. Or: perception of the situation is in habit entirely determined by purposiveness, the particular by the universal. With Kant's discussion of the structure of the will in his treatise on religion, we might thus say: the self habituated by practice has "admitted" a new, artificial purpose "into its maxim," has made this purpose "a universal rule for itself, according to which it wills to conduct itself"\(^ {17}\); but the self of habit does not apply the maxim it has admitted into its will, since "to apply" means to realize a universal in the particular. Because it has admitted a purpose into its maxim, the self of habit is not determined either extrinsically or intrinsically; it is free because it wills. Will is precisely not what the self of habit lacks; it can only will, but it cannot perceive.

Because it cannot perceive, the self of habit also possesses no practical knowledge. True, the self of habit always knows exactly and with certainty what it must do: exactly what it has done until now. What that was and what it requires is something the self of habit is certain of. The self of habit wills nothing but to be and remain the same. But it is precisely for that reason that it comes to be internally split. For its knowledge of what it wills to do or must do—nothing but what it has always done—can never also be a knowledge of what it is in fact doing just now, as it in fact always does something different. By the same token, its knowledge of what it wills to do or must do is not practical knowledge. For practical knowledge is defined by the union of knowledge and praxis. Practical knowledge means knowledge of praxis, as well as (or on the basis of) praxis by knowledge. This union disintegrates in the certainty of habit because the self of habit reduces its knowledge of what it must do or wills to do here and now to the knowledge of what it has until now always already done. It sees its praxis as its own complete immersion in the straightforward and comprehensible series of its actions until now. In this way, the self of habit renders its praxis an object. Its knowledge of what it does is theoretical knowledge: a knowledge of the universal and abstract features that all of its actions so far have


\(^{17}\) Kant, *Religion within the Bounds*, 25; translation modified.
in common. The very fact that the self-consciousness of habit is theoretical knowledge of an abstract universal means that it is just as essentially ignorance. Habit, like "ethical action," is "split up into a conscious and an unconscious part"\(^\text{18}\); because the certainty of habit is the knowledge of the universal features of its actions until now, and since the self of habit relies on these universal features, known in observation, as the (therefore "abstract") criterion of its present actions, habit produces with each action an other aspect, determined by the circumstances of the situation that habit itself cannot know. In its action, habit is split up into something it knows—the action as the identical instantiation of universal criteria derived from observation and hence abstractly defined—and something it does not know—the action in its performance in the particular situation. "In the action, only one aspect of the resolve as such is clearly manifest. The resolve, however, is in itself the negative aspect which confronts the resolve with an 'other,' with something alien to the resolve which knows what it does."\(^\text{19}\) By acting out of situationless self-certainty, the self of habit engenders its own unconsciousness.

This defines habit as a mechanism of spirit. Habit is a mechanism of spirit because it is a mode of behaviour in which an artificially formed and hence posited or willed purpose is realized. Because the self of habit wants this habit’s purpose, it also knows of it. But this knowledge is like that of an object: the knowledge of a complete series of actions that agree in features identified by way of abstraction. What the self of habit wills is to add another element to this series that does not add anything to the series. The criterion of habit is identity capable of abstract definition. Habit is “mechanical” in the manner of its repetition. For “repetition” in habit means to reproduce a behaviour that once again evinces the same feature. Habit can accomplish this only if it does not know, because it represses, what in fact makes the behaviour different in each instance. The self of habit does not act.

Why is this so for the self of habit? What is at stake for the self of habit in the identical reproduction of its behaviour is its own identity. This identity is given to the self of habit in the same way the series of habitual actions is: as an object with qualities. The identity of the self

\(^{18}\text{Thus Hegel’s description of the essential unconsciousness of the “ethical action,” which becomes manifest in the tragic hero: Phenomenology of Spirit, (tr.) A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 285. This connection between habit and the ethical order is not merely external: the ethical order is essentially habitual.}\n
\(^{19}\text{Ibid., 283.}\)
of habit, then, is precisely what is extrinsic to it. “This is how I am,” the subject says in second nature, the “choice, assent [is] posited as identical with me” (Rph, § 147 N), it is “determined by nature.” (Rph § 150) The identity of the self of habit is imaginary: it has become, has been posited by spirit, and appears as being or nature.

II.

(1) The concept of second nature describes how spirit, by distinguishing itself from nature, by liberating itself from the determining power of natural impulses, engenders a world that is, like nature, alien and arbitrary. If the first nature of which spirit frees itself is an order that confronts it as an order of necessity, second nature is an order of necessity in spirit: second nature is spirit constituted like nature (and not: determined by nature). But because spirit is, by its very concept, the reality of freedom, its self-generation as (second) nature is an act of self-dissimulation or self-inversion: spirit appears to itself like or as nature; it inverts or perverts itself into nature. The concept of second nature, then, is a critical concept. It denotes a manifestation of spirit that is in contradiction with its own concept. The concept of second nature is a concept of critique because “critique” is the form of cognition that elaborates the contradiction between a concept and its reality, and because it runs counter to the concept of spirit that its rules take on the manifest appearance of a second nature.

Yet the concept of second nature is a critical concept not only because it denotes a defective manifestation of spirit, but also because it at once explains it. The concept of second nature, as the concept of a second nature, is a concept of “true” critique: as Marx will put it, it “shows the internal genesis” of the nature-like manifestation of spirit; it “describes the act of its birth.”20 The genesis of second nature as a defective manifestation of spirit does not originate in nature but in spirit itself. “Second nature” means a “repetition of nature”21 in spirit, against spirit, and through spirit. Second nature is nature posited by spirit itself—not mere nature but merely like

nature. Accordingly, what Hegel writes about first nature is, properly speaking, true only of second nature: that it is the "apostasy" or "lapse [Abfall"]\(^{22}\) of spirit from itself—but through and in spirit itself, just as, to quote Hegel, "Jakob Böhme says that Lucifer is God's firstborn."\(^{23}\) Second nature is the other and indeed the adversity of spirit born from spirit: an expression of spirit's contradiction with itself. The concept of second nature is intended both to "combat" (Marx) the lapse of spirit and to explain it, that is to say, to understand its necessity.

(2) Having critically defined habit as second nature—habit is "something posited that assumes the shape of immediacy, and...consequently something not corresponding to free spirit"—Hegel adds the explanation that it is "something merely anthropological." (Enz III, § 410 Z)\(^{24}\) That second nature is something "anthropological" means that the self-inversion of spirit that engenders its manifestation as second nature is the law that rules over spirit in its human appearance. Spirit as it appears in man is "finite" spirit, and the critical-genealogical concept of second nature belongs in the theory of finite spirit (and, more precisely, in both of its parts: the theory of subjective, and that of objective spirit)\(^{25}\). Both the necessity of second nature in spirit and its defects are relative to the necessity (and to the defects) of the finite, human manifestation of spirit.

This has two implications: it implies, on the one hand, that finite spirit, spirit as it is in man, is without exception governed by the law of its self-inversion into second nature. Spirit's misapprehension of

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\(^{22}\) For a discussion of Hegel's metaphor of the "lapse [Verfallenheit]" of spirit (into nature) see Michael Wolff, *Das Körper-Seele-Problem. Kommentar zu Hegel, Enzyklopädie (1830), § 389* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1992), 69.

\(^{23}\) "Thus Nature has also been spoken of as the self-degradation of the Idea." (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 9, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II*, § 248 A, tr. by A. V. Miller as *Philosophy of Nature* [Part II of the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences (1830)], with an introduction by J. N. Findlay [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970]). Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as Enz II. References will be to the section numbers used in both editions. Hegel further explains in the addition: "Nature is the negative because it is the negative of the idea. Jacob Boehme says that God's first-born is Lucifer." (Enz II, § 248 Z)

\(^{24}\) Translation modified: *spirit for mind.*

itself in its inversion into second nature is not an avoidable error; it defines the finitude of human spirit: as finite spirit, spirit is not just spirit. In his anthropological theory of second nature, then, Hegel describes nothing other than the irreducible naturalness of finite spirit. And so Hegel’s theory of second nature is the beginning of a materialist revision—and not a materialist reduction—of the theory of spirit.

But if the necessity of second nature in spirit and its defects are relative to the necessity (and the defects) of the finite manifestation of spirit, that at once also means that thinking the concept of second nature includes the perspective on its overcoming. As part of a theory of finite spirit, the concept of second nature demands nothing less than a theory of “absolute” spirit.

If Hegel, in keeping with what Marx will call “true critique,” traces second nature back to “the act of its birth” in the self-inversion of spirit, he discerns in spirit the ground of its own—defective, finite—reality as second nature. As we have just seen, this means, first, that the inversion of spirit into second nature is a defect or error that is inscribed within spirit itself. And it means, second (and contrarywise), that the inversion of spirit into second nature is engendered by spirit itself. Spirit is the ground of the misapprehension of spirit. Yet spirit is therefore also more than its misapprehension: it is, as the ground of this misapprehension, beyond its inversion into second nature. If spirit itself engenders its inversion into second nature, then it is in this generation more, and something else, than finite spirit (which succumbs to the inversion into second nature). Accordingly, the materialist revision of the theory of spirit that begins with Hegel’s concept of second nature does not amount to an anthropological pessimism. Since in the perspective of a genealogical critique, to describe the “act of the birth” of second nature means to explain it as the self-inversion of spirit, spirit is always already more than finite spirit.

(3) To put the same thesis in a different way: the concept of second nature stands between the theory of finite and that of absolute spirit. Finite spirit is spirit that succumbs to its inversion into second nature, that is subject to the law of its self-inversion. Absolute spirit, by contrast, is not a spirit that is free of this law, but a spirit whose own law it is: absolute spirit is spirit that freely performs its self-inversion into second nature. It is thus absolute spirit’s own law of movement to lapse into finite spirit. The second nature that it engenders is the point of inversion between them—the undecidable in-between of absolute and finite spirit.
Hegel indicates as much when he describes second nature as a moment in the “manifestation” of spirit. “The substance of spirit is freedom” (Enz III, § 382)\(^{26}\), which attains “determinacy” in the “manifestation” of spirit: the “determinacy and content [of spirit] is [its] very revelation.” (Enz III, § 382) This self-revelation in which spirit consists evinces the following formal structure:

Revelation...\(^{27}\) as the revelation of spirit, which is free,...is the positing of nature as its world; but because this positing is reflection, it is at the same time the presupposition of the world as independent nature. (Enz III, § 384)\(^{28}\)

The self-manifestation of spirit as the praxis of freedom is the generation or production (Hervorbringung) of nature. According to the explication that Hegel gives of this general determination, it refers both to what we call “nature” and to the world of spirit. In relation to the first, outward nature, the self-manifestation of spirit consists in its appropriating this nature as “its world.” At the same time, the self-manifestation of spirit consists in engendering its own world as independent nature. So Hegel describes the self-manifestation of spirit as taking place by means of two different operations: in relation to outward nature, as an operation of appropriation; and in relation to spirit’s own world, as an operation of becoming-independent. Rightly considered, however, these two operations are performed at once in any act of the manifestation of spirit. The self-realization of spirit evinces a double structure: it is a “positing of (nature as) its world” and a “presupposition of (the world as) independent nature.” Even if Hegel places particular emphasis now on this, now on that aspect of the two ways of spirit’s manifestation,

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\(^{26}\) Translation modified: spirit for mind.

\(^{27}\) The elision reads: “...as the revelation of the abstract Idea, is the unmediated transition, the becoming, of nature.” That is the first and immediate way the idea reveals itself: the transition of the abstract idea of freedom—or of freedom as idea—into first, outward nature. The “abstract” idea of freedom with which the logic ended succumbed to an “immediate transition” into nature because it was inverted, without mediation, into its opposite: the self-revelation of the idea was the “transformation [Umschlagen] of the Idea into the immediacy of external and individualized reality.” (Enz II, § 384 Z) The initial and only abstract idea of freedom thus confronts the extrinsic order of nature as just as extrinsic to it. Hegel subsequently distinguishes the “revelation of spirit, which is free” (translation modified; emphasis C.M.). This self-revelation of free spirit (in contradistinction to the self-revelation of the idea of freedom) is the generation of second nature.

\(^{28}\) Translation modified: spirit for mind.
now on the positing, now on the presupposition—in relation to outward nature and in relation to its own world—neither is possible without at once performing the other move as well. The “presupposition of the world as independent nature” must at once be a *positing* because otherwise it would not be the presupposition of a *world*. And conversely, the “positing of nature as [spirit’s] world” must at once be a *presupposition* because otherwise it would not be a positing of *nature*: the positing is the (presup-)positing of something that is independent of the positing of being.

The double movement of positing (“of nature as *its* world”) and presupposition (“of the world as *independent* nature”) defines the conceptual locus of second nature in the self-realization of spirit: the concept of second nature denotes the independent being of what has been posited by spirit, or the spiritual being-posited of what is independently. “Revelation in the concept is creation of nature as its [*i.e. spirit’s*] being.” (Enz III, § 384) In it, Hegel continues, spirit procures for itself “the *affirmation* and *truth* of its freedom” (*ibid.*), for it is here that spirit realizes itself as what it is. The positing of being—which is to say, the creation of a second nature—is the “affirmation” of spirit. So is the concept of second nature in Hegel in fact not a concept of critique at all? The concept of second nature is both: it is a concept of affirmation and of critique. Indeed: “second nature” is in Hegel the concept at once of the highest affirmation and of the profoundest critique, and the one only because it is the other. We cannot understand the critique proper to the concept of second nature without the affirmation it articulates, nor the latter without the former.

The concept of second nature is affirmative because it thinks the union of positing and being: freedom realized in spirit is no longer externally confronted with natural-independent being—*spirit can posit being*. There is no more profound reason for the affirmation of spirit than this power to posit being. That is why the structure of second nature—posited being—denotes the structure of what Hegel calls “absolute” spirit. Spirit is “absolute” when it manifests itself in such fashion that it at once presupposes what it posits as immediate, independent being: “Spirit must again freely let go the world; what spirit has posited must at the same time be grasped as having an immediate being. This happens at the third stage of spirit, at the standpoint of absolute spirit, *i.e.*, of art, religion, and philosophy.” (Enz III, § 385)\textsuperscript{29} Thus the creation of an artwork is the creation of something that, qua beautiful, transcends its being merely created;

\textsuperscript{29}Translation modified: *spirit for mind.*
or again: the thinking of a philosophical thought is the thinking of that which, qua true, transcends its being merely thought. The beauty of art and the truth of philosophical thinking are the results of acts of creation or thinking and independent vis-à-vis these acts—existing in itself. Absolute spirit is that manifestation of spirit in which positing and being are identical because to posit is to presuppose being. Absolute spirit is second nature.

The power to posit independent being proves the absoluteness of spirit. However, by exercising this power, spirit necessarily engenders a reality that does not correspond to its concept—second nature as an object of critique. Second nature in the critical sense of the concept defines finite spirit. Finite spirit is determined by the contradiction between the reality of spirit and its concept. We can now describe this contradiction more precisely as the incompatibility of the two aspects that, taken together, constitute the self-manifestation of spirit: the aspects of positing and presupposition, or of positing and being. In finite spirit, positing and being fail to coincide; its manifestations never appear at once as posited by spirit and as independent beings. Finite spirit appears as the contradiction of positing and being. Precisely in this appearance, however, finite spirit presupposes the union of positing and being that defines absolute spirit. After all, “second nature” in the critical sense, as what defines finite spirit, means not only independent being vis-à-vis what spirit posits. “Second nature” also means an independent being vis-à-vis what spirit posits, a being that has been engendered by spirit’s very acts of positing. Spirit can be finite, can be inverted into second nature, only if it was absolute spirit, was generative of second nature all along.30 To be finite spirit means to have already been absolute spirit. But by the same token, to be absolute spirit means to become (to have become) finite spirit. For the inversion of spiritual, free positing into independent being that constitutes the critical concept of second nature is itself prescribed by its affirmative concept, the free positing of independent being: it is a free positing of independent being only if being is independent vis-à-vis the positing; that is, if the free positing acquires independence from itself and becomes the

30 The spirit that appears finite in the alternative of positing or being is in truth, according to its concept, the positing of being. Finite spirit appears as the antithesis between positing and being. But in order to be able to appear as such, finite spirit must be the antithesis of positing and being and the union of positing and being. The contradiction of finite spirit consists in the fact that it is at once against positing (or positing against being) and being by virtue of positing (or positing of being). The critical concept of “second nature” describes nothing other than this double constellation of positing and being.
necessary inversion into being (a becoming that is itself equally a positing and an inversion).

III.

According to the argument of Section II, the logical space of second nature is defined by the indissoluble intertwining of finite and absolute spirit. This must also lead to a new, revised description of the inner structure of second nature. According to the argument of Section I, the structure of second nature is defined by the hybrid character of “spiritual mechanism.” I described its two aspects by saying that habit as second nature is “spiritual” (or free) insofar as it is the effect of an act of willing (or “positing”), and that it is mechanical (or unfree) insofar as, once posited, it becomes independent of the will and operates unconsciously. However, the indissoluble intertwining of finite and absolute spirit that defines the logical space of second nature entails that the becoming independent of the posited, the reversal of positing into being, is in itself ambiguous: it describes the actualization as well as the decay of spirit. From this it follows that the very same mechanism that the critical theory of habit characterized as the loss of freedom (as sketched in Section I) is also the mechanism of self-transgression—namely the self-transgression by which the beauty of an artwork raises itself out of and over against its mere createdness or by which the truth of a philosophical thought raises itself out of and over against the mere act of thinking. The mechanism of habit by which the posited becomes independent is itself ambiguous: it is the loss of freedom and the transgression of the self at the same time. Thus a theory that seeks to do justice to this undecidable ambiguity of second nature cannot just be a “critical” theory. Rather, the theory of second nature must be at once critical and affirmative. — In closing, I would like to sketch, somewhat programmatically, the general outline of such a theory.

Hegel develops the concept of second nature in three steps:

1. The critique of second nature as a self-misapprehension of spirit: the rule of habit originates in the freedom of will (it embodies a spiritual purpose), but this freedom of its origin is lost in its effect, in

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the mechanism of the reproduction of an imaginary, abstract identity.

2. The genealogy of second nature as an anthropological necessity: finite spirit is subject to the law of its self-misapprehension because it wages a battle against the forces of inner nature that it cannot win other than by the power of a second nature. (This step depends upon an argument of Hegel's that I did not present in my sketch of his theory of habit in Section 1.)

3. The affirmation of second nature as a self-realization of spirit: the freedom of spirit is manifest not in external opposition to the world, but in the generation of spirit's own world as an independent nature.

Essentially, the critique and the affirmation of second nature say the same thing: spirit is the generation of (itself as) nature. That is spirit's error—its lapse—and yet also its success—its fulfilment: the error of spirit is its success, and the success of spirit is its error.

How are we to understand this union of error and success, of lapse and fulfilment, of critique and affirmation in the concept of second nature and hence in that of spirit? The union of error and success is a dialectical union: that of identity and difference.

The identity of error and success in the concept of second nature consists in this: that the success of spirit engenders its self-misapprehension, and that the error of spirit presupposes its self-realization. The identity of error and success thus implies a critique of—as Marx will put it: "dogmatic"—critique. Dogmatic critique describes the self-misapprehension of spirit as the becoming-independent of what has been posited in relation to all positing. It concludes that the success of spirit must consist in a positing that is free from all becoming-independent of what has been posited in relation to all positing. Successful or free positing, it says, is mere positing. Therein lies the dogmatism of dogmatic critique: it decides between error and success by separating the two. Because it fails to understand their identity, it consequently also fails to understand either the error or the success correctly.

The difference between error and success in the concept of second nature consists in the fact that their identity, as a dialectical identity, cannot be expressed by a simple equation. Accordingly, there is a difference within second nature: not the difference between positing and becoming-independent, but the difference between becoming-independent and becoming-independent—between the becoming-independent that forms a spiritual mechanism and the becoming-independent in spiritual creation, between the forever unchanging repetition of abstract-imaginary identities and the sudden emer-
gence of the work out of and vis-à-vis our making. The self-
realization of spirit implies its self-misapprehension—that is the
meaning of the identity of error and success in the concept of second
nature. Yet the self-misapprehension of spirit does not imply its self-
realization—that is the difference in the union of error and success in
the concept of second nature.

The success of spirit consists not in not committing any error, in
getting things right; it consists in committing the right error, or
getting the error right.

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