Dissolution of the Sentence:
Reading the Theological, Philosophical, and Literary Dimensions of
the Propositional Form with G.W.F. Hegel and Gertrude Stein

by

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the problem of sentences, and the latent capacities of the propositional form, as brought to the fore in the works of G. W. F. Hegel and Gertrude Stein. The analysis proceeds in a comparative manner, asking after the joint contributions that both of these authors make to adequate and novel theorizations of syntax as a way of expressing philosophical, theological, and literary truth.

One principal argument is that both authors work out such contributions under a presupposed theological pressure in their thought and writing. We inquire into the effect that such an epistemological predicament has on the formation and theorization of syntactic functions. Both Hegel and Stein offer challenging critiques of our notions of the “theological,” and their works exhibit what will be approached as “dispersed” and “implicit” theological modalities, which affect these authors’ sentences in manifold ways. The basic form of the proposition – “S is P” – is questioned throughout, with specific reference to Hegel’s “speculative sentence” and Stein’s “completed sentence” as the vital linguistic offerings both of these authors make, offerings that in turn affect both the production and the theorization of sentences in works like Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Science of Logic* and Stein’s *Lectures in America, Making of Americans*, and *Tender Buttons*. 
Such theorizations are here gathered from disparate traditions, but always with an eye to their original historical emergence. This analysis should help to highlight the challenges both authors issue against more current models of propositional functioning such as performativity, description, participation, enactment, subsumption, predication, and copulation. The final aim is a thorough presentation of the contributions these authors make to an understanding of the capacities of the proposition, the value of syntactic experimentation, and the gathering of novel linguistic practices forged in the fire of a competing set of theological, epistemological, and literary ambitions.

“Thou drewest near in the day…”
Lam. 3:57
Acknowledgments

All thanks, all affections, all wailings and joys are to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who mid-way through writing this thesis swooped in on the wind (John 3:8; Ruth 2:12), washed me (1 Corinthians 6:11), redeemed me, called me by name, and made me eternally His (Isaiah 43:1). Lord, forgive me the affronts to truth in this thesis. Lord, thank you. Lord, save everyone. Amen.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Gordon Thompson Caldwell and Michele Anne Robitaille, who have seen me through the whole process, as well as through my entire life, the foolish trials and the unspeakable joys alike. I thank them for being my parents, and for being such superlative people.

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Abbreviations for Frequently Cited Works

G.W.F. Hegel


Immanuel Kant


Bible


Gertrude Stein


Allegra Stewart

General Introduction

Subsections:

i) Why these two authors
ii) Three principal objectives
iii) Purpose of these objectives

i) Why these two authors

“For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much.”
Exodus 36:7

The comparative study of Gertrude Stein with G.W.F. Hegel is precisely as old as
December 21, 1894, when William Vaughn Moody, professor of “English Composition 22” at
Radcliffe College, left the following comment on Gertrude Stein’s sixteenth assignment:

“Hegelian.”

Stein’s composition that week was two paragraphs long – five periods, two commas,
orthodox grammar. It dealt with what she saw as the “tamest of platitudes”: the “eminently
illogical” historical announcement that each age is an “age of transition.” The themes set forth
there were indeed somewhat “Hegelian,” but Moody’s comment may have been as much a
recommendation for the young Stein as it was an indictment of a sort of caricatured Hegelian
thinking. What matters for this thesis is that someone saw a connection, the connection was
made along conceptual and historical lines, and, as far as we know, Stein never explicitly
brought it up again.

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1 The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, King James Version (New
York, NYC: American Bible Society, 1999). Further references to this translation denoted KJV.
Further references are denoted “Miller.”
Since then, there have been little glances across the isle from the more poetical Hegel scholars, and then from the more philosophically minded commentators on Stein. Most of these comparisons have been quite general. In Stein scholarship, for instance, Laura Riding Jackson in 1927 saw an affinity between Hegel and Stein in their shared mania, in the sheer weight and insanity of their projects, where their thinking goes “below this minimum, beyond this extreme.” \(^3\) She saw Stein as effecting a sort of “instant Hegelianism” (LRJ 255), in which Stein (pardon Jackson’s avalanche) “attempted to create a norm of extremism in which the contradictions of attitude and performance both finalistic in spirit and temporalistic…should neutralize each other and a perfection be achieved thus of nothing left over from the process, nothing to signify wrong, non-fulfillment of human functionality, incomplection of special destiny” (CEGS 241). As Stein had written on that early assignment, all this transitional extremism “is one of the tamest of platitudes but it is always introduced with a flourish of trumpets” (Miller 122). We will return to Jackson’s assessment in a later chapter on Stein’s theology. For now, suffice it to say that Jackson saw the likeness not only in conceptual approach (as Moody did), but also in literary project. Stein “attempted to create a norm of extremism” in words, in sentences: “With Gertrude Stein…the play was a playing with words, to make them unwrite, unspeak, themselves as fast as they got written” (LRJ 256).

Less verbose, but no less obscure, in 1957 Allegra Stewart marked the Stein-Hegel connection in the “diverse forms in which meditation upon ‘first and last things’ has been the object of the writing,” \(^4\) and in an effort to “bound the infinite at every moment by its own autonomous acts of knowing” (SQ 497; cf. 501), a project which Stewart also observed in James,

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4 See Allegra Stewart, “The Quality of Gertrude Stein’s Creativity” in *American Literature*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Jan., 1957), 493; also cf. 491 in this connection. Further references denoted SQ.
Bergson, and Whitehead. Here, someone noted the *theological* connection, with the emphasis on “first and last things” and “bounding the infinite.” These “theological” approaches to *Hegel with Stein* will instruct much of this thesis, but the next step is to make such connections both more concrete and more *linguistic*.

The explicitly linguistic connection is finally made in Katrin Pahl’s 2006 study of Hegel’s “speculative proposition.” In Pahl’s study, Stein’s infamous sentence appears as the purest example of Hegelian thinking:

> Speculative reading refuses to reduce propositions to a single meaning. The speculative reader regards subject and predicate as equal in value and in their ability to speak. She acknowledges their union as one that allows for difference, and stays attuned to their absolute difference, which accepts being expressed as identity: “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.”

These collected nods to the Hegel-Stein connection were all originally made in passing. It will be the intention of this thesis to dwell on them, to amplify them, and to move deeper into what they suggest. My contention will be that Hegel’s approach to a speculative linguistics, in his conception of the “speculative sentence,” is best read as a meaningfully, if only partially, *theological endeavor*. Secondly, I will contend that its *vision* is best carried through not just by Hegel’s followers but also by people outside of Hegel scholarship like Gertrude Stein, whose work is harassed by a similar set of questions pertaining to theology, linguistics, syntax, and the propositional form. I mean to say that this thesis gets much of the grist for its mill in proposing that Hegel “meets his match” in Stein, just as much as he does in some of his more canonized texts.

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readers in the continental tradition – like Marx, Heidegger, Adorno, or Judith Butler.\textsuperscript{6}

Conversely, I believe Stein is best read as operating under a theological, philosophical, and linguistic pressure that is akin to Hegel’s, so that she meets her match in Hegel’s speculations, just as much as she does in the developments of her contemporaries and in the canon of Stein scholarship. The interpretive implications of these comparisons will be made more explicit and hopefully more fruitful on every page that follows.

The thesis, however, concerns not only questions of the relation between these two authors. The greater concern should be with the \textit{contribution these authors make to a shared field of study}. A preliminary sketch of those contributions goes as follows.

\textbf{ii) Three principal objectives}

My initial intention in studying Hegel with Stein was to acknowledge their shared project of stretching the syntactic possibilities of language for the specific purpose of achieving greater \textit{adequation}, or in order to meet the demands of the old model of truth that says truth is achieved by an \textit{adequatio rei et intellectus} – a fitness of thing and thought.\textsuperscript{7} I am deliberately importing this term “adequation.” It is not germane to the actual idioms of either Stein or Hegel. It should serve constructively, however, to refer to what Hegel intended to achieve by his “concept” (see especially the final chapters of his \textit{Phenomenology} and \textit{Science of Logic}), and to what Stein intended in her reworking of the literary demand for “description” (see especially her \textit{Lectures in...}}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{6} I cite these readers’ reactions to Hegel throughout the Chapters 2 and 3 below. I find their approaches to Hegel most relevant to the present study because they use a mixed method of interpretation that combines elements of the philosophical, metaphysical, political, and literary; and they are thus able to grapple with a conceptual entity as difficult and epistemologically manifold as the speculative sentence.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{7} This conception of truth has its origins in Thomas Aquinas’s reading of Isaac Israeli (see \textit{Summa I}, Q. 16).}
America). I had intended to explore a connection, then, between what might be called Hegel’s “conceptual adequation” and Stein’s “descriptive adequation.”

I then detected a curious feature in both of these authors: in order to meet such an end, they would do odd things to the res and the intellectus alike; the “sentence” and the “sentenced” were both thrown into question; in order that the two should meet, the res was bloated, and the intellectus distended. Specifically, I observed that Hegel and Stein became discontent with the various models of “adequation” their predecessors had proposed. In this discontentment, we find Hegel and Stein offering critiques (however inadvertently) of four models of sentence functioning that we now take as quite standard, and quite functional. These models might be summarized thus: description, enactment, performativity, and participation. Again, Hegel and Stein may not be confronting these concepts head-on, or in this exact terminology (“performativity,” for instance, is a rather new word), so I am using these four terms to telegraph what came under many headings in the manifold works of my two interlocutors. (To name but a few of the more specialized terms they do use: Hegel was battling against “the conventional/habitual form of the proposition,” “argumentative thought,” “poetic utterances,” and Kantian “judgments/propositions”; Stein, against “description,” “story,” “plot,” “history,” “character,” and what she called the “emotional sentence.”) I am using these more current abbreviations, however, to signal that my authors thereby offer critiques that unsettle such categories for us. We often unthinkingly consider a sentence to be literally “describing” a reality, poetically “enacting” a reality, performatively “effecting” a reality, or metaphysically “participating in” a reality. I am calling such things “propositional models” in order to indicate that the demands of such

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8 I take the difference between ‘enactment’ and ‘performativity’ to be precisely that: the performative utterance is equivalent with the performance of the content of that utterance, while the utterance of ‘enactment’ mirrors, mimics, or dramatizes its content. See Austin 1962 and Derrida 1978.
linguistic situations are met precisely in *how their propositional elements relate*, and in what those syntactic arrangements suggest, even if or when such models extend beyond any single proposition.

On this question of propositional *relation* or *concatenation*, both Hegel and Stein *step behind* the proposition to ask (again, in their own idioms and in their own traditions) about *each part* of the proposition, about the *relation and movement between* those parts, about the *total expanse* that such movement can *encompass*, and about the total expanse that such movement *presupposes*. In doing so, both authors issue attacks on models of propositional *relation*, such as those of predication, ascription, assumption, and copulation (those attacks will be addressed in the following chapters). And again, for Stein and Hegel, such models continually come up short.

This then, is the first objective of the thesis: 1) to study Hegel and Stein as they develop a way of understanding how propositions work that extends beyond the many above mentioned propositional models.

But then we have to ask *what made Hegel and Stein discontent with such ways of interpreting the sentence?* The answer is that their respective *epistemologies* weighed down on them. In the Hegel chapters, I will explain the epistemological demands – what I am calling the “*pressure*” – of Hegel’s system of “absolute knowing.” In the Stein chapters, I will explain how her programmatic idea of descriptive “completion” exerted like pressure. Both of their respective epistemological presuppositions demand that the models of propositional form these two writers propose be subject *always* to thoughts of something greater – to some presupposed realm of “totality,” “everything,” “the absolute,” or “Spirit” (to quote Hegel), or of “everything that ever was or is or will be,” “god and mammon,” or “God” (to quote Stein). The more I studied these two authors, the more I came to see that the truly novel questions they pose in fact concern not only the “fitness of thought and thing,” but rather the fitness of thought-entities to broadly
theological realities, such as those I have just listed. The question was not so much that of a sentence mapping onto a part of concrete reality, but rather of a “sentence reality” interacting with various forms of spiritual and non-spiritual totality.

For such totalities to be meaningfully “theological,” however, they must consist of some account of God (theo-logos), which account, in the Judeo-Christian tradition that Stein and Hegel are alternately working in and reworking, entails a distinction between the creature and the Creator. Instead of an adequatio rei et intellectus, then, one might say that Stein and Hegel are both grasping after a sort of adequatio creatoris creaturique et intellectus creaturi – a “fitness of the thought of the creature to the total reality of the Creator and the created.” And it is precisely to this end that the sentence, as stated above, could no longer be a mere descriptor, enactor, performative, or participant. The sentence was being stretched beyond all bounds of such normalcy – combining and overriding such models in form, content, and function – so that theological truths could be captured in propositions.

Here, then, is the second objective of this thesis: 2) to ask what is peculiar to the form and function of propositions that seek to account for “God.” This is what I am calling the question of a “theological syntax.” This has to do with how sentences that deal in theological realities concatenate, or how their elements combine.

But now the questions should immediately arise: But what are these “theological realities”? What “God” is being spoken of? Don’t Hegel and Stein serve wildly different “gods”? Are their writings even theological at all? And it is precisely because these questions arise that I believe Hegel and Stein can offer deep challenges to our approach to the theological proposition. Neither of these authors are concerned with scriptural orthodoxy, nor is their principal concern
ever to appeal to specific theological camps. But I argue that it is precisely in _the dispersed and perhaps seemingly incommensurate theological strains_ in both of these authors that we find deep challenges to a theory of the sentence.

Here we should make the third objective of this thesis clear. My intention is to glean 3) how Hegel and Stein teach us to read _purportedly_ theological propositions. This does not entail the claim that these two authors are “doing good theology,” nor that the type of theology they are involved in is the same. Broadly speaking, we may say that _at face value_ Hegel is a theological syncretist who privileges the ideas, and not the truth, of Christianity; and again _at face value_, we may call Stein a not-quite-atheistic champion of human genius who likes to toy with Judeo-Christian terms. But both of these _prima facie_ views will be challenged and then _moved beyond_ in Chapter 1 below. And that chapter will be devoted to demonstrating that, in fact, Hegel and Stein are employing what we might think of as _diffuse, implicit, abbreviated, or ghosted theologies_, which I will contend are nevertheless very meaningfully _theological_, and of critical relevance to this thesis precisely because in both authors such “theologies” are always inextricably bound to the precise propositional forms that do the work of that diffusion.

I am deliberately not calling such implicit theologies “secular theologies” or something civilized like that. My conviction is that Stein and Hegel were writing under substantial theological pressures, crying out with Job, “Where is God my Maker?” (Job 35:10), as they are part of the human race that universally “has eternity in its heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). But this

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9 Though Hegel at least twice claims to be a Lutheran (see Butler _Letters_ pp. 520 and 532), and Stein does seem to get a lot of traction out of her appeal to a vaguely mystical bohemian atheism that constituted a sort of camp in the Paris of her time (see especially the introductions to _The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913-1946_, two volumes, ed. Edward Burns, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; and _Four in America_, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947.

10 Where necessary, I will cite this contemporary and very literal translation of the Bible: _The Holy Bible, Updated New American Standard_ (La Habra, CA: Foundation Publications, 2003). Further references to this translation are denoted NAS.
thesis will be concerned primarily with the *articulation* of that cry, and not with an evaluation of the relative orthodoxy or secularism of it.

Instead, then, of evaluating such theologies under a model of textual orthodoxy, or again instead of simply writing off the theological dimension of these authors’ works as a poetic trope or a cultural vestige, the following four criteria will guide our understanding of the “diffuse theological strategies” of Hegel and Stein. These criteria must be present for us to be legitimately discussing their works as “theological” at all: 1) *accounting for God* (however broadly that project may be defined) *in concepts or sentences* is part of the implicit or explicit intention of the author; 2) the word “god” or “God” is mentioned or at least noticeably ghosted; 3) a *theological totality* that consists of some notion of “the absolute” and of a “creature-creator” distinction is under discussion; and 4) an understanding of the author would be diminished without taking the explicit or implicit “God-coordinate” seriously.

To make sure the horse is dead: I mean to imply, in all this talk of the “implicit or explicit,” the “diffuse” and the “ghosted,” that in the following exegeses, it will be common to find Hegel and Stein at their *most* radically theological when they are *least* explicitly discussing “God.” I can only justify this approach by saying that, if these authors were always making *explicit* theological pronouncements, their utterances would constitute nothing more than a sort of confession, and their formulations could be said simply to *express* the theological; but instead, their “implicit theologies” teach us something peculiar about the *difficulties inherent in expressing the theological* in the first place.

iii) Defamiliarizing purpose of these objectives
A secondary purpose of the above objectives could be thought of as follows: to defamiliarize our understanding of the works of Hegel and Stein, as well as of the general function of the linguistic proposition and of the theological predicaments that such propositions must address. The standard views of these works that I argue need to be defamiliarized are those inherited from the scholarship, which will be referenced as the thesis proceeds. This project of defamiliarization may be summarized as follows:

1) First, I want to ask what theological predicaments teach us about the use of propositions in general. I claim that Hegel and Stein are two authors whose approach to the theological is always bound up in their approach to sentences. There are many readers of Hegel and Stein, however, who do not emphasize the constitutive role of these authors’ respective (proposition-centered) theories of language. The “speculative sentence” in Hegel studies can be brushed over in favor of canonized metaphysical, epistemological, Marxist, or theological readings. Likewise, the deep theories of meaning that Stein’s sentences develop are oftentimes brushed over in favor of a reading of Stein’s “nonsensical experimentations” for political, cultural, historical, or merely literary ends. This investigation, then, should work to defamiliarize the approach of much Hegel and Stein scholarship that has not put the doggedly linguistic (and specifically sentence-obsessed) concerns of these writers front and center.

2) Secondly, I have chosen to examine two authors whose approach to the theological is always bound up in their grasp of non-theological epistemological predicaments, and this is precisely because of the very commitments of their “theologies” (as we began to see above). Again, these two writers are not orthodox theologians of any stripe. Instead, they are always manifesting implicit theological claims at the cross-roads of other types of claims. This study, then, may also be used to defamiliarize the thought of orthodox, confessional, or Scripture-thumping religious thinkers of whatever tradition, by proposing novel and nuanced approaches to
the status of any theological proposition from sources that have been previously largely unemployed in this connection, writers whose theological claims are not beholden to a model of derivative truth, biblical presupposition, or confessional fidelity.

3) And yet, at the very same time, I have chosen two authors whose approach to their own thinking and tradition involves an undeniably necessary theological node, without which neither their thinking as a whole, nor their non-theological pronouncements, nor their theories of language could be assessed. With this consideration, the investigation should serve a defamiliarizing purpose for stridently non-theological readers of Hegel and Stein. In Stein studies, that would include almost everyone (there are no theological readers of Stein!), while in Hegel studies, that would include many of the “left-wing” Hegelians, as well as the more recent camp of “non-metaphysical” Hegelians (discussed in Chapter 1 below).

To summarize: we are concerned to point to the linguistic where it has been ignored, to push the non-theological where the theological has been made an exclusive principle, and to propound the theological where it may not have been heard in the first place. And in seeking this “theological syntax,” then, we are seeking: A) a model of propositional functioning that goes beyond the models of description, participation, performance, and enactment; B) a model of propositional relation that goes beyond the models of predication, ascription, assumption, and copulation; and C) a model of propositional capacities that can alternately describe totalities, account for presupposed totalities, and question the very modalities of propositional “accounting for” in the first place. We are confronted, then, with the question of the possibilities of sentences, and of the potentialities that are already constantly, if latently, at work in sentences. The tools for a rigorous excavation of such potentialities are Hegel’s “speculative sentence” and Stein’s “completion,” which I hope to present below as the very sites of a deep theory of the inextricability of and reciprocity between the theological and the sentence.
Chapter 1: Grounds for Comparison: the capacities of the proposition and the status of the theological in Hegel and Stein

Subsections:

i) Shared intentions: stretching the capacities of the proposition
   a) Syntax: expressing movement
   b) Syntax: odd constructions necessitated
   c) Syntax: new methods of theorization necessitated
   d) Syntax: enthymemic enfoldings

ii) Stein’s theology: a genealogical account
   a) Biblical textures
   b) Working under theological pressures?
   c) Or assuming the place of God?

iii) Hegel’s theology: where to begin?
   a) Presupposition-less theologizing
   b) The word “God” and the demands of aufheben
   c) Intervening into the Hegel scholarship

In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate just how intertwined are the theological implications and the syntactic inventions of Stein and Hegel’s respective ways of thought. If David Bentley Hart can argue that “an ethical theory constructed apart from some account of transcendent truth is a fragile fiction,”\(^\text{11}\) the contention of this chapter is that a linguistic theory of propositional functioning constructed apart from some account of transcendent truth is, likewise, fragile and inadequate.

As set forth in the above Introduction, however, a simple “theological” reading of Hegel or Stein would be no more than an interpretive importation. And a mere sprinkling of ‘transcendent truth’ would not meet the deep conceptual demands of these complex texts, which we must instead examine from the inside out. Having worked in this way, we find that these two authors effect *diffuse, ghosted, or implicit* theological strategies (as I put it in the Introduction), so that our task is never as simple as saying, “Hey, that’s Stein describing God. And there goes Hegel doing the same thing. Compare!” Instead, we must learn how to discern the theological strains implicit in the words of these two authors.

Part of that process entails extracting the approaches to sentence-making that have been tailor-made to such processes.

This chapter, then, will ask about the affinities Hegel and Stein share in their approach to propositional capacities, before exposing just the sort of diffuse theologies that instruct those theories of the proposition, *so that* we can then turn, in later chapters, to Hegel’s “speculative sentence” and Stein’s “completion” and treat those two constructions for the vital accounts of propositional truth-bearing they constitute.

i) Shared intentions: stretching the capacities of the proposition

We will start magnifying the aim of this thesis by comparing what I am calling the “syntactic innovations” or the “syntactic weirdness” of these two authors. As Slavoj Zizek puts it, Hegel’s speculative sentences present propositions in which “subject and predicate are radically incompatible, incomparable.” Zizek gives examples from a variety of Hegel’s works: “‘The Spirit is a bone,’ ‘Wealth is the self,’ ‘The state is *Monarch,*’
‘God is Christ.’”\textsuperscript{12} Those are simple sentences that cause us to question just how simple sentences work in the first place. However, notice that the examples Zizek choses, and his comments upon them, point mainly to the \textit{semantic} content of such sentences, where they “provoke in us a sentiment of radical, unbearable contradiction” and present “an image of grotesque discord, of an extremely negative relationship” (ibid.). In this thesis, we will be concerned to highlight the \textit{syntactic} stakes of Hegel’s “speculative sentence,” thereby problematizing Zizek’s sort of approach. As we go deeper into Hegel’s presentation, we will also find such “grotesque discord,” such “weirdness” played out in more complex sentences, like the following programmatic statement from the \textit{Phenomenology}’s “Preface,” §17, where we find the negations of the speculative sentence more boldly on display \textit{in the syntactic register}, and where grammatical contortions are being explicitly mobilized to methodological ends:

According to my view, which must justify itself through the presentation of the system itself, everything depends on apprehending and expressing the true not as \textit{substance} but just as much as \textit{subject}.

Es kömmt nach meiner Einsicht, welche sich durch die Darstellung des Systems selbst rechtfertigen muß, alles darauf an, das Wahre nicht als \textit{Substanz}, sondern ebensosehr als \textit{Subjekt} aufzufassen und auszudrücken (\textit{PS} §17/3:22-23).\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Slavoj Zizek, \textit{The Sublime Object of Ideology}, New York: Verso, 1989, p. 207. Further references are denoted ZSOI.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} My translations of the passages from Hegel’s \textit{Phenomenology} throughout, except where otherwise indicated. German text from G.W.F. Hegel, \textit{Werke in zwanzig Bänden}, Moldenhauer, Eva and Michel, Karl Markus, ed., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971, Vol. 3, pp. 22-23. All further references will be denoted PS, followed by the paragraph number from Miller’s
\end{itemize}
While a simple “speculative sentence” like the ones Zizek quotes above, might read something like “the true is substance and subject,” here Hegel *enacts* the very “negative relationship” between the parts of such a proposition and *plays out* that relationship in the *syntactic* articulation of “expressing the true not as *substance* but just as much as *subject*.” Here I argue that even in the German, the syntax of this clause forces the reader first to register a negation (“express the true not as *substance*”) and then to *retroactively re-inscribe that negation* as a positive equation of terms, once the second term, “*subject*,” as been added. After the syntax has forced this retroactive inscription, the reader can say, “Ah yes, Hegel means ‘expressing the true *not only* as substance *but just as much* as subject.’” Again, here Hegel’s “speculative sentence” is not achieved only by ranging together what Zizek had called “radically incompatible” *semantic* elements. It is more fully achieved by *dramatizing* the true relation of such elements with *precise syntactic motions*.

The examples of the speculative proposition that Hegel gives throughout the “Preface” to the *Phenomenology* function in similar ways. While we there find simple propositions, we also find much suggestiveness in the precise syntactic presentation of those propositions. In the German of §62, the examples of speculative sentences are italicized in suggestive ways: “*Gott ist das Sein*” and “*das Wirkliche ist das Allgemeine*.” The first sentence of §62 reads: “To elucidate what has been said through examples, thus in the proposition: *God is the being*, the predicate is *the* being; it has substantial meaning,
into which the subject melts,” “Um das Gesagte durch Beispiele zu erläutern, so ist in dem Satz: *Gott ist das Sein, das Prädikat das Sein; es hat substantielle Bedeutung, in der das Subjekt zerfließt*” (§62/3:59). The *theological* portentousness of this example is thrown off balance immediately when Hegel puts the emphasis on the predicate: “*das Sein.*” Is it the *italicized definite article* before ‘Sein’ that gives the predicate of the proposition the ‘substantial meaning, into which the subject melts,’\(^\text{14}\) or is it the mere semantic content of this sentence?

The second example of a speculative sentence in the “Preface” comes in sentence 4 of §62: “Thus too, when it is said: **the actual is the universal,** the actual as subject passes away [*vergeht*] into its predicate,” “So auch wenn gesagt wird: das *Wirkliche ist das Allgemeine, so vergeht das Wirkliche als Subjekt, in seinem Prädikate*” (§62/3:59; Hegel’s italics; my bolds). The passage proceeds: “The universal should not only have the meaning of the predicate, such that the proposition **were to state** this: the actual is universal; rather, the universal should express the essence of the actual,” “Das Allgemeine soll nicht nur die Bedeutung des Prädikats haben, so daß der Satz dies **aussagte,** das Wirkliche sei allgemein, sondern das Allgemeine soll das Wesen des Wirklichen ausdrücken” (ibid.; Hegel’s italics; my bolds). The word ‘*aussagte,*’ bolded above, is also a common word for *predication,* so that we could translate that clause: “such that the proposition predicated this…” Here the floating “one who knows about it” from the above example would seem to be part of the sentence, as the proposition is itself personified. That mere predication or ‘stating’ consists of a noun for subject and an

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\(^{14}\) This emphasis is hard to replicate in English. It could be dramatized in alternate translations: “thus in the proposition: *God is Being,* the predicate is *Being;* it has substantial meaning” or “thus in the proposition: *God is being [and not a being or any being],* the predicate is *being [and not a being or any being];* it has substantial meaning.” For Hegel’s italicizations of other definite or indefinite pronouns, see his 1831 alterations to §22.
adjunct for predicate, whereas the proper example of the speculative proposition had a noun in both spots: “das Wirkliche ist das Allgemeine.” This substantial predicate (with a definite article), it would seem, then gives something for the truly speculative subject to “pass away into.”

I believe it is precisely the portentousness of these examples that has given rise to some of the confusion around the range of applicability of the speculative sentence. If ‘God,’ ‘being,’ ‘the actual,’ and ‘the universal’ are the subjects and predicates of these examples, are we then to think that the speculative sentence is a method of constructing and reading only highly abstract theological and philosophical pronouncements? Or was Hegel simply making his point at the extremes, as he so often does?15

As our thesis goes even deeper, we will find Hegel’s discussion devolve into an effort to diffuse the “speculative proposition” into speculative utterances in general, which consist of “speculative modes,” “philosophical exposition” (PS §64), “speculative predicates” (ibid. §66), and a general “presentation” that “must remain true to the nature of the speculative” (ibid. §66). This wide-ranging diffusion of speculative syntax will be on display especially in Chapter 3 below.

Likewise, in Stein, we find simple sentences that break the back of the simple sentence, as in these bizarre specimens from Tender Buttons: “A little lace makes boils. This is not true.”16 “A table means does it not my dear it means a whole steadiness. Is it likely to change” (TB 15). “Light curls very light curls have no more curliness than soup. This is not a subject” (TB 25). And we find more riddling sentences, whose very

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15 See Adorno’s remark in Three Studies...
16 Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), p. 15. Further references are denoted TB.
contorted nature serves as the initiation rites into Stein’s thought: “One cannot come back too often to the question what is knowledge and to the answer knowledge is what one knows. / What is English literature that is to say what do I know about it, that is to say what is it.” Stein too (see Chapters 4 and 5) will force us to approach such sentences not just for the *semantic content* they purvey, but also for the *syntactic means* by which they engender a whole world of what Stein calls “completed” relations.

I will let these brief examples serve as indicators of the sorts of sentenced peculiarities the following pages will set out to theorize. In the above introduction, I outlined a three-fold “defamiliarizing” objective in my approach to Hegel and Stein, which was intended to make clear that a mere study of ‘theological propositions’ would not do justice to my interlocutors and the scholarship they have inspired. Instead, we will set out to bring *linguistic, general epistemological, and theological* questions to the fore precisely where they have not been given due weight. There, my references are to the respective canons of Stein and Hegel scholarship, which I do not believe have yet adequately addressed the *theory of the sentence* that these authors make so ripe for the picking. But I also do not mean in those “defamiliarizing intentions” to make this thesis a random clean-up job of the massive bodies of scholarship that have come before, and that have always been more developed than this thesis could hope to be. I mean instead to situate our exposition of Hegel’s “speculative sentence” right in the middle of those three reciprocating tasks, and likewise to put Stein’s “completion” right there – where the sentence, the theological, and the mundane (the un-sentenced and un-theological) are all under intense scrutiny.

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These comparative ambitions are meant to constitute a propaedeutic to a fresh reading of Hegel and Stein. And here we want simply to mark some of the methodological and conceptual similarities at stake, before we bring out their theological underpinnings. This should help us foreground the fact that attempting to hear Stein’s theory of the sentence as against Hegel’s theory of the sentence means asking questions across disparate lines of tradition and language. However, I believe that such comparisons can serve as an interpretive palate cleanser, ultimately enabling us to hear both authors speak louder and profounder, or: as they should speak. The intention is to use Stein to drive us into Hegel’s text from an angle that has not been exhausted by other Hegel-commentators, and vice versa, to use Hegel to help us find deeper ways of reading Stein.\footnote{Note that our attempt at a “fresh reading” will nowhere exclude the most salient remarks from the venerable traditions of Stein and Hegel commentary, nor will it exclude questions of each author’s relations to their contemporaries, an apprehension of each author’s work as a thing-unto-itself that defies comparison, or certain relevant reflections on one author that have only a very faint connection to the other.}

\textbf{a) Syntax: expressing movement}

Fundamental to the aim of this thesis, I contend that both Hegel and Stein innovate more at the level of the sentence or of syntactic import (concatenation, conjunction, disjunction, inferential movement) than at the level of the word or of mere semantic import (meaning, polysemy, making new words). The novel character of this approach may be dramatized in Stein’s self-styled battle with James Joyce and Marcel Proust as part of what she saw as the old guard of name-innovators, authors who, like Joyce, were bogged down in word-play, etymological games, and the creation of new
nouns, or, like Proust, constructed novels out of an almost obsessive concern with identity, place, memory, and time.\textsuperscript{19} Because of Stein’s own disgruntled readings of such contemporaries, she waged war on all sorts of novelistic semantemes – “name,” “word,” “character,” “identity,” and even “description.” And in order to get such static categories out of the way, Stein spoke everywhere of “replacing” and “rejecting” names, as sentences unfold and pronouns, prepositions, ever-moving participles, and other mobile parts of speech took over.\textsuperscript{20} One commentator, Amy Feinstein, calls this Stein’s “asemantic” project, her “treatment of writing as an asemantic medium for sketching mobile identities.”\textsuperscript{21} This is a useful designation, but below I will discuss this “asemantic” dimension of Stein’s work in a specific sense that Feinstein may not have intended. I believe Stein’s work to be “asemantic” \textit{not} in that it \textit{does not make sense}, but rather in

\textsuperscript{19} See the discussion of \textit{Lectures in America} in Chapter 4 below.
\textsuperscript{20} See, e.g., \textit{LIA} 236, 228, 241. In some of Stein’s most experimental instances, she even seems almost to be using her participles to translate Aristotle’s \textit{to ti en einai} (\textit{essentia, substatia}, or literally: ‘what it was being to be’): ‘to some anything to have meaning must be being, \textit{having been going to be} experienced as something existing by some one’ (\textit{The Making of Americans, Being A History of A Family's Progress}. Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995, p. 779; my italics; further references denoted \textit{MOA}). As part of this project of putting categories, adjectives, and verbs in motion, Stein will sometimes even employ a double continuant or a doubling of the imperfective aspect (in English the participle is the marker of continued action), for example, ‘being living,’ is not enough for Stein; she will instead supply a triple imperfective/continuant: ‘Certainly everyone being living is \textit{being one going on being living}’ (\textit{MOA} 801; my italics). Note this again in \textit{MOA} 835; such stacking is then dropped on p. 883; and we find a different type of stacked continuant on p. 915 (here just doubled): ‘being living and being living.’ For further experiments in participle use, observe the following constructions: ‘This is now a history of her, of her loving, of her marrying, of her dress-making, of her living with Mary Maxworth’ (\textit{MOA} 217); ‘…never could there come the miracle of simultaneous opening and gripping’ (\textit{MOA} 320). Finally, the psychological ‘kinds’ of character Stein seeks to spell out are given participial articulation: e.g., the ‘independent dependent’ kind is called ‘attacking’; the ‘dependent independent’ kind is called ‘resisting’ (\textit{MOA} 224); and then we find further subdivisions of ‘attacking being’ on p. 363.
that the sense it does make is to be tracked at the level of syntax and not at the level of word, sign, noun, or semanteme.

In Hegel, we find a similar ambition to replace static linguistic entities with mobile sentences, with dialectical movements that require entire paragraphs and chapters, with prepositional constructions in the place of nouns (“the in-itself,” “the for-itself”), and with “speculative sentences” that telegraph totalities, encapsulate negations, and put the very function of the sentence in question.

With both authors, we start to ask, Why are you trying to do this big thing with these little sentences? For both are trying to induce verbal motion where the grammatical forms they are employing are not always willing to comply. What is more, in the hands of any other writer, the reader would expect the very concept of a “single sentence” to have disintegrated under the weight of such experimentations. Think of Hölderlin’s experiments in the German Idealist strain; or of Joyce and Beckett in Stein’s time. With those writers, we can truly speak of the disintegration of the sentence as civilized grammar knows it. But the peculiar thing about Hegel and Stein is that the single sentence continues to hold for them to the end, even if in thoroughly disfigured or re-worked capacities.23

23 They share this peculiarity with the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Judeo-Christian Bible, where sentences are always the primary expressive mode, while sentences are also being stretched beyond the bounds of referential normalcy. As brief examples, I might cite what one could think of as the “consummative sentences” of passages like Ephesians 1:3-14 (one sentence), Ephesians 1:15-23 (one sentence), Heb 9:26, 1 Cor 2:2 (“For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”), 2 Cor 5:21, Gal 2:19, and Heb 13:8 (“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever”), where conventional syntactic constructions are being pressed beyond their usual range of expression. One also finds many anacoluthic or grammar-breaking sentences in the Bible, which are notoriously hard to translate, e.g.,
Stein and Hegel’s grammatical intentions, then, are not anarchistic. Both authors go to great methodological pains to *incorporate* their traditions and predecessors, instead of simply overthrowing them. In Hegel, this is because his “speculative sentence” is itself a vessel of dialectical *retention*, whereby it can both negate and retain the elements of the propositional motions it expresses. We will see this demand very clearly in Hegel’s use of the speculative sentence to track *die Sache selbst*, the very heart or “matter” of philosophical inquiry, as that “matter” induces the dialectical motions of Hegel’s philosophy (see Chapter 2). But we will also see that this retentive function of the speculative sentence is alive in its micro-motions, so that the single philosophical proposition can monadically cover entire expanses of thought, even while critiquing them and catapulting them forward.

Likewise, Stein’s vision for a “complete sentence” demands that the inner workings of her sentences encapsulate broad totalities, and mobilize the very “histories” and “literatures” of which they are a part. Tracking her own sort of *Sache selbst*, Stein makes sure that her “complete” formulations retain all the older literary demands of “description,” “character,” and “identity,” even while they instigate the most ferocious attack on such things. Again, like Hegel, Stein seems to want to make her sentences stand alone as perfect monadic units of expression, but at the same time she uses those monads to spin out into and to define what she will call her greater “emotional” arches of paragraph-making, biography-writing, and making history.

*Philippians* 1:23: “But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, *for that is much more better*, yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake” (my italics); or Paul’s ecstatic stuttering in Romans 1:10: “*always asking in my prayers if somehow, now, ever, I will journey prosperously in the will of God to come to you*” (my italics).
b) Syntax: odd constructions necessitated

Again, because of this dual demand – that they press the proposition to its limit as a means of expressing movement, and that they retain the propositional forms they have inherited from their traditions – both Stein and Hegel contribute some of the oddest syntactic formations imaginable to their respective fields. And while that in itself could be no more than a poetic curiosity, I argue that, as a direct result of such syntactic innovations, and in the midst of their utterances, both Hegel and Stein proffer novel ways of theorizing syntax.

Such novel constructions are the obsessive intention of Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, and the same intentions lead to the weird noun-grunting triumphs of *Tender Buttons* – one writer calls them “cryptograms,” cautioning, “I dare not say sentences.”

Likewise, most Hegel commentaries begin with a warning about the notorious difficulty of Hegel’s sentences. In both Hegel and Stein, some of these sentences feel initially impervious to theorization or comparison. Some are pure aesthetic bliss. Others are pure syntactic train wreck. Some such experiments even lead Stein herself to despair of her work and life (see *MOA* 348, 453-461). But then we also find Stein declaring, right in the midst of her riddling sentences, that she has overcome such literary vanities as “description,”

25 “name,” (*LIA* 231; 233-241) and “sound” (*LIA* 191; 201) themselves.


26 She even once claims to have overcome the need to be mentioned or recognized, because of what she seems to have construed as her own omnipresence: “Mention me if you can because I
And while Hegel’s speculative sentences can break the interpretive capacities of his readers’ minds, Hegel is quick to remind us that the exposition of his thought has such sentences as its elements (PS §63/3:60), and we are in fact being schooled in the halls of speculative syntax precisely when we are having difficulty reading through its motions.

In this confluence, then, of syntactic innovation and syntactic theorization, we find that Hegel and Stein are two writers who are never content just to “state their findings.” Instead, both authors play out their exercises of theorizing the sentence by dramatizing those theories everywhere throughout their writings. They both exhibit a broad, systematic, or, again, dramatized approach to the questions they raise about the status of the sentence, and they are both almost obsessively concerned with demonstrating what they claim, not in examples, but in every single sentence of their works. Below we will have to ask if it is legitimate to see every sentence of Stein’s as a “complete sentence,” and likewise every sentence of Hegel’s as a “speculative sentence.” Both of these designations are quite specific and demanding, and both Hegel and Stein speak of the genesis of these constructions in their works themselves, so it would be quite grand to claim that every single sentence has achieved this end. But our reading will at least examine this dramatized, systematic mode of presentation for what it teaches and demonstrates about the inextricability of writing, reading, theorizing, working-through, living-through, and presenting content at all levels of formal experience.27

am here” (Gertrude Stein, The Geographical History of America or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind. New York: Random House, 1936, p. 155. Further references denoted GHA. Cf. SQ 495; and GHA 24: “Do you see that there is the land which nobody can see because there is the sea, and yet there is the land in America, there is the land salt lake land where there is no sea.”

27 Cf. Allegra Stewart’s comment: “‘Content without form,’ [Stein] was fond of saying, meaning that structures and forms should not be permitted to tyrannize over direct experience – that they
c) Syntax: new methods of theorization necessitated

I have used the words “mobile,” “monadic,” “complete,” and “dramatic” to describe the sorts of propositional forms Hegel and Stein are employing. My intention is to use these words constructively (even when they are not always to be found in the texts at hand) to approximate the propositional functions that Hegel and Stein are developing. These functions then become active critiques of the propositional categories I mentioned in the Introduction – those of description, enactment, performativity, and participation. Hegel and Stein, of course, do not merely start labeling their propositional relations in different ways. Following the demands for innovation and demonstration I have just outlined, they instead go to great pains to create different types of sentences, in which the propositional elements – subject, predicate, and verb – interact in concretely different ways. We can now start to see, for example, that when the “descriptive” capacities of the proposition fail Stein’s purposes, Stein demands that the propositional parts of speech concatenate in a way that expresses “completion,” and not mere description. For Stein, this involves a sort of syntactic situation where the elements of the sentence present a complete, full-orbed, all-in picture of the content of the sentence: the subject and predicate hem each other in; the verb encroaches on the nouns by way of participial constructions; and content that seemingly should belong in the subject slot is jutted to the place of the predicate, and vice versa. Where a “performative” proposition could, in its moment of utterance, effect the very content it describes, the “mobile” proposition not

are less important than the quality of life by which the forms themselves are actually distinguished” (SQ 490).
only effects that content, but also puts it into motion, or into dialectical dispersion, as in
the movements of Hegel’s thought. Where a proposition could “enact” its content by
poetically mimicking it, Hegel and Stein now put the emphasis on a systematic,
dramatized approach whereby the proposition must be part of a larger philosophical
project of enactment, with the emphasis on retaining, negating, and enfolding the more
conventional thrusts of a proposition (for Stein, “description”; for Hegel,
“representation”), so that a full-on demonstration of the very claims and content of a
proposition can be set in motion. Likewise, where Hegel becomes discontent with a
sentence “participating” in its content, merely being a “part” of a larger whole, he offers
the “monadic” structures of the speculative sentence, which can totalize its content
through a series of negations and inclusions taking place between the subject, predicate,
and verb of a sentence. Such monadic aspirations then enable any one speculative
proposition to encapsulate a series of moving, dialectical findings in but one
propositional utterance.

d) Syntax: enthymemic enfoldings

And again in Hegel and Stein, we can identify a shared method for effecting these
modifications in the capacities of the single proposition. I will bring this out by way of a
brief comparison with Aristotle. In Aristotle’s conception of the enthymeme, we find a
logical tool for describing how elements of propositions themselves contain inferred
truths. The enthymeme appears in Aristotle’s Rhetoric as a way of compressing the
deductive arrangements of sentences, particularly in order to meet the demands of “an
The audience of untrained thinkers” who find long deductive arguments either hard to follow owing to length or unpersuasive because of the obscurity or disreputability of the premises (ibid. 1357a11-14). In such cases, the speaker can hide objectionable premises, or enfold them in more general premises that would be harder to refute. What’s more, the speaker has an obligation to reject familiar premises, in order to present a more persuasive sentence; as Aristotle says, “The enthymeme must consist of few propositions, fewer often than those which make up a primary deduction. For if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need even to mention it; the hearer adds it himself.” And it is relevant for this thesis to note that Aristotle’s example of an enthymeme is itself a single sentence:

Thus, to show that Dorieus has been victor in a contest for which the prize is a crown, it is enough to say, “For he has been victor in the Olympic games,” without adding, “And in the Olympic games the prize is a crown” (ibid. 1357a19-22).

This is a simple thought, but we should make its implications even more glaring. For example: the proposition “a bear is a mammal” requires the implied truths that “a mammal is a hirsute animal that feeds milk to its young” and “bears are hairy, and they grow up on milk.” Here we see, quite simply, that the original proposition is meaningless without the sentences implied by both its subject and its predicate. And indeed, Hegel and

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28 See Aristotle, Barnes, Jonathan, ed. The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volumes I and II, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 1357a12. Further references denoted with book title (e.g. Rhetoric) followed by the standard Bekker pagination (e.g. ‘1357a12’).
29 Rhetoric I.2, 1357a7-18 is the crucial text on the brevity or compressed nature of the enthymeme; but cf. also Rhetoric II.22, 1395b24–26.
Stein would have us go even farther and ask, “and what does the ‘is’ imply?” if we want a truly meaningful reading of the initial proposition.

While neither Hegel nor Stein explicitly mobilize Aristotle’s “enthymeme” in the texts we will be discussing, in this connection both authors are painfully aware of a certain inferential conjunction of verbal units, whereby no subject, predicate, or verb can stand on its own. Both authors work obsessively with just this sort of simple logic, in order to revamp our understanding of the word, the sentence, the inference, the paragraph, and then, by consequence, the larger systematic structures of the book. And both authors are also keen to demonstrate the ever-possible equation of such units, whereby “this milk-rearing hairy thing is a milk-rearing hairy thing” may be substituted as a more “complete” propositional articulation of “the bear is a mammal,” whenever this suits the conceptual situation. We find Stein and Hegel obsessively toying with this fact that words carry entire “sentenced” thoughts within them, and sentences contain other sentences within them – without which neither the word nor the sentence would hang together, of course.30 The degree to which such inferential conjunctions of verbal units is made explicit in Stein and Hegel is vital to our investigation into their “theological syntax,” because such a method then affects their ability to jump descriptive registers on the mere turn of a linking verb (Are we speaking of all crown-awarding circumstances, or only of the Olympic games?), and in so doing, to jump between different registers of propositional use, thereby implicitly making theological claims (or any other sort of epistemological claim) even in the course of a simple non-theological utterance.

30 Or, to do away with the slightly abstract “containment” metaphor: words imply sentences, and sentences imply inferences. Vice versa, an inference can be summed up in a sentence, and a sentence can be summed up in a word.
An awareness of these dimensions will help us grasp why Stein will replace word units with sentence units, so that “A is B” becomes “(A is C) is B.” I call these Stein’s “sentence relatives” and her “object sentences.” Such things are not new in Stein, but they are heavily and newly thematized, and put relentlessly into practice. Here are some examples of what I am calling the object sentence: “Explanations make me think of what do they think,”31 “Now translate that to know in English they mean very well for once” (HTW 17; my italics), “Finally a prayer has nothing to do with I care” (GHA 83; my italics). She can then create “completed portraits” or “complete sentences” by bringing otherwise merely implied connections to the surface, and bloating the proposition with such implications. And likewise we will see that Hegel’s speculative sentences can be read like syllogisms stripped of their conditional trappings (“if,” “and only if,” “then,” “it follows that”), so that “If A is B, and B is C, then A is C” becomes the speculative proposition “A is C,” or “A finds its truth speculatively in C,” or the chiasm “A is C and C is A.” In this way, Hegel can compress massive dialectical truths that elsewhere in his system require whole chapters, but can now be expressed in single, speculative sentences. And in so doing, he is able to demonstrate the monadic, totalizing, or “conceptual” stakes of such claims, and even to teach them, or to initiate his readers into the vital (even: pedagogical) motions constitutive of such truths.

Moreover, such an understanding then allows us to grasp the systematic reach of any single sentence in the weird fabric of these writings. When the elements of a proposition are allowed – by way of the above logical implications – to be stacked atop one another, conflated with one another, or even equalized with one another, the

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31 See Gertrude Stein, How to Write, Barton: Something Else Press, 1973, p. 16; my italics. Further references are denoted HTW.
connection between a propositional truth and the body of truth to which it belongs can be carried along in every utterance. Such “stacking” of course presupposes a previous differentiation of these registers, which Hegel and Stein would not deny. But behind this “stacking” procedure lies the implicit truth claim – in both authors, I intend to demonstrate – that such a melding or confusing of expressive registers is a more truthful methodological approach to speaking truth than it would be to keep such registers separate and to present such models unmixed (see my use of the term “adequation” above). If it is objected that all thinkers simultaneously stack and separate the inferential registers of their sentences, I simply retort that, nevertheless, most thinkers are not as obsessed with making these degrees of separation and melding explicit or unavoidably important. Again, this will be best demonstrated in Hegel’s exposition of the ‘speculative proposition’ and Stein’s creation of her category of “completion.”

It is precisely through these logical enfoldings, these enthymeme-like compressions, conflations, and stackings, that we can start to observe the diffuse pressure of the “theological” on the molding of the theory of the sentence in Stein and Hegel alike.

ii) Stein’s theology: a genealogical account

Gertrude Stein’s relation to theology is a good place to start, especially because theological strains impinge on her thought from all angles throughout her life, and a genealogical account of those impingements tells a story of the sort of stacked, conflated, slowly-developing, and diffused pressure that theological considerations had on her (likewise developing) theories of sentence-making.
Since very little work has been done on the theological preoccupations of Stein’s mind, the following will constitute a gathering of the relevant, but sparse, secondary literature.\(^\text{32}\) Here we want to ask: what hints do we find in Stein scholarship, and in Stein’s words themselves, about seeing Stein’s linguistic innovations as a theological or quasi-theological project? As with the consideration of Hegel’s theology that will follow, we will not be searching for bold theological proclamations in these works; we will rather be asking about the manifold theological pressures at work in Stein’s thought, so that we can then ask, in a later chapter, how such pressures worked to mold Stein’s theory of the sentence.

a) Biblical textures

Gertrude Stein came from a Jewish family, but disavowed any actual belief in the God of Judaism as early as her 1896 Radcliffe composition entitled *The Modern Jew Who Has Given Up the Faith of His Fathers Can Reasonably and Consistently Believe in Isolation*.\(^\text{33}\) Amy Feinstein rightly notes that this was “one of the few known pieces in

\(^\text{32}\) The sources I cite constitute ample reason to read Stein through a theological lens *especially* because these interpretations did not come from writers who had a theological agenda, but rather from writers who were trying to make sense of Stein in some way, and apparently stumbled on the question of her ‘theology’ rather accidentally. This accidental stumbling to me suggests some necessary connection. It shows that Stein’s contemporaries were struck by this odd dimension of her thought, and that they couldn’t ignore it. Such theological considerations, however, have been largely absent from more current readings of Stein – hence my harkening back to these earlier strands of criticism. In this thesis, I propose to remedy this lack not as if it is a mere curiosity, but because I believe such a recognition of Stein’s theological presupposition makes for better, more comprehensive readings of writings that have been notoriously hard to get a handle on. I believe this should make for a fuller reading of Stein, but I also believe that such an approach should pose healthy challenges to readings of Stein that have become complacent in their use (and sometimes imposition) of feminist, Marxist, historical, and merely literary models.

\(^\text{33}\) See Feinstein 2001.
which Stein treats directly the question of Jewish identity” (ibid. 416). And Stein’s emphasis in that paper was indeed on the question of identity, and not on the question of theology, except in what the title announced: that “faith” is something “renounced.” Feinstein rather sees the paper as the first instance of Stein’s “preoccupation with the ambiguities and varieties of human types in general and Jewish types in particular” (ibid. 416). For our purposes here, we can note that in this paper, Stein sketched a movement from defining the “Jewish Faith” as “a belief in a personal or quasi-personal God such as is described in the Old Testament” (ibid. 423), to questions such as these: “How can one look back proudly to the origin of a race based on a covenant with God when the belief in that God has departed? What do you mean by declaring yourselves the Chosen People when you deny the existence of the Chooser?” (ibid. 425). In her paper, Stein was then content to speak of the Jewish faith as “a poetical description of the rise of a race,” and the terms of that faith as having a “spiritual meaning” (ibid. 425), though it is not clear what “spiritual meaning” means here. She concludes by defining Judaism again in terms of the personal identity that arises from individual “endeavor” and the communal identity that arises from “a banding together of a people making of themselves a brotherhood devoted to noble aims and great deeds” (ibid. 427).

The category “identity” is one Stein will thoroughly disfigure in works like The Making of Americans and Tender Buttons. Most relevant to our thesis is the curious fact that “identity” swoops in to save the day when the “God coordinate” has been emptied of its meaning (we will witness similar moves in Hegel35); indeed, that very emptying-out can then become something personal and identificatory. Note that in this early article of

34 See also Maria Damon’s article “Gertrude Stein’s Jewishness, Jewish Social Scientists and the ‘Jewish Question.’” Modern Fiction Studies 42 (1996): 489-506.
35 See Chapter 2 below.
Stein’s the shift from “God” to “identity” provokes no verbal or syntactic novelties, except for a notable Steinian elision of the commas in the phrase “Abraham Issac [sic] and Jacob” (ibid. 425). Such innovation would not be expected from Stein’s early assignments at Radcliffe, but neither should we necessarily expect that the theological position (or lack of one) that she lays out there would carry into her mature work.

For we then have to ask what happened between such a renunciation of faith and, say, the assessment of Allegra Stewart in 1957 that, in Stein’s work, the “measure is devotion rather than use” (*SQ* 491). Stewart rightly notes that “in Gertrude Stein’s vocabulary [the poetic object] is variously called a ‘hymn,’ a ‘prayer,’ a ‘song,’ a ‘meditation,’ a ‘masterpiece’ of human experience – given an immortality beyond the life of both the knowing subject and the known object, in an object totally new” (*SQ* 491).

We will have to throw Stein’s 1896 question back at her later works: “What do you mean by a ‘hymn,’ a ‘prayer,’ or a ‘meditation,’ when you deny the existence of the divine Recipient of those hymns, prayers, meditations?” One potential answer is given half-way through *The Making of Americans*, where Stein concludes: “I write for myself and strangers.” This deep phrase, this deep Steinian program, leaves open the question of identity, for the “I” in *Making of Americans* is no simple pronoun; and it also leaves open the question of theology, for this statement sends Stein’s works off into who-knows-where, and by writing for strangers, Stein might very well have been entertaining angels unawares (see Hebrews 13:2). Here it is most important simply to note that Stein recorded this conflicted relationship with her Jewish background, and that that relationship would continue, in however transmogrified a form, to affect her literary productions throughout her life.
Twenty years later, the testimonies of Carl Van Vechten and Thornton Wilder, issued after the publication of *The Making of Americans*, supply attestation from these closest of Stein’s friends and literary confidants that Judeo-Christian themes – or at least biblical literary textures – were never far from Stein’s purview. On April 19th, 1923 Carl Van Vechten wrote the following evaluation of *The Making of Americans* to Stein herself:

I mean, to the average reader, the book will probably be work. I think even the average reader will enjoy it, however, once he begins to get the rhythm, that is so important. To me, now, it is a little like the Book of Genesis. There is something Biblical about you, Gertrude. Certainly there is something Biblical about you…I liked the passages about fat people, and washing, and religion, and old man Hersland certainly emerges complete from this first volume.36

It seems likely that Van Vechten was picking up both on the ‘Biblical’ thrust, texture, and expanse of *The Making of Americans*, and on explicitly biblical allusions throughout the work. The opening passage of that book (*MOA* 3), for example, reads like a practical exposition of Proverbs 22:28 – “Do not move the ancient boundary / Which your fathers have set” – when we hear of an “angry man” who “dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard”:

“Stop!” cried the groaning old man at last. “Stop! I did not drag my father beyond this tree.”

It is hard living down the tempers we are born with. We all begin well, for in our youth there is nothing we are more intolerant of than our own sins writ large in others and we fight them fiercely in ourselves; but we grow old and we see that these our sins are of all sins the really harmless ones to own, nay that they give a charm to any character, and so our struggle with them dies away (MOA 3).

And in this manner, Stein heralds the book’s experimentations with a concerted confluence of biblical texture, compressed narrative, questions of identity and time, and internal exegesis (all of which will be on display in Chapters 4 and 5 below). Elsewhere, Stein alludes to the “hedge of roses” from the Song of Songs 7:3 (MOA 36). She dwells long on the dynamics of hypocrisy (MOA 62; 489), as if in Jesus mode. And her reflections on “the twenty-ninth year of life” ring both of the ministry of Jesus that started around his 30th year, and of Joshua’s call to “chose this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15, KJV). Witness how much of her vocabulary in that passage seems to be borrowed from the King James Bible:

It happens often about the twenty-ninth year of a life that all the forces that have been engaged through the years of childhood, adolescence and youth in confused

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37 This opening tale in fact compresses many allusions. We hear hints of Browning, Aristotle, Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘The Story of a Lie,’ and Johann Peter Hebel’s ‘Kindesdank und Undank’ throughout.
and sometimes angry combat range themselves in ordered ranks [cf. 1 Samuel 4:2], one is certain of one’s aims, meaning and power during these years of tumultuous growth when aspiration has no relation to fulfillment and one plunges here and there with energy and misdirection during the strain and stress of the making of a personality until at last we reach the twenty-ninth year, the straight and narrow gateway [cf. Matthew 7:14] of maturity and life which was all uproar and confusion narrows down to form and purpose and we exchange a dim possibility for a big or small reality [cf. Joshua 24:15; Romans 1:25; 1 Corinthians 13:12] (MOA 436-7; my italics).

Along with such allusions, many of the repetitions that make up The Making of Americans read like Hebraic parallelisms, where a new phrase augments or repeats content, but does not necessarily move beyond it:38 “and so this one was quick in developing, / early in flowering / and this one was always trying to be a slower one / and this one really never was in living a really slow one” (MOA 559). We may guess that some of this biblical texturing lead to Van Vechten’s assessment that there was “something Biblical” about Stein.39

38 See Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry. New York: Basic Books, 1985. Alter identifies eight different ways that parallelism can effect a “semantic shift” between the items on both sides of the parallel: “synonymity, synonymity with verbatim repetition, complementarity, focusing, heightening, intensification, specification, and consequentiality” (32). A simple example from Hebrew prose is Genesis 11:30: “Sara was barren; she had no child.” Bob Dylan sometimes writes this way: “The hanging judge was sober; he hadn’t had a drink” (see ‘Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts’ on Blood on the Tracks).

39 Stein’s epistolary replies show no sign of a response to Van Vechten’s remarks, except that she thanked him for a review from some years earlier (the review doesn’t mention Stein’s ‘Biblical’ textures) with these words: ‘It would take an awful lot more than the perfect letter writer to tell you how much I liked your thing on me. It did just what I have always wanted to be done that it
Thornton Wilder later confirms that Stein was reading the Old Testament along with the other mega biblia of western literature, and that such works were “frequently in her conversation,” if not frequently influencing her art, while she was writing a work like The Geographical History of America, published in 1936:

“This book grew out of Miss Stein’s meditations on literary masterpieces. Why are there so few of them? For what reasons have they survived? What qualities separate the masterpieces from the works that are almost masterpieces? The answers usually given to these questions did not satisfy her. It was not enough to say that these books were distinguished by their “universality,” or their “style,” or their “psychology” or their “profound knowledge of the human heart.” She thought a great deal about the Iliad and the Old Testament and Shakespeare, about Robinson Crusoe and the novels of Jane Austen – to quote the works that appeared most frequently in her conversation during the months that this book was approaching completion – and the answer she found in regard to them lay in their possession of a certain relation to the problems of identity and time.\textsuperscript{40}

As we noted in Stein’s Radcliffe essay, here again her emphasis was on identity, and that emphasis is then dissolved and dispersed by all that Stein was “thinking a great deal about.”

b) Working under theological pressures?

We can see how questions of “identity and time” are never far from questions of the theological for Stein, when we look to Laura Riding Jackson’s 1927 essay entitled *The Word-Play of Gertrude Stein* – an article that quickly spins out into discussions of much more than just Stein’s “word-play.” Jackson’s tone here is highly critical, almost scathing, but because of this, she offers an approach to Stein that is refreshingly detached and probing. I believe Jackson’s article sets forth, more than almost any other, some pragmatic keys to interpreting what Stein was up to in her sentence-making.

The first of those two big keys is Jackson’s proposal that the “compression” (and, we might say more generally, the resultant syntactic innovations) of Stein’s writing was the result of certain implicit theological pressures. The second: toward the end of her essay, Jackson proposes that the most salient way of seeing Stein’s work as “theological” is to take it not just as work refined by the pressures of having to *account for God*, but rather as an attempt to *approximate the very vantage point of God*. That is, she contends that Stein herself was playing God, and her sentences were the result of that posture. Here again we will draw comparisons with Hegel, who has often been accused of blurring the distinction between the mind of man and the mind of God.41

Jackson’s article starts out with many semi-dismissive remarks that would seem to choke and mock Stein’s intentions from the outset. She says standard things like the following about the “nonsense” practice Stein was engaged in: “Gertrude Stein’s work

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41 See, e.g., G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller. New York: Routledge, 1965, §53. Further references to this translation will be denoted *SLM* with § number. Also see Houlgate pp. 17-18, e.g.; and the discussion of Hegel’s theology that follows in this chapter.
consists of studied deviations from rational continuity of thought” (*CEGS* 241); she speaks of “the seeming elementalness of their [Stein’s sentences’] verbal characteristics” (ibid. 241), noting that “It can be seen that this technique of word-use obliterated all categorical difference between making sense and not making sense” (ibid. 243); and at her most critical, Jackson devolves into comments like this: “The appearance of purest simplicity [in Stein’s verbal constructions] is false; it is not a simple thing, but astute syntax-flouting and sense-flouting – applause of it is applause of the worm” (ibid. 242)!

We should take such assessments to heart, though. My thesis also claims that Stein’s constructions are not a “simple thing,” but I add that there is nevertheless something real going on in Stein’s “syntax-flouting and sense-flouting,” something deserving just a bit more than the “applause of the worm.” Even worse, Jackson devolves into childish and offensive caricatures of Stein: “her use of words planted on the nothingish scene of critically legislated literary modernism an honest-injun Literary Nothing” (ibid. 253).

But at the same time, Jackson, I think correctly, notes that even in Stein’s attempts at a “language-yet-nothingness” (ibid. 244), Stein was dead serious in her experimentations: “there is no lightness in the play. Gertrude Stein has the genius of total seriousness – the so rare genius” (ibid. 246). Here we may think of Aristotle’s *spoudaios*, “seriousness,” as the requisite and result of scientific and ethical study. 42 So, in spite of the above remarks, Jackson confirms that Stein’s experiments were made in all sincerity, and that they are best studied with all sincerity: “One must not think of her as enacting publically a private position. She *meant* the meaning-devastating consequences of the

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42 See, e.g., *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1098a8ff (Book 1, Chapter 7).
play with all her mind – and if, also, with all her heart, this was by the personal signature to the sincere intention” (*CEGS* 247; my italics).

But then we must ask what such “seriousness” and “sincerity” consists in; what is its cause and aim? Jackson proceeds to draw out the more far-reaching psychological (or cosmological or theological) implications of such linguistic practices: “How Gertrude Stein’s verbal constructions sounded is how human existence would sound if human beings abandoned their linguistic proficiencies as encumbrances upon the intelligence, yet held on to words as accessories of an intelligent, mentally therapeutic exercise of stupidity” (ibid. 243; my italics). Once again, Jackson’s scathing tone obscures some real, good interpretive intent. The phrase “how human existence would sound if human beings abandoned their linguistic proficiencies as encumbrances upon the intelligence” rings eerily of Hegel’s statement in the Introduction to his *Science of Logic*. There he speaks of the “objective thinking,” the “content of pure science,” that would be on display in the categories of the *Science of Logic*, as “truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind” (*SL* §53; my italics). We will discuss the theological debates that have ensued from this statement below. For Stein, such stripping of presuppositions, such “abandonment” of linguistic encumbrances, would seem to be at least one principal aim of books like *The Making of Americans*, where we watch as meaning devolves and sense is built back up again in a sort of echo-chamber of propositional counterpoint. On Jackson’s assessment, such “abandoning of linguistic proficiencies” can have a “purifying intent” – the seeking of proof, in the word-play, of the possibility of having *language-yet-*
nothingness – an intention and potential of purification” (*CEGS* 244; my italics). Or the process can lead to the curious construction of a theological universe. Let us dive into Jackson’s explication of the latter.

Jackson sees Stein as in league with the theological stipulations of Alfred North Whitehead, whom Stein “knew as a friend” (ibid. 245). The theological position Jackson cites is not dissimilar to that of the “presuppositional apologetics” of people like Cornelius Van Til43 who take the presupposition of a God as the limit and check on other truth claims about reality. But Van Til and his school nowhere refer to God’s existence as “the ultimate irrationality,” as does Whitehead here. I will quote Jackson’s passage in full, italicizing the crucial ideas:

[Whitehead], in his metaphysical speculations, stressed the necessity of a principle of limitations. He called “the ultimate limitation” God. [Quoting from Whitehead] “…and His existence is the ultimate irrationality. For no reason can be given for just that limitation which it stands in His nature to impose. God is not concrete, but He is the ground for concrete actuality. No reason can be given for the nature of God, because that nature is the ground of rationality.” This argument preaches a necessary limit to rationality, as the spiritual principle of existence, and the law of human intelligence. By the argument’s terms, a shrunken intellectuality and a shrunken spirituality are the human expression of what is ultimately inexpressible. Gertrude Stein responds to this cramped religious-

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philosophical-scientific pattern of cosmic explanation with a *shrunk*  

*linguisticality (CEGS 245).*

This position is not fully in line with most Judeo-Christian conceptions of God, because in a properly Judeo-Christian biblical world-view, even if the claims of that God produce a presupposition that limits and circumscribes the types of truth claims that can be made, that presupposition need not produce a “shrunk intellectuality.” It might be that being beholden to the claims of a *book* limit what can be said about the world outside that book; “people of the Book” of all stripes exhibit certain limits on their ways of speaking and thinking. Nowhere, though, do we find Stein explicitly beholden to, and thereby limited by, the claims of the Bible, for instance. We will, however, find her creating linguistic limits because of her concept of “completion” – which concept arises from Biblical phrases, and their implied theological strictures, like “serving God and mammon,” in *Lectures in America* (see this discussion in Chapter 4 below).

I cite this passage from Jackson, though, not because it proves that Stein was following a biblical pattern of thought, but rather because it makes an interesting proposal for why Stein’s verbal experiments exhibit the textures they do – those of being “shrunk” and “cramped” (and I would add: obsessed with the inner workings of the sentence). By these characterizations, I think Jackson is referring to Stein’s limited vocabulary, the greyness of her verbal textures, Stein’s experimentation at the level of syntax instead of at the level of semantics, and the limits of the verbal means Stein allows herself.

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44 See Van Til 1-2 and 18; also, e.g., Deuteronomy 11; Psalm 1; 1 Corinthians 2:16.
45 Cf. how Stein characterizes Crabbe and Wordsworth in *LIA* 124, e.g.
Jackson’s speculation helps us see that for Stein, experiments with grammatical form and expression were not a battle peculiar to her “modernism” or to “her time” (though we cannot deny that they were products of that time). In her Lectures in America, Stein sees this shrunkenness and crampedness as a vital part of poetic experimentation across the historical board:

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that. *Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns. That is what poetry does, that is what poetry has to do no matter what kind of poetry it is* (*LIA* 231; my italics).

But Stein in fact articulates this sort of concern with the small, “replaceable,” units of language as more of a “drunkenness” than a result of “shrunken intellectuality”: “Nouns are the name of anything. Think of all that early poetry, think of Homer, think of Chaucer, think of the Bible and you will see what I mean you will really realize that they were drunk with nouns, to name to know how to name earth sea and sky” (*LIA* 233). In Stein’s *Transatlantic Interview*, she reveals some of the critical motives behind this “drunken” and “shrunken linguisticality,” citing a phrase from *Tender Buttons*: “‘Dirty is yellow.’ Dirty has an association and is a word that I would not use now. I would not use words that have definite associations. That was earlier work and none of the later things

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have this” (*TB* 26). She was constantly, progressively, concerned with purging her writings of “words that have definite associations,” thereby marshaling the potential associations of all phrases, to meet the demands of this “shrunken” word-scape.

Jackson quickly, however, makes an opposite sort of assessment, namely that “Gertrude Stein’s words are not for the uses of any sort of spiritual reorientation. Their reality is that of a realism of disavowal of all but a phenomenological reality in them. They are words stripped to a nudity of psychic inconsequentiality” (*CEGS* 249). But if we pit *this* assessment of Jackson’s against her claim above that “a shrunken intellectuality and a shrunken spirituality are the human expression of what is ultimately inexpressible” (ibid. 245), then Stein’s words are always caught in this crossfire of being “shrunkenly spiritual” and “not for the uses of any sort of spiritual reorientation.” They are caught in the crossfire of being too solipsistic, too shrunken, too nude and psychic and inconsequential *and simultaneously* being a very high expression of “what is ultimately inexpressible,” which points to what is theological, objective, external, and not at all “shrunken.”

In other words, Jackson’s approach, though it is quite confusing and rather inchoate, forces us to read Stein’s work as simultaneously too objective and too subjective, too cramped and too cosmological, potentially profound at the theological level and potentially the mere game of human, personal, godless, solipsistic experimentation. We might summarize this approach by saying the following: Stein’s verbal textures were necessitated by a vague presupposition of a God who demands that human expression be both limited and expanded in efforts to better account for a world under the sway of that God. Jackson’s evaluation is most useful in helping us see that
Stein could never be content with the adequation model of verbal representation. Her words were never merely descriptive of something. We might rephrase this: Stein’s words were descriptive of something that was beholden to the very thing her words were beholden to!

To circle back around to our discussion above of Hegel’s and Stein’s conflations of various levels of inference, and various epistemological claims, this gives rise to Stein’s textures of verbal impartiality, verbal equalization, and a sort of epistemological leveling of the playing field. In the Transatlantic Interview she calls it an “evenness.”

There historicizing herself, Stein writes, “Up to that time composition had consisted of a central idea, to which everything else was an accompaniment and separate but was not an end in itself, and Cezanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another thing. Each part is as important as the whole” (TAI 15; my italics). From the point of that early realization, Stein’s innovations would consist of this constant equation of compositional part and compositional whole:

You see I tried to convey the idea of each part of a composition being as important as the whole. It was the first time in any language that anyone had used that idea of composition in literature. Henry James had a slight inkling of it and was in some senses a forerunner, while in my case I made it stay on the page quite composed. You see he made it sort of like an atmosphere, and it was not solely the realism of the characters but the realism of the composition which was the

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important thing, the realism of the composition of my thoughts (TAI 15-16; cf. 25).

This model of composition has been seen by some as derived from the cubist model. But Rachel Blau DuPlessis (whose claims we will evaluate in Chapter 4 below) and Jackson (here) have, I think rightly, remarked that Stein is exceeding the cubist model. And Jackson suggests that she exceeds that model precisely because of such implicit theological pressures as we have been discussing.

c) Or assuming the place of God?

In the latter half of her essay, Jackson gives this theologically bound predicament a new spin. She speaks of Stein’s “new absolutism” (CEGS 253) or her “everything policy” (ibid. 248). She writes: “Gertrude Stein made no deals with the past. She rested – a consistent absolutist of a basic undefinable – at recording just what the succession of pure present evanescent moments admitted of sense-accumulation” (ibid. 253). This emphasis on temporal dimensions as the leveling factor in Stein’s work is confirmed in the Transatlantic Interview, where Stein writes that: “there should not be a sense of time, but an existence suspended in time” (TAI 20). And again we can see that this was indeed Stein’s peculiar project, and not one she saw as shared with or accomplished by her modernist colleagues like Hemingway, whose time, Stein writes, was “false…on account of his newspaper training” (TAI 20). It seems that Stein’s relationship with time was one
of a gradual expunging of temporal properties, as if to achieve a ‘timeless’ non-journalistic stance in true narration.

This then begins to look a lot like approximating the position of an a-temporal God, one who could achieve what Stein sees as true, objective “narration”:

I found that in the essence of narration is this problem of time. You have as a person writing, and all the really great narration has it, you have to denude yourself of time so that writing time does not exist. If time exists, your writing is ephemeral. You can have a historical time, but for you the time does not exist, and if you are writing about the present, the time element must cease to exist (TAI 20; my italics).

And indeed Jackson’s reading ends up accusing Stein of occupying the position of a timeless God, because of the tireless involutions of Stein’s own identity, the shrunkenness of her project as described above, and because of just this obscuring of the time-coordinates in description: “She was, by her own created image of herself, as a compendium of human versatility compressing the range of diversity within it to so abbreviated a representation that she was the God of herself” (CEGS 260; my italics). In the final paragraph of Jackson’s essay, she writes:

Dismiss those difficulties of being, thinking, speaking, and you absent yourself to an ease of tireless deity-being. To whom? Gertrude Stein has actually won for herself the status of a figure of at least quasi-divinity in literary lore. Timidity of
identifying themselves as non-comprehenders of her writing and her intent, or as irreverent disbelievers in the title of what she did to being taken seriously, has become the rule where quasi-worshipfulness is not the rule. Perhaps everyone up to the time of her self-deification was-is to blame, for the great emptiness that had accumulated in human self-knowledge – which Gertrude Stein tried to fill with herself for everyone’s edification (ibid. 260).

Jackson’s approach, then, very clearly suggests that another way of reading Stein’s work as “theological” is to read it as an attempt to create sentences uttered from the perspective of God him/herself.

I have only been able to find one place in Stein’s writing where such an approach is confirmed outright. In Thornton Wilder’s Introduction to Stein’s Four in America, Wilder cites a conversation with Stein where she is purported to have said:

Now if we write, we write; and these things we know flow down our arm and come out on the page. The moment before we wrote them, we did not really know we knew them; if they are in our head in the shape of words then that is all wrong and they will come out dead; but if we did not know we knew them until the moment of writing, then they come to us with a shock of surprise. This is the Moment of Recognition. *Like God on the Seventh Day we look at it and say it is good.* That is the moment that some people call inspiration, but I do not like the
word inspiration, because it suggests that someone else is blowing that knowledge into you. *It is not being blown into you; it is very much your own* (FIA xi).

Here Jackson’s thesis is confirmed that at least one of Stein’s principal theological modes was that of assuming the place of God the creator and evaluator who “looks at it and says it is good.”

Jackson, then, has given us two remarkable and profound approaches to Stein’s writing project. In the first, Stein innovates under the epistemological restraints of accounting for the presupposition of God. In the second, Stein innovates by assuming the position of God and creating sentences from that eternal vantage point.

**iii) Hegel’s theology: where to begin?**

Hegel too has often been accused of just this sort of grandiose claim – namely, that he is himself assuming the intellectual vantage point of God, or that his system makes human thought and divine thought equal. This is a faulty approach to Hegel’s theology, and like Stein’s similar conceit above, it only holds water as one among many ways of mapping the manifold theological impulses in Hegel. We will address it briefly,

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48 The last two sentences reflect the confusion engendered by the King James translation of 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is *inspired by God* and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” During Stein’s lifetime, B.B. Warfield would clarify that the Greek word there, *theopnustos*, is better translated “God-breathed” (see Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1951), confirming Stein’s approach to inspiration as the author/Creator’s “breathing out” or “blowing out” of something “very much your own.”

49 See Houlgate 2006, 17-18, for a useful discussion and the relevant background in the German Idealists’ reception of Kant’s “intellectual intuition.”
in order to move past it to a more nuanced reading of the status of the theological in connection with Hegel’s “speculative sentence.”

Cornelius Van Til discusses this blurring of distinctions between the human and the divine mind in an implicit attack on Hegel, noting that the doctrine of sin – articulated as the *separation* between God and man in Isaiah 59:2, e.g.\(^5^0\) – and sin’s affects on human thinking, are really what are at issue if Hegel is indeed making such claims:

A question closely related to that of method is that of the place and function of reason in theology. If the method employed by theology is the ordinary inductive method, it goes without saying that the human reason will be thought of as non-Christians generally think of it; that is, *human reason will not be thought of as having been influenced by the fall of man into sin*. There will be no recognition of the *noetic effects of sin on man*. Then, too, *the human reason will be placed on a par with divine reason*. Non-Christians think of reality as one whole, inclusive of God and man, and consequently they think of Reason as everywhere the same, whether in God or in man. Human reason is said or assumed to be potentially divine (Van Til 21; my italics).

While Hegel may indeed be guilty of approaching theology from something less than the Christian biblicist’s perspective, he is in fact everywhere borrowing his notion of the *confluent relationship* between the Creator’s mind and the creature’s mind from the

\(^{50}\) “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (NAS).
Christian Bible, and from his understanding of the incarnation of God in Christ.\textsuperscript{51} What is more, Hegel dwells heavily on the “noetic effects of sin” in the \textit{Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion}\textsuperscript{52} and the \textit{Phenomenology}\textsuperscript{53} alike. But a misunderstanding like the one Van Til articulates, namely, that Hegel’s thought is meant as an approximation of the mind of God, pure and simple, stems first from a misunderstanding of the primacy of \textit{mediation} in Hegel’s thought, whereby no such monolithic stance could be held without it crumbling under the weight of its own self-negations.\textsuperscript{54} And it stems, secondly, from the oft-misquoted statement with which Hegel introduces his demonstration of the categories in the \textit{Science of Logic}. We alluded to this statement above. Now we must understand that it was primarily intended to introduce Hegel’s thinkers to his book on the categories of “logic,” as “the system of pure reason,” “the realm of pure thought.” In a literal translation, that statement reads:

\begin{lyxlist}{-1}
\item \textit{This realm is truth as it is without veil in and for itself}. One can thus express oneself: that this content is \textit{the presentation of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite spirit} (my translation; Hegel’s italics).
\end{lyxlist}

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. such texts as: “You have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16); “to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27); and all of John 17. See Hegel’s discussions in \textit{Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion}, 3 vols., ed. P.C. Hodgson, trans. P.C. Hodgson, R.F. Brown, and J.M. Stewart, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984-87, pp. 211-222. Further references to this work will be denoted \textit{LPR}.

\textsuperscript{52} See \textit{LPR} pp. 17-18, 29-30, 41-42, 202-206, and 296-305, e.g.

\textsuperscript{53} See \textit{PS} sections VI.C ‘Spirit that is certain of itself. Morality’ and VII.C ‘The revealed religion,’ and especially §783.

\textsuperscript{54} Further discussed in Chapter 2 below.
Dieses Reich ist die Wahrheit, wie sie ohne Hülle an und für sich selbst ist. Man kann sich deswegen ausdrücken, daß dieser Inhalt die Darstellung Gottes ist, wie er in seinem ewigen Wesen vor der Erschaffung der Natur und eines endlichen Geistes ist (SLM §50/5:44).

The phrase “One can thus express oneself,” absent from Miller’s translation, signals that Hegel is using a figure of speech in order to engender the sort of comportment toward thinking that his “pure,” “unveiled,” and “in and for itself” exposition of the categories requires. What is more, the genitive construction “the presentation of God” (“die Darstellung Gottes”) leaves indeterminate whether this is “God’s own presentation” or a “presentation with God as its object.” I don’t mean to claim, however, that Hegel’s invocation of “God as he is in his eternal essence” is merely an instructive metaphor; it in fact points to a striking coincidence between the structures of Hegel’s thought and the pressures of theology on those structures. I simply mean to demonstrate that this is not the proper vantage from which to consider Hegel’s theology. What matters most is that here Hegel is in fact initiating his readers into the “presuppositionlessness,”

55 For the most accurate treatment of this subject, with much reference to Hegel’s critique of Kant, see Beatrice Longuenesse, Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics, trans. Nicole J. Simek, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 165-191. Longuenesse concludes, “My view is that Hegel is right in seeing a tension within Kant’s philosophy between “point of view of man” and striving towards “knowledge of God.” Hegel is also right in claiming that the resolution of this tension depends on an interpretation and development of Kant’s theory of judgment. But I have tried to defend the view that Kant’s critical philosophy offered the tools for a resolution symmetrically opposed to the one Hegel is attempting: a systematic development of the “point of view of man” which is quite different from the Lockean “empirical psychology” Hegel is accusing Kant’s transcendental philosophy of collapsing into. Elements for such a development can certainly be found in Hegel’s philosophy itself – in his Phenomenology of Spirit, but also in his mature Science of Logic and Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences” (191).
Voraussetzungslösigkeit,\textsuperscript{56} that his philosophy, and consequently his theology, necessitate as a starting point.

a) Presupposition-less theologizing

This passage in fact suggests that we cannot begin our investigation of Hegel’s theology (by definition an “account of God”) by simply asking how he accounts (conceptually) for God as an object of thought. Instead, we ought to say that Hegel’s theological position cannot be gleaned apart from an understanding of how he construes conceptual development in general, which in turn is always and only expressed in the concatenation of the linguistic entities we call sentences. I begin instead, then, with two proposals that govern the claims of the Hegel portion of this thesis:\textsuperscript{57} first, Hegel’s theology can only be discerned in light of his sentence-practice; and yet: Hegel’s sentence-practice is best assessed in light of his theological persuasions.

The circularity of these two proposals is in fact a natural outpouring from the call for “presuppositionless thought” in the above passage. Stephen Houlgate gives a crucial overview of just how this call should arrest our approach to Hegel:

Hegelian ontology cannot provide such “definitions of the Absolute” because it does not start out by assuming that there is an Absolute (or substance or God or spirit) and see its task as that of providing an account of such a “thing” (and of

\textsuperscript{56} See The Encyclopedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991, §78: “Science should be preceded by universal doubt, i.e., by total presuppositionless-ness.” Further references are denoted EL. Also cf. Houlgate 29.

\textsuperscript{57} And which, I hope to have demonstrated, have much resonance with our study of Stein.
having to justify its claim to direct access to that “thing”). Indeed, it does not start
out from any determinate conception of what there is at all. It starts our from the
utterly indeterminate awareness or thought of being as such and sees its task as
the onto-logical one of simply unfolding what is implicit in that bare thought
itself (Houlgate 122).

Houlgate makes this assessment in his book on Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, but he is
speaking of “Hegelian ontology” in general, and I believe these thoughts are immediately
pertinent to our study of the “speculative sentence” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*
well. In his dwelling on Hegel’s project of “presupposition-less thinking,” Houlgate
demonstrates why Hegel’s method – across the board – required an “emptying out” of all
operative terms, before they could be meaningfully submitted to conceptual development
and “filled up” again. This, then, will be the best place to start our investigation.

Such a starting place allows us to account for a bivalent dialectical motion
between philosophy and religion throughout Hegel’s work (cf. the circularity of the
proposals above), and to see how that dual motion mirrors the motions of the “speculative
sentence” that we will discuss in Chapter 2. By the terms of “presupposition-less
thinking,” and in the forms of the “speculative sentence,” thought and object are mutually
constituting; likewise, then, in such presuppositionless thinking about God, or in such
speculative sentences forged in the theological flames, subject and object, rational
expression and theological content, are mutually constituting. In Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*,
we find *philosophy* is what absorbs, perfects, or ‘accomplishes’ theology and religion as

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58 See also Houlgate pp. 29-71.
‘its whole object’ (§12). And indeed, Hegel insists on the necessity of the sublation of religion into philosophy throughout his works. But then again, we occasionally find the opposite sorts of statement, for example in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, where it would seem that religion subsumes philosophy, in that “philosophy is theology” and “philosophy is of itself the service of God”:

God is the one and only object of philosophy. [Its concern is] to occupy itself with God, to apprehend everything in him, to lead everything back to him, as well as to derive everything particular from God and to justify everything only insofar as it stems from God, is sustained through its relationship with him, lives by his radiance and has [within itself] the mind of God. Thus philosophy is theology, and occupation with philosophy – or rather in philosophy – is of itself the service of God (*LPR* 1:84).

I believe Hegel principally stresses the sublation of *religion into philosophy*, while always leaving a persistent religious strain in the philosophical, which can in turn bend back and sublate the philosophical. The speculative sentence, as we will demonstrate in Chapters 2 and 3, is all about the supersession of *Vorstellung* (representation) by *Denken* or *Begriff* (thinking or the concept). And this same supersession is also at work, in Hegel’s own account, in the passage from religion to philosophy (again, see *Encyclopedia* §12 ff.). My claim is that, just as there is a persistence of representational thinking in the realm of conceptual thought, Hegel also enacts a crucial persistence of theology in the realm of philosophy. Furthermore, those two sorts of persistence can then

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59 See Theron vii.
make for a counteractive supersession or sublation, so that both representational and theological thought continue to have operative, subjective, agential force precisely when we thought they had become mere predicates, mere terms, mere objects of sublation. Those bizarre motions of thought are precisely the motions of the speculative sentence, which for this reason I think forces us to examine the dialectical function of parts of speech, theological categories, and modes of thought all at once. We will for these reasons ask how Hegel’s “presupposition-less thinking” is enacted first in the realm of the theological.

b) The word “God” and the demands of aufheben

On my understanding, and following Houlgate’s approach, Hegel submits the word “God” to all the same processes of negation and development that he submits any other conceptual term to. The term only becomes meaningful when made the subject of a “determinate negation” or an “Aufhebung,” by which it is simultaneously invested in and suspended. This peculiar Aufheben motion is the very engine of Hegel’s systematic thinking, and it works almost like a microcosm of the grander project of “presupposition-less thinking” just described. It necessitates that a word like “God” appear as something to be developed in the conflicting sentences, paragraphs, sections, and books that make up Hegel’s systematic presentation. Each instance of Hegel’s theological “accounting for God” (theo-logos) should be seen, then, as just that: an instance – by which I mean what Hegel calls a “moment,” a snap-shot of conceptual development (here distinctly

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60 See Houlgate 199-201 and 301-3 for the salient references concerning this central Hegelian operation.
theological), which by its very nature requires its own participation in Hegel’s dialectical movement toward other instances, other moments.

Following this logic-in-motion, we then have to read theological statements in Hegel as part and parcel of a dialectical movement, as reciprocally constituting, and not as stand-alone or mutually negating entities. And indeed, this approach is immediately laid bare in the “Preface” to the Phenomenology, where “the word God” appears in a pregnant initial groping toward the radical logic of the “speculative sentence.” At first glance, this passage would seem to indicate that Hegel held even the word “God” in very low esteem:

In a proposition of this sort [“God is the eternal”], things get started with the word: God. This, for itself, is a senseless sound, a mere name; only the predicate first says what it is, is its fulfillment and meaning; the empty beginning becomes, only in this end, an actual knowing (PS §23/3:26).

But here, what was initially a “senseless sound, a mere name” turns out to be highly expressive of just the sort of subjectivity that a true utterance of the word God would require, as Hegel goes on to explain: “But it is through just this word that it is indicated that not a being or essence or universal in general, but something that reflects into itself, a subject, is posited” (ibid.). In this first theological example of the Phenomenology, we see Hegel beginning to expound the logic of the speculative sentence, and he does so precisely by running the proposition “God is the eternal” through the gamut of presupposition-less thinking, whereby “God” is first stripped of its presupposed baggage
– made a “senseless sound, a mere name” – and then *that very emptiness* is used to set the speculative sentence in motion: the predicate (“the eternal”) points out the emptiness of the subject; the subject (“God”) necessitates the motion to the predicate by its own emptiness; and because these two previously static entities (“God,” “the eternal”) have mutually necessitated the other’s movement, “the empty beginning becomes, only in this end, an actual knowing.” As “section I” above was meant to suggest, this is an instance of Hegel’s theology being subject to the demands of his philosophy, so that the operations performed on the term “God” here are not exclusive to theological predicaments. Indeed, as early as the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*, on “Sense-certainty” (§§95-108), we find this very emptying procedure applied to deictic pronouns and simple expressions of place and time, so that we start to read the speculative valence of sentences like “Now is night” and “Here is tree,” where the shifting referents of *singular* designations like “now” and “here” put the status of propositional subject and predicate in question, making for the inaugural (because relatively basic) speculative sentences of Hegel’s system.

Submitting a word as hallowed as “God” to such a process might irritate the orthodox mind (as it did at least for the polemics of a provocateur like Bruno Bauer⁶¹), but it should just as readily be seen as consonant with the simple demands of most bookish religions, where the term “God” only means as much as its relation to a set of orthodox (confessionally-determined) predicates dictates. In Christianity, for example, this is entirely cogent with Christ’s warning in Matthew 7:23-24 that the use of the “mere name” “Lord” is just as deadly as no reference to God at all:

Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness” (NAS).

I compare this example to Hegel’s “empty name” because here Christ is not addressing people who knowingly “take God’s name in vain,” which would constitute a deliberate blasphemy; here he is speaking to empty uses of the theological signifier that nevertheless masquerade as fulsome uses – a sort of inverted, unknowing blasphemy. All of this functions more as an exhortation to the truth, and not as the mere prohibition of blasphemy; likewise, Hegel’s “empty names” are not blasphemies per se, but are rather dialectical promptings for greater signification. Compare a similar thought in Jeremiah, where God is (most vividly in the KJV) “near in their mouth, and far from their reins [kidneys]” (12:2). A recognition of the moment, then, when the word “God” is entirely empty or meaningless should be no affront to the biblical mind, at least. We must ask what else distinguishes Hegel’s approach.

I locate the most representative statement of Hegel’s theology in the thought that “the absolute is a result.” This is how Hegel puts it in the Preface to the Phenomenology:

It should be said of the absolute that it is essentially result, that it is first only in the end that it is what it is in truth; and precisely herein subsists its nature: to be actual, subject, or the becoming-of-itself (Hegel’s italics; my bolds).
Es ist von dem Absoluten zu sagen, daß es wesentlich Resultat, daß es erst am Ende das ist, was es in Wahrheit ist; und hierin eben besteht seine Natur,


Such a statement is dependent upon its own propositional unfolding, because again, either of its terms (“absolute,” “result”) could be taken as entirely empty on their own (mirroring the use of the word “God” above). To take such a statement as this as theological, however, we must also allow for a synonymity between such terms as “God” and “the absolute” (Houlgate suggested as much in his passage cited above). Here I speak of a “synonymity” and not an unequivocal “univocity;” for it should not be taken for granted that every use of such synonyms can be taken as univocal with the word “God,” and my following analyses will be wary of that fact. Hegel develops that synonymity, however, as early as these sections of the Preface (§20, etc.), where, as said above, an “empty” word like “God” is useful because its emptiness necessitates its participation in a process of subjective or conceptual development, while seemingly fulsome conceptual vessels like “the eternal,” “being,” or “essence” (we may add: “the absolute”) turn out to be too general or too universal to be conceptually expressive; so that they end up requiring the very same syntactic unfolding that a word like “God” did! Such synonymity is also hinted at in Hegel’s Encyclopedia, where he tells us that the “speculative” method is a translation of formerly more theological words like the “mystical.”

62 See EL §82, Add.: “It should…be mentioned here that the meaning of the speculative is to be understood as being the same as what used in earlier times to be called ‘mystical.’”
developing a theological synonymity both within his writings, and at the border between his writings and the theological traditions they envelop.

On such a reading of Hegel’s theology, instead of answering questions of Hegel’s avowed theological allegiance, we should forefront two operations. First, the project of “presupposition-less thinking,” which strips mere words of their presumed fullness and their presumed vacuity alike. (Here I mean to suggest that both “fullness” and “vacuity” have semantic content, but Hegel’s conceptual move is to start with a full negation of such content, even if its initial valence was already somewhat “negative,” or “vacuous.”)

Secondly, we have developed some notion of the inextricability of conceptual development and theological proclamation. By this I mean that a mere theological pronouncement is nothing without its conceptual development, while the mere conceptual development is nothing without moments of alternating theological emptiness and theological commitment. (Hegel’s philosophical trick and richness lies precisely in the methodological guarantee that his dialectical processes of “negation” allow for the sort of “distinction” between emptiness and commitment that can allow the two to alternate and to meld, and also for the sort of systematic integration of all such movements, so that all “theological” dimensions can then also be relegated in favor of conflicting “non-religious” readings.)

In this thesis, those two propositions will result in the following: 1) Sensitivity to the “theological dimensions” of Hegel’s thought, even when those dimensions go by many names (“result,” “the absolute,” “totality,” “Spirit,” “God”). And: 2) sensitivity to the linguistic forms (especially sentences) that make up both the development and the proclamation.
c) Intervening into the Hegel scholarship

As suggested in the Introduction, these considerations should constitute a deep critique of other models of propositional functioning, but it is also a critique that has something to offer, namely, Hegel’s distinctly concrete and new ways of conceiving of the capacities of the proposition. This recognition of the utility of the speculative sentence should also enable us to articulate a worthwhile intervention into the field of Hegel studies. That discussion should now have made clear that I do not believe that saying “Hegel was a Christian” or “Hegel was an atheist” are very fruitful things to do, nor do they help us much in understanding Hegel’s theory of the sentence. To my mind, the relative orthodoxy of Hegel’s theology is best treated in books like Peter Hodgson’s *G.W.F. Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit*, Stephen Theron’s *The Orthodox Hegel*, G.R. Mure’s *A Study of Hegel’s Logic*, Emil Fackenheim’s *The Religious Dimension of Hegel’s Thought*, and Alfredo Ferrarin’s deeply theological *Hegel and Aristotle* (see bibliography). Such books bear out the claim I made in the above introduction, that Hegel was at best a quasi-Christian syncretist, by showing that Hegel was borrowing as much from Christian theology as he was from Aristotelian and Kantian theologies, hence ‘syncretist’; and that his syncretism and historical project contradict the exclusivity of the truth of Christianity, hence the claim that Hegel was working with that religion’s “ideas, but not its truth.” Those books were written largely with a disregard for the polemics of the left-wing/right-wing Hegelian debates that have so defined the cannon, and they were also written before the break that defined the “anti-metaphysical Hegel” camp of people
like Robert Brandom and Robert Pippin.\textsuperscript{63} A brief nod to those divisions now will help to better situate the intervention of this thesis.

It has been conventionally useful to see the field as ranged into the two historical camps of “right-wing Hegelianism” and “left-wing Hegelianism.” But then again, those terms are principally political designations with massive philosophical implications, but the concern of either camp with Hegel’s theology, and with his theory of sentences, is not predictable. While one might expect the liberals to liberate or ignore Hegel’s theology, and the conservatives to treat Hegel as a dogmatic Christian, no such clean correspondence is to be found. The left-wing “Marxist” readers, for example, who take all of Hegel’s terms as created with a mind to (or as themselves being subject to) historico-economic processes, tend to have a tangential care for Hegel’s theology, while they are some of the only readers who at least begin to take Hegel’s “speculative sentence” seriously – see my discussions of Marx, Butler, and Gillian Rose below. The right-wingers, on the other hand, pay little attention to Hegel’s sentences and his theology alike; they are therefore largely absent from this thesis. Now, I don’t think Hegel would necessarily have objected to the approaches of either camp. To my mind, both sides are capable of making claims to legitimate readings of Hegel, but both sides also make incomplete readings,\textsuperscript{64} and I believe this is because neither side fully heeds the dimension


\textsuperscript{64} On the left-wing, Marxist side, for example, a Fredric Jameson may argue that Hegel’s term “Spirit” is only ever a shorthand for human “collectivity” (The Hegel Variations. London, Verso, 2010, p. xxx). But we must note that Hegel’s “Spirit” clearly refers to God in many places (see \textit{LPR} 1:75), and I will argue below that there is a deep relation of synonymy between such terms. On the “conservative” side, we find readers who take Hegel’s discussions of “totality” as leading directly to his championing of a godless totalitarianism; and yet, a reader of the final chapter of the \textit{Phenomenology} cannot help but hear at least a family resemblance between the terms “totality” and “God.”
of Hegel’s “theological syntax” (where questions of God and language meet), whose examination is precisely the contribution of this thesis.

Where there is no clear allegiance to either of the above camps, we instead find a bunch of rogue approaches to Hegel’s language and his God. We find early Christian Hegel-commentators like Bruno Bauer who thought (or at least provocatively trumpeted that) Hegel was the anti-Christ. We find 20th century commentators who see Hegel’s thought as theological through-and-through, but who nevertheless see his syncretistic method as antithetical to orthodox Christian studies – see Cornelius Van Til (cited above). Peter Hodgson (1997) rightly places Hegel as the predecessor to the liberal theologies of German “higher criticism,” but the constitutive role of Hegel’s linguistics is not recognized in such an approach. Then we find others who, in rather insular but totally important philosophical projects, are mining Hegel for his references to the German mystical tradition, like Magee. Finally, we have authors like Stephen Houlgate (2006) who take Hegel’s claims to “presupposition-less thinking” seriously, but who are not keen to take sides in the more recently developed anti-metaphysical/metaphysical Hegel camps.

Here I intend to develop a fruitfully “extreme middle position,” somewhere between the right-wing, left-wing, and “other” interpretations extant in Hegel scholarship. By “extreme middle position,” I mean to point to the value of an approach to Hegel that does not merely constitute a new reading, but that intervenes right at the center

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65 See Bauer 1989.
66 Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, is especially valuable for its “mystical view” of Hegel and the boldness that arises from such a theological reading: “If Hegel departs from the metaphysical tradition in anything, it is in dispensing with its false modesty. Hegel does not claim to be merely searching for truth. He claims that he has found it” (16-17).
of the philosophical, theological, and linguistic nodes we have just discussed, by putting “presupposition-less thinking,” “dialectical movement” and its articulations, the nuances of the “God-coordinate,” and the vital motions of the “speculative sentence” front and center.

Chapter 2: Hegel’s Speculative Sentence: how is it employed?

Subsections:

i) Employed at the level of syntax

ii) Employed at the level of conceptual development

   a) Interpretive or productive?

iii) Employed at the level of Hegel’s system: both interpretive and productive

   a) “Not yet”: the speculative sentence used to track the “very matter itself” of philosophical inquiry

   b) “Already”: the speculative sentence used to treat what absolute knowing has achieved

Having compared Hegel’s theological persuasions and his gropings after a theory of the sentence with similar strains in Gertrude Stein, a question has begun to haunt our inquiry: just how new or different or specialized is this philosophical mode of expression, the speculative sentence, that Hegel has introduced? Or more simply: what precisely is the “speculative sentence”? 
The words *der spekulative Satz* first appear in §61/3:59 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will be alternately translating this phrase as “speculative sentence” and “speculative proposition” throughout this chapter and the next, in order to indicate that Hegel has chosen for his purposes the polyvalent word *Satz*, which in German could signify both a philosophical “proposition” and just your everyday “sentence.” Here we want simply to note that §61 stands as the first appearance of the phrase *der spekulative Satz* in Hegel’s works. The only earlier use of this phrase that we find in the German Idealist tradition occurs *once* in Kant’s *Jaesche Logik*, which reads (rather suggestively for our thesis, I think), “Such merely speculative propositions are very numerous, e.g., in *theology*.” Note that Kant’s usage (discussed in full in Chapter 3 below), made in passing and with a somewhat pejorative tone, *would* suggest that “speculative propositions” are at least somewhat specialized, being relegated mainly to “theology.”

But we have already found that Hegel’s usage is much more integrated and complex, in light of which we have to ask: is Hegel *always* writing in speculative propositions? Should *all* his sentences be interpreted through this lens? And indeed, are *all* sentences *anywhere* (in other philosophers, in everyday language) open to interpretation along these lines? These questions are vital to our consideration of a “theological syntax” because we want to know if the speculative sentence was made only to meet Hegel’s philosophical ends, to meet only his *theological* ends, or if it can be used

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67 Chapter 3 below will be devoted to a full exegesis of that crucial paragraph. Here we will simply ground our reading in a quick glance toward its first sentence.  
68 See Harris 1997 and Pahl (in Surber 2006, pp. 233-244) for these translation questions. In Chapter 3, we will also discuss the relative ‘plasticity’ of this term, where Hegel could have chosen a more entrenched philosophical word like *Urteil*, ‘judgment’ to do his bidding.  
to interpret *all manner* of theological and philosophical sentences outside of Hegel, *and* if it helps us see the confluence between the theological, the philosophical, and the quotidian everywhere. If Hegel is suggesting that *all* sentences can be *read* speculatively, then he is making a readerly or *interpretive* claim. If, however, the speculative sentence is more specialized than that, then he is making a slightly more circumscribed writerly or *productive* claim. I believe we will find that Hegel suggests *both* interpretive and productive modalities and purposes for his speculative sentence, but we will have to ask precisely when and why he puts the emphasis on the former or the latter.

The question of such modalities also incites us to ask: is it self-evident what a “sentence” is at all, once we step into the waters of Hegel’s presupposition-less thinking, theologizing, and sentence-making? Is a proposition still defined in the standard way – as “S is P” – or have we moved into a different realm entirely? In the above chapter, we laid out this intimate relationship between the speculative sentence and Hegel’s philosophical project of presupposition-less thinking. We saw that Hegel’s theology, as well as his sentence-making practice and theories, are beholden to that very same project. We saw that these tasks meet in the demand that Hegel’s sentences be able to express the motions of the Hegelian *aufheben* and “determinate negation,” which I described (Chapter 1.3.ii) as the *simultaneous investment in and suspension of* conceptual material.70 This, I think, is one of the most concrete ways of defining what the speculative sentence *is* and *does*: the speculative sentence is the *agent* of such dialectical negotiations.

This chapter will be devoted to spelling out how the speculative sentence meets this task at the level of Hegel’s i) syntax, ii) conceptual development, and iii) systematic

presentation. And such considerations should enable us to determine just how much those functions internal to Hegel’s thought allow for external application.

i) Employed at the level of syntax

When the speculative sentence is first named in the Phenomenology’s §61, it is introduced as the sort of syntactic unit that destroys, while also being something that the thing destroyed becomes. In the “Introduction” to the Phenomenology, Hegel speaks of this sort of destruction or negation as “a negation that has a content” (Das Nichts...hat einen Inhalt) (§79/3:73). Note, though, that when presenting it in the “Introduction,” Hegel deliberately uses the static language of “negation” (Negation) and “nothingness” (Nichts), not the verbal “destroying” (zerstören) that we find in the Preface. In §61, I believe Hegel allows for the term destruction because it is immediately salvaged by “the proposition of identity,” that is, by a sentence entity, and not by a static noun that could simply be “negated.” At stake here is a process of destruction adhering between the subject and predicate of a sentence, rather than a mere identification of “nothingness” or “content.” Here is Hegel’s presentation of such movements at the level of syntax in §61:

Formally, what has been said can be expressed thus: the nature of the judgment or of the proposition generally, which involves the distinction of subject and predicate, is destroyed by the speculative proposition, and the proposition of identity, which the former becomes, contains the counterthrust to that relation.
Formell kann das Gesagte so ausgedrückt werden, dass die Natur des Urteils
oder Satzes überhaupt, die den Unterschied des Subjekts und Praedikats in sich
schliesst, durch den spekulativen Satz zerstört wird und der identische, zu dem
der erstere wird, den Gegenstoss zu jenem Verhälttnisse enthält (§61/3:59).\textsuperscript{71}

So here we see that the syntax of the speculative sentence allows it to \textit{retain the stuff} – be it grammatical, theological, epistemological, or metaphysical – \textit{that it destroys}\textsuperscript{72} because of the very nature of its propositional concatenations. The speculative sentence destroys “the nature of the judgment” and “the nature of the proposition in general,” \textit{but} it also turns such standard “judgments and propositions” into “propositions of identity,” so that it can be seen that these very propositions themselves “contain” a “counter-thrust” – a jab, an affront – to the ways their parts of speech were originally purported to relate.

Chapter 3 below will be devoted to expounding the many other \textit{syntactic} negotiations of §60-61. Here we want to ask how such syntactic “counterthrusts” serve as the \textit{proper vessel for the conceptual developments} that Hegel’s speculative philosophy means to articulate.

\textbf{ii) At the level of conceptual development}

\textsuperscript{71} My translations throughout. Again, where it is necessary to mark the distinction, Hegel’s \textit{italics} will be retained, and my emphases will appear in \textbf{bold}.

\textsuperscript{72} One could speculate endlessly on why Hegel \textit{needs} this trope – that a negation “has a content,” that destruction “retains what is destroyed” – so much. Its use may be understood Christologically as something that is “the end of the law” (Romans 10:4) but that also “came not to abolish but to fulfill the law” (Matthew 5:17); see Agamben’s \textit{Time that Remains} on Luther’s use of \textit{aufheben} in this connection. We may also speculate that Hegel got this penchant for positivizing the negative from Fichte, or from the conflicted word “determinate” itself (an importation from Spinoza).
Much of Hegel’s “Preface” to the *Phenomenology* is devoted to showing how his “concept” (Begriff) disrupts the less speculative modes of “representational” and “material” thinking (the difference between the two is set forth below) in their respective comportments and grammars. This is meant to set the stage for the many dialectical movements of the *Phenomenology*, which will consist in continual re-workings of representational thought in favor of more dialectically mediated conceptual articulations.

Having shown how this disruption works in §§58-59, Hegel then presents the speculative sentence in §§ 60-62 as the privileged vessel for expressing these conceptual mediations. In order to understand how the speculative sentence meets this expressive task, we will briefly follow the moves of the attack Hegel issues against such inadequate modes of thought in §§58-59.

Here I present a new translation of those paragraphs (a new translation of §§60-61 will appear at the start of Chapter 3 below). Since my thesis is intimately concerned with the syntactic peculiarities of Hegel’s thinking, and the prime syntactic engine of his speculative thought, the translations I am providing are sensitive to the minute motions of Hegel’s sentences. As has been indicated in the preceding chapters, Hegel’s arguments often hinge upon the use of very specific words and very specific syntactic patterns. The common English translations of the *Phenomenology* by Miller (1977) and Pinkard (2011) are invaluable resources, and I have consulted them throughout. Those translators do often, however, obscure the smaller motions of Hegel’s syntax in that they will make sentences shorter than they are in the German, and narrow the semantic range of Hegel’s terms at will. Such translation procedures at times enact the very philosophical commitments that Hegel’s thought is in fact trying to overcome with his almost obsessive
attention to grammar. The implicit claim here, then, is that my translation is itself a start at interpreting. In the analyses that follow, I will make clear why certain translation questions are crucial for a right understanding of Hegel’s linguistic project, and I will cite earlier translations where they present linguistic and philosophical problems. Here, I present the English translation first, followed by the German text.73

58. What therefore is important in the study of science is that one should take upon oneself the effort [\textit{Anstrengung} - strain, exertion] of the concept. This requires attention to the concept as such, to the simple determinations, for example, of \textit{being-in-itself}, \textit{being-for-itself}, of self-equality [\textit{Sichselbstgleichheit}], and so forth; for these are pure self-movements such as could be called souls if their concept did not designate something higher than that. The concept’s interruption of the habit of running away into representations is just as irksome as it is to formalistic thinking that argues back and forth in un-actual thought. That convention should be called material thinking, a contingent consciousness that is absorbed only in stuff, and therefore finds it hard work to lift the self clear of such matter, and to be with itself.

The other \[way of thought\], argumentation, on the contrary, is freedom from content, and vanity concerning it; what is looked for here is the effort \[\textit{Anstrengung}\] to give up this freedom and, instead of being the arbitrarily moving principle of the content, to sink this freedom in the content, letting it move of its

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own nature, that is, through the self as its own self, and then to contemplate this movement. This refusal to intrude into the immanent rhythm of the concept, either arbitrarily or with wisdom attained from elsewhere, constitutes a restraint which is itself an essential moment of attentiveness to the concept.

59. One should further remark upon both sides in the argumentative behavior to which comprehensive thinking is opposed. – On the one hand, the former [argumentation] behaves negatively toward the apprehended content, knows how to refute it and to make it null. That something is not the case, this insight is the mere negative; it is the final, that does not go out to a new content beyond itself; rather, in order to have a content again, something other must be taken over from elsewhere [irgendwoher: from anywhere, somewhere else]. Argumentation is the reflection into the empty I, the vanity of its knowledge. – This vanity, however, expresses not only that this content is vain, but also that this insight itself is; for it is the negative that doesn’t catch sight of the positive within itself. Because this reflection does not obtain [get, lay claim to, earn; Hyppolite: ‘transvalue’ LE 142] its very negativity for its content, it is generally not within the matter, but always out beyond it; therefore, with the establishment of the void, it imagines itself to be always further along than any content-rich insight. On the other hand, as just now shown, in comprehensive thinking the negative belongs to the content itself and is the positive both as its immanent movement and determination and as the whole of it [of the movement and determination]. Apprehended as result, it is what
comes forth from this movement, the *determinate* negative, and with this likewise a positive content.

58. Worauf es deswegen bei dem *Studium der Wissenschaft* ankommt, ist die Anstrengung des Begriffs auf sich zu nehmen. Sie erfordert die Aufmerksamkeit auf ihn als solchen, auf die einfachen Bestimmungen, zum Beispiel des *An-sich-seins*, des *Für-sich-seins*, der *Sichselbstgleichheit* und so fort; denn diese sind solche reine Selbstbewegungen, die man Seelen nennen könnte, wenn nicht ihr Begriff etwas Höheres bezeichnete als diese. Der Gewohnheit, an Vorstellungen fortzulaufen, ist die Unterbrechung derselben durch den Begriff ebenso lästig als dem formalen Denken, das in unwirklichen Gedanken hin und her räsoniert. Jene Gewohnheit ist ein materielles Denken zu nennen, ein zufälliges Bewußtsein, das in den Stoff nur versenkt ist, welchem es daher sauer ankömmt, aus der Materie zugleich sein Selbst rein herausheben und bei sich zu sein. Das andere, das Räsonieren, hingegen ist die Freiheit von dem Inhalt und die Eitelkeit über ihn; ihr wird die Anstrengung zugemutet, diese Freiheit aufzugeben, und statt das willkürlich bewegende Prinzip des Inhalts zu sein, diese Freiheit in ihn zu versenken, ihn durch seine eigne Natur, das heißt, durch das Selbst als das seinige, sich bewegen zu lassen und diese Bewegung zu betrachten. Sich des eignen Einfallens in den immanenten Rhythmus der Begriffe entschlagen, in ihn nicht durch die Willkür und sonst erworbene Weisheit eingreifen, diese Enthaltsamkeit ist selbst ein wesentliches Moment der Aufmerksamkeit auf den Begriff.
59. Es sind an dem räsonierenden Verhalten die beiden Seiten bemerklicher zu machen, nach welchen das begreifende Denken ihm entgegengesetzt ist. - Teils verhält sich jenes negativ gegen den aufgefaßten Inhalt, weiß ihn zu widerlegen und zunichte zu machen. Daß dem nicht so sei, diese Einsicht ist das bloß Negative, es ist das Letzte, das nicht selbst über sich hinaus zu einem neuen Inhalt geht, sondern um wieder einen Inhalt zu haben, muß etwas Anderes irgendwoher vorgenommen werden. Es ist die Reflexion in das leere Ich, die Eitelkeit seines Wissens. - Diese Eitelkeit drückt aber nicht nur dies aus, daß dieser Inhalt eitel, sondern auch, daß diese Einsicht selbst es ist; denn sie ist das Negative, das nicht das Positive in sich erblickt. Dadurch, daß diese Reflexion ihre Negativität selbst nicht zum Inhalte gewinnt, ist sie überhaupt nicht in der Sache, sondern immer darüber hinaus; sie bildet sich deswegen ein, mit der Behauptung der Leere immer weiter zu sein als eine Inhaltsreiche Einsicht. Dagegen, wie vorhin gezeigt, gehört im begreifenden Denken das Negative dem Inhalte selbst an und ist sowohl als seine immanente Bewegung und Bestimmung wie als Ganzes derselben das Positive. Als Resultat aufgefaßt, ist es das aus dieser Bewegung herkommende, das bestimmte Negative, und hiemit ebenso ein positiver Inhalt.

As we come to the question of the speculative sentence employed at the level of conceptual development in these paragraphs, note that we have first heard of “representation” (Vorstellung) and “material thinking” as a sort of formalistic or descriptive storehouse in §51, figured as a “synoptic table, which is like a skeleton with
scraps of paper stuck all over it, or like the rows of closed and labeled boxes in the
grocer’s stall” (“eine Tabelle, die einem Skelette mit angeklebten Zettelchen oder den
Reihen verschloßner Büchsen mit ihren aufgehefteten Etiketten in einer
Gewürzkrämerbude gleicht”) (§51/3:50). This type of rigid, descriptive formalism must
be dealt with, because it does not achieve the sort of *adequatio* Hegel’s philosophy will
demand. A bunch of sticky notes stuck to a skeleton would be no better than the “general
proposition” we just read of, which presents nothing more than “the distinction of subject
and predicate” (*Unterschied des Subjekts und Prädikats*) (§61/3:59), thereby showing
itself impotent in the face of the dialectical motions (*aufheben*, presupposition-less
thinking, determinate negations, syntactic counterthrusts) that a true, speculative
apprehension of its object (here, the skeleton and its bones) necessitates. Hegel’s
speculative thought instead demands that we move from this representational “pigeon-
holing”74 model of knowledge to the task of “expressing the concept itself, or the
meaning of the sensuous representation” (§51/3:50; *PSM* p. 30; my italics). And later in
the *Phenomenology*, once Hegel has achieved this end, we will find him returning to the
skeleton with such riddling speculative sentences as this: “Spirit is a bone”
(§332/3:250),75 whereby disparate realities are grafted together in order to express the
speculative truths of “Observing Reason,” which is able to grasp the mediated relations
between “the brain as the being of self-conscious individuality,” “the actuality and

74 §51/3:50. “Pigeon-holing” is Miller’s suggestive translation (*SLM* 32) of Hegel’s “*der
tabellarische Verstand,*” literally, “the tabular understanding” or “the understanding which just
Tabulates, which keeps careful records, which merely documents.”
75 “Spirit is a bone” has become a canonized simplification of Hegel’s sentence in §332 (see
Zizek as quoted in Chapter 1). The original reads: “der Schädelknochen hat wohl im Allgemeinen
die Bedeutung, die unmittelbare Wirklichkeit des Geistes zu sein,” literally: “The meaning of the
skull-bone is, in general, that of being the immediate actuality of Spirit.”
existence of man” (§331) “the immediate actuality of Spirit” (§332), Hamlet’s fond and manifold anamneses, and an “indifferent, unencumbered thing” like the skull-bone (§333).

The first objection to the mindless pigeon-holing of representational thought is that it requires nothing of its thinker, and in requiring nothing, it is not able to say anything about the epistemological involvement of that thinker. We will find that the speculative proposition is likewise impotent unless it can syntactically carry with it something of the epistemological struggles of the one who utters it. We will find that it is in fact tasked with the operation of making the “the knowing I itself enter into the place of [the grammatical] subject” whereby it becomes “both the knotting of the predicates and the subject holding them” (§60/3:57). But before we get there, Hegel introduces us to his Begriff precisely as something that makes subjective demands on the thinker, something that entails effort: “What therefore is important in the study of science is that one should take upon oneself the effort of the concept” (“Worauf es deswegen bei dem Studium der Wissenschaft ankommt, ist die Anstrengung des Begriffs auf sich zu nehmen”) (§58/3:56). At the epistemological level, then, here we are presented with the conflict of objective and subjective registers in Hegel’s thought: the objective “study of science” meets the subjective “taking upon oneself” and the “effort of the concept.” From this one sentence, we can already glean that the “effort of the concept” consists of just that sort of cramming of epistemological demands. And indeed, the speculative sentence will be at great pains to make whole, and not put asunder, the subjective and objective, by way of the sort of “inferential stacking” I set forth in Chapter 1 (see section 1.iv). What is more, it is pertinent to note that even in this one utterance, Hegel is proposing such an
approach stealthily, right in his sentence, and not in programmatic divisions or hyphenated terms, such as the “subjective-objective” of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel’s own early writings. Consequently, we read not just of the “concept” (Begriff) to be studied, but also of the subjective “effort” or “strain” (Anstrengung) of the concept’s articulation.

What more does this entail? We read that this “effort” consists in attention to the elements of conceptual development: “This requires attention to the concept as such, to the simple determinations, for example, of being-in-itself, being-for-itself, of self-equality, and so forth; for these are pure self-movements such as could be called souls if their concept did not designate something higher than that” (§58/3:56). All such determinations (“being-in-itself, being-for-itself, of self-equality”) are linguistic entities that Hegel will then deploy in sentences, so that they are the mere parts of speech, or parts of the conceptual development that a sentence entails – and such sentences likewise will serve as mere “parts or elements” of the whole dialectical movement of the system (§66/3:62). Here such hyphenated terms seem to have value as self-sufficient forms, as independent speculative words, for they are “pure self-movements” that already carry

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77 Could also be translated: ‘effort,’ ‘exertion,’ ‘strenuousness,’ ‘strain,’ ‘difficulty.’ We find this strain fleshed out later in the paragraph as consisting of feelings of ‘irksomeness,’ ‘interruption,’ and a ‘hard work lifting oneself clear’ of other ways of thought (§58).

78 “Sie erfordert die Aufmerksamkeit auf ihn als solchen, auf die einfachen Bestimmungen, zum Beispiel des An-sich-seins, des Für-sich-seins, der Sichselbstgleichheit und so fort; denn diese sind solche reine Selbstbewegungen, die man Seelen nennen könnte, wenn nicht ihr Begriff etwas Höheres bezeichnete als diese.”

the subjective mediations Hegel found wanting in a (comparatively unmediated) term like “God” in §23 (see our discussion in Chapter 1.3.ii above).

Only with such intimacy, with such care for the words and phrases that will take up the position of subject or predicate in philosophical sentences, can Hegel begin to move toward the true conceptual employments of the speculative sentence, where we will find that “the subject and the predicate themselves are each of them the whole judgment” (EL §180). §58 shows that this monadic “making each of them the whole judgment” consists, in the first instance, of giving “attention” to “the concept,” to the “simple determinations,” and “pure self-movements” that we will watch inflate by way of syntax until they become “each of them the whole judgment.” Such weight, such development and tarrying, is then seen, in §58, to be the crucial threat to the conventional way of thinking.

80 With this second sentence of §58, we ought to compare Hegel’s 11th “Aphorism from the Wastebook” (Werke 2:542). For also at stake in Hegel’s “attention to the concept itself” is a semi-poetic intimacy with the terms of philosophy that express conceptual content and speculative depth (this discussed more in Chapter 3.viii). Hegel seems to be aping the commands of Proverbs 2:7 (“Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’ and call understanding your intimate friend” NAS). The Aphorism reads: “The peasant woman lives in the circle of her Lisa, who is her best cow, then the black one, the spotted one, and so on; also of Martin, her boy, and Ursula, her girl, and so forth. Thus, to the philosopher, infinity, cognition, movement, sensory laws, and so forth, are likewise familiar things. And just as her dead brother and uncle are to the peasant woman, so Plato, Spinoza, and so forth, are to the philosopher; the one has just as much actuality as the other, but the latter have eternity up ahead” (my translation); “Die Bauersfrau lebt im Kreise ihrer Liese, was ihre beste Kuh ist, dann der Schwarze, der Scheckin usw.; auch des Märtens, ihres Buben, auch der Urschel, ihres Mädchens usf. So familiäre Dinge sind dem Philosophen die Unendlichkeit, das Erkennen, die Bewegung, die sinnlichen Gesetze usf. Und wie der Bauersfrau ihr verstorben der Bruder und Ohm, so dem Philosophen Piaton, Spinoza usf. Eins hat soviel Wirklichkeit als das andere, diese aber haben die Ewigkeit voraus.” An incomplete translation of the ‘Aphorisms’ (#3, 7, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 59, 61, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 74, 76, 79, 80, 81, 84, 85, 89, 92, 93, 96, and 98) can be found in Miscellaneous Writings of GWF Hegel. Ed. Jon Stewart, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002, pp. 245-255. (Further references denoted “Miscellaneous.”)
We now hear of the disruption that such an “effort of the concept” causes: “The concept’s interruption of the habit [Gewohnheit] of running away into representations is just as irksome as it is to formalistic thinking that argues back and forth in un-actual thought” (PS §58/3:56). Here the “concept,” in its “simple determinations” and “pure self-movements,” has become an “irksome” threat to, and an “interruption” of, Gewohnheit, which may be translated “habit,” “convention,” or “custom.” Without much warning, Hegel has in this small sentence introduced the concept’s two offended parties, two types of argumentative thought. These two types are i) “the habit of running away into representations” and ii) “formalistic thinking that argues back and forth in un-actual thought.” The latter will be termed “argumentation” or “argumentative thought” in the paragraphs that follow, once Hegel has treated the former (and stealthily subsumed it under ‘argumentation’ in general). The former, “the habit of running away into representations,” will be called “material thinking” in the very next sentence. Here, the implicit attacks of Hegel’s lampooning are 1) Kant’s “reflective judgment,” which “runs away” into “representations” that are gathered from outside itself, and 2) the “un-actual formalism” of Fichte and his school.

We were introduced to the constitutive motion of concepts when they were described as “pure self-movements” which “require the attention” of the “effort of the concept.” In contradistinction to that, merely “formalistic thinking” (ii) on Hegel’s estimation, gets caught in that “pure self-movement,” and cannot move beyond it to

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81 “Der Gewohnheit, an Vorstellungen fortzulaufen, ist die Unterbrechung derselben durch den Begriff ebenso lästig als dem formalen Denken, das in unwirklichen Gedanken hin und her räsoniert.”

82 “Habit” is etymologically closest to the German Gewohnheit, which implies what is lived in, lived out, inhabited, dwelt in. See EL §409, pp. 139-147, for Hegel’s full discussion of Gewohnheit as the final, developed, transitional category of his “anthropology of the soul.”

83 See Harris 1997 for these connections.
something actual; it just argues “back and forth,” “hin und her räsoniert.” Material thought (i), on the other hand, “runs away into representations,” “an Vorstellungen fortzulaufen,” and shows up its own emptiness by seeking its content elsewhere.

For purposes of understanding what the “speculative sentence” does, note that these motions will later be rehearsed as linguistic motions, as ways that grammatical subjects and predicates relate, and these (insufficiently dialectical) motions will be retained as important components of the movement of a speculative grammar. We ought to think of ii) this “back and forth” motion as analogous to the motion of grammatical ascription, where the subject of the sentence is simply ascribed various predicates, and runs “back and forth” between them, seeking more predicates and a more adequate description by various adjectives. Likewise, i) this “running away into representations” is analogous to grammatical subsumption, whereby the subject of the sentence seeks to be subsumed under a universal predicate that is adequately descriptive of its general properties. Such connections between the motions of thought and the grammatical motions they entail will become clear in our discussion of §§60-62 below. Here, both motions are insufficiently “conceptual” or “speculative” because both seek a sort of escape, the one by running away, the other by arguing back and forth in its own prism. Both lack the more thoroughgoing mediation of the speculative sentence, precisely because each lacks what the other has.

Hegel then further explains the escapism of i) the Kantian reflective judgment: “That convention should be called material thinking, a contingent consciousness that is absorbed only in stuff, and therefore finds it hard work to lift the self clear of such matter,
and to be with itself” (§58/3:56). We saw that “material thinking” was always prone to “running way into representations.” Now we hear that, because of this form of escape, it is “absorbed only in stuff.” The stress is on the inability of such thinking to achieve self-consciousness; here it is merely “a contingent consciousness” that cannot attain to the “pure self-movements” of the \textit{Begriff}.

In the next sentence, Hegel levies his attack principally on the \textit{formalistic} aspect of argumentative thinking, calling it “argumentation.” Such formalism (again, we might think of it as Fichtean) has at least \textit{some} “freedom” from this dogged, empirical obsession with observable “stuff.” But we will see that formalistic thought is only incrementally more equipped to “lift itself clear of such matter and be with itself” than materialist thought was. Hegel explains the escapism peculiar to that “formal” presentation thus:

The other [way of thought], argumentation, on the contrary, is freedom from content, and vanity concerning it; what is looked for here is the effort \textit{[Anstrengung]} to give up this freedom and, instead of being the arbitrarily moving principle of the content, to sink this freedom in the content, letting it move of its own nature, that is, through the self as its own self, and then to contemplate this movement.

Das andere, das Räsonieren, hingegen ist die Freiheit von dem Inhalt und die Eitelkeit über ihn; ihr wird die Anstrengung zugemutet, diese Freiheit aufzugeben, 

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\textsuperscript{84} ‘Jene Gewohnheit ist ein materielles Denken zu nennen, ein zufälliges Bewußtsein, das in den Stoff nur versenkt ist, welchem es daher sauer ankömmt, aus der Materie zugleich sein Selbst rein herauszuheben und bei sich zu sein.’
und statt das willkürlich bewegende Prinzip des Inhalts zu sein, diese Freiheit in ihn zu versenken, ihn durch seine eigne Natur, das heißt, durch das Selbst als das seinige, sich bewegen zu lassen und diese Bewegung zu betrachten (§58/3:56).

Argumentative thought in its negative comportment, or negative way of relating (“in seinem negativen Verhalten”), is precisely this “formalism” that merely “argues back and forth in un-actual thought.” In this connection, the word Anstrengung of the first sentence of §58 is repeated. Note that this “effort” is not merely a movement from the formalistic thought that has no regard for “content” to a thought that knows how to “read for content”: “Freedom from content” and “being the arbitrarily moving principle of the content” is again like what mere representation, Vorstellung, had prescribed. And let us highlight the word “principle,” which is the thing Hegel says must be moved beyond.

Here Hegel’s early Aphorisms from the Wastebook (1803-06\footnote{For these approximate dates, see Miscellaneous 245.}) are again helpful because we can see him there sketching, in abstraction, some of the attacks that here in §58 are made in the midst of a very difficult flow of presentation. In the 34th Aphorism, Hegel had written:

A necessity, to study a system of philosophy as a whole. The principle contains everything shrouded, but also only shrouded, latent, the empty formal concept, not the matter itself. Just as a miser keeps all his enjoyments in his purse as possibility, and spares himself the actuality, the arduousness of enjoyment itself (Hegel’s italics; my bolds).
Notwendigkeit, ein System der Philosophie ganz zu studieren. Das Prinzip enthält alles eingehüllt, aber auch nur eingehüllt, latent, den leeren formalen Begriff, nicht die Sache selbst. Wie ein Geiziger im Beutel alle Genüsse als Möglichkeit behält und sich die Wirklichkeit, die Beschwerlichkeit des Genusses selbst erspart (Aphorism #34, Werke 2:547).

So what is figured in our paragraph as “freedom from” and “vanity concerning” is also a sort of *miserliness*. Instead of the miser’s “keeping all his enjoyments,” in §58 argumentative thought is called upon to “give up this freedom.” Instead of keeping its principles “in its purse,” argumentation must “sink this freedom in the content.” In so doing, the “arduousness of enjoyment itself” lines up with the “effort […] to contemplate this movement,” and we move from “un-actual thought” (§58, sentence 3) to the “actuality” that the miser is sparing himself, for facing this actuality would take “effort.” This oxymoronic “arduousness of enjoyment itself” is an odd early expression of the dual demands of the concept’s (true, good, constitutive) *effort* on the one hand and its *pure self-movement* on the other.

In §58, it is not clear at what epistemological or systematic level this “vanity” of the “arbitrarily moving principle” is dissolved. It happens by way of a “sinking […] letting move […] and contemplating.” But does this happen by reading Hegel’s philosophy? Does it happen in any old quest for truth? Is this breakdown to be found principally in the reader, or in the writer? In Aphorism #43, we hear again of this effort to
get past mere philosophical principles, which “are bad.” There, the emphasis is on *reading* and *studying*:

In the study of a science it is necessary not let oneself be put off by the **principles**. They are general and mean very little. As it seems, the only one who gets their significance is the one who gets the particular. Often the principles are bad. They are the consciousness of the matter [die Sache], and the **matter is often better than the consciousness**. One keeps studying [Man studiere fort]. At first consciousness is murky. *We do not want to have to comprehend and prove step by step*, but one throws the book away, keeps reading as between waking and sleeping, gives up on one’s consciousness, that is, on one’s individuality, which is embarrassing [peinlich]. This is the way I studied differential calculus and other things. And thus is falls to others to have studied Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (Hegel’s italics; my bolds).

It is instructive to read about this process of *getting free of mere principles* as a process that takes place *in reading*. No doubt Hegel is doing more in §58, where the “effort” described seems to be taking place on multifarious epistemological and interpretive levels. But the stance of the *reader* who must “keep studying,” points to an emphasis on the readerly or interpretive modalities of the speculative sentence.

And this is confirmed when in the next sentence of §58 Hegel writes of what might be taken as a particularly reader-directed “attentiveness to the concept”: “This refusal to intrude into the immanent rhythm of the concept, either arbitrarily or with wisdom attained from elsewhere, constitutes a restraint which is itself an essential moment of attentiveness to the concept” (§58/3:56).\footnote{Sich des eignen Einfallens in den immanenten Rhythmus der Begriffe entschlagen, in ihn nicht durch die Willkür und sonst erworbene Weisheit eingreifen, diese Enthaltsamkeit ist selbst ein wesentliches Moment der Aufmerksamkeit auf den Begriff.’}

Hegel answers our questions about at what level of interpretation these motions are taking place. They may take place, he says, “either arbitrarily or with wisdom attained from elsewhere.” Argumentative thought has “refused to intrude into” the concept. This is funny, because we have been reading largely of argumentation’s passive stance vis-à-vis conceptual thought: it was vain and free, not able to “let things move spontaneously.” But here those passive failures are contrasted with an active “refusal.” An active “intruding,” by contrast, would look like the “effort of the concept,” which we will find spelled out in the restless, probing, and (negatively) assimilating motions of the speculative sentence. It is precisely in this re-
writing of the motions of argumentative thought that Hegel “suspends” it and *vindicates what was vain* in that way of thinking as “an essential moment of attentiveness to the concept.” Hegel will devote another paragraph (§59) to the failures of argumentative thought “in its negative way of relating,” but in vindicating it as an essential moment,” he has in effect already pointed to the “positive content” of argumentation that the speculative sentence will subsume in §60. And again, this is consonant with the basso continuo of Hegel’s philosophy: the motions of determinate negation and *Aufhebung*. The negative aspects of argumentation have already been shown up as a “negation with a content.” So the very “refusal to intrude into the immanent rhythm” will now be *incorporated into* that immanent rhythm.

Note here that this is the first portrayal in the *Phenomenology* of the “concept” as something that *has a rhythm*. This will be magnified in the simile of §61, where “the conflict between the form of a proposition generally and the unity of the concept that destroys it is similar to that which takes place in *metrical rhythm* between quantity and accent” (my italics). That simile, while quite abstract and requiring much exegetical attention, will in fact provide a more fulsome explanation of the ways in which speculative syntax incorporates (in order to trump) the clumsy, evasive beats of argumentative thought that we are currently listening to.

As we have watched Hegel move toward “*der spekulative Satz*” of §61, we have seen that his project of suspending and yet retaining baser forms of representational thought has occurred on multifarious levels of articulation. We have read of a seemingly specialized philosophical project (at the level of writing), but we have also heard Hegel issue universal demands on the speculative mind (at the level of reading). We can now
ask further about the alternating interpretive (readerly) and productive (writerly)
modalities of the conceptual developments that the speculative proposition will be tasked
to articulate, and about the relative specialization or universalization of Hegel’s
speculative demands.

ii.a) Interpretive or productive?

In a remark Karl Marx makes in his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, he
seems to enroll himself on the side of those who see Hegel as *always* writing in
speculative propositions, where the grammatical emphasis of that specialized type of
sentence is “at all times” operative: “Hegel at all times makes the idea the subject and
makes the proper and actual subject […] the predicate. But the development proceeds at
all times on the side of the predicate.”

We will find, however, that Marx’s interpretation is just a bit too one-sided. It is refuted (or at least made more nuanced) in §23 and §61 of the *Phenomenology* in particular. I hope to demonstrate that the movement of the
speculative sentence is less a shift “to the side of the predicate” and more a perpetual
toggle between subject and predicate, with much labor, strain, eddying, and getting stuck
on either side, in the process.

Judith Butler’s assessment comes closer to this interpretation, and she again
emphasizes the fact that speculative “reading” is at odds with “common sense” reading.
She speaks of “a doubly inverted reading that knows no closure, which will no doubt
offend the avatars of common sense, but without which no approach to Hegel is

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possible.” Her last clause is confirmed in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel writes that “acquaintance with [his] philosophical method is presupposed.” And Jean-Luc Nancy takes this presupposed acquaintance further in referring to the demand for speculative propositions as “*the program* of an absolutely other grammar” (Nancy 2001, 13; my italics). This should only be tempered by what was spelled out above, that the grammar of speculative thought is always at great pains to *retain* that than which it is “absolutely other.” And Nancy admits as much when he writes that “the Hegelian grammar resists what one was looking for in it” (ibid. 90), and “the Hegelian grammar is confused, entangled, and shameful” (ibid. 91).

The “absolutely other grammar,” the “other sense,” that these commentators speak of must be given its due weight. The two most direct statements Hegel makes on the *difference* of the speculative proposition from other types of sentences are found in §60 of the *Phenomenology*, and in a short remark from the *Science of Logic*.

In the first part of §60, Hegel has begun discussing *das begreifende Denken*, “comprehensive” or “conceptual” thinking, or even “the thinking that comprehends,” “the thinking that deals in concepts.” And he has made the thrust of this discussion clear in §60, where he moves from treating “argumentative thinking’ to treating “comprehensive thinking” with the abrupt sentence, “*Anders verhält es sich im begreifenden Denken.*” This sentence is quick, jerky, and lacking in a clear subject or referent. Its most valid translation is as an impersonal construction: “The case is different in conceptual thinking.” But it is plausible that Hegel is also playing on the impersonal *verhält es sich,*

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90 Shameful?
91 §60/3:58; cf. Miller’s rendering, *PSM* p. 57.
where the neuter *subject* of the impersonal construction, “*es,*” could be referring to the word *Subjekt* in the preceding sentence, so that “Dies *Subjekt macht die Basis aus, an die er geknüpft wird und auf der die Bewegung hin und wider läuft. Anders verhält es sich im begreifenden Denken,” could be translated: “This subject makes up the basis to which the content is attached and upon which the movement runs back and forth. Otherwise does the subject behave in conceptual thinking.” So there is some ambiguity here about just how “absolutely other” *das räsonierende Denken* is from *das begreifende Denken*. One might say that that ambiguity is already being enacted in the very “subject” of the above impersonal construction, and the “*Subjekt*” of the sentence that precedes it. Even if we are adamant that Hegel is not playing around here, and *Anders verhält es sich im begreifenden Denken* is just your standard impersonal construction that breaks us away from the earlier sentences on “argumentative thinking,” the curious fact will still haunt us that Hegel then goes on to describe *all the same forms and parts of speech* he had discussed under the heading “argumentative thinking,” as if the situation is really not so “otherwise”! We are bound at least to admit that, while argumentative and comprehensive thought are *somehow* different, comprehensive thought has nevertheless not left the *stuff* of argumentative thought behind, and that, of course, is just Hegel’s point. Here the ‘running back and forth’ of pre-speculative, argumentative thought itself suggests a battle of mediation as much as it suggests at least some *kind* of return – an identification through resuscitation – so that the motions of the speculative sentence are already latent in (and dripping out from) the insufficient motions of argumentative thought.
The “absolutely other grammar” suggested in the abruptness of that sentence (“the case is different”) from §60 is consonant with the remark Hegel makes in the *Science of Logic* that the proposition in its conventional “form of a judgment” is “not suited to express speculative truths”:

The proposition thus *contains* the result, it is this *in its own self*. But the fact to which we must pay attention here is the defect that the result is not itself *expressed* in the proposition: **it is an external reflection which discerns it therein.** In this connection we must, at the outset, make this general observation, namely, that **the proposition in the form [an der Form] of a judgment is not suited to express speculative truths**; a familiarity with this fact is likely to remove many misunderstandings of speculative truths (*SLM* 90; Hegel’s italics; my bolds).

Pursuing our question of the relative *interpretive* or *productive* modalities of the speculative sentence, we can ask: who or what performs this “external reflection”? In the presentation of the speculative proposition of §60-62 (see Chapter 3), we will see that some of the sentences Hegel puts forth are capable of effecting this reflection *of their own accord* (dramatized in the personifications of various parts of speech involved), right in the mechanisms of their own syntax. Here Nancy wonders, “Could *an der Form* mean right at the level of grammar? And should the speculative truth of the dialectical process manifest itself as grammaticality?” (Nancy 2001, 90). These questions cannot be immediately settled. We will find that Hegel does indeed *sometimes* employ weird
grammatical constructions to meet his speculative end *an der Form*. But we will also encounter a more subtle reading of “*an der Form*” in our discussion of §61. For in the last sentence of that paragraph, Hegel defines “the form of a judgment” thus: “the form of the proposition” is the appearance of the determinate sense or the accent that distinguishes its fulfillment (§61). That paragraph will suggest not an entirely “other grammar,” but an entirely other epistemological approach to *apprehending* the same old grammar of conventional thought, so that Hegel is using “judgment” both in a non-speculative and in a revised, speculative sense. Nancy points to this enfolding, rather than revamping, of grammar when he writes that “the proposition is therefore marked by a defect – an excess of emphasis [*defaut d’accent*]” (Nancy 2001, 34-5). In the next sentences of that remark from the *Science of Logic*, Hegel spells out this ‘defect’ as part of the insufficiencies of the *Urteil* that the speculative proposition inherits:

> Judgment is an *identical* relation between subject and predicate. In it we abstract from the fact that the subject has a number of determinatenesses other than that of the predicate, and also that the predicate is more extensive than the subject. Now if the content is speculative, the *non-identical* aspect of subject and predicate is also an essential moment, but in the judgment this is not expressed. It is the form of simple judgment, when it is used to express speculative results, which is very often responsible for the paradoxical and bizarre light in which much of recent

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92 This first sentence of §61 allows us to read “judgment” and “proposition” as synonymous. This synonymity does not always hold in Hegel, but I do believe it holds in the remark from the *Science of Logic* that is currently under consideration.
philosophy appears to those who are not familiar with speculative thought (SLM 90-91).

We will need to proceed in our initiation rights to this “familiarity with speculative thought,” all the while agreeing with Nancy that this will involve “a singularly complex movement through which the text gets itself tangled up, moves away from meaning while referring to the meanings of a word” (Nancy 2001, 60). This “singularly complex movement” is presaged, again, in two early scraps from Hegel’s Wastebook Aphorisms, where we find that Hegel had been agonizing over finding the right vessel of articulation for his philosophy since as early as his 1803-06 Jena years:

We no longer have so much to do with thoughts. We have enough of them, good and bad, beautiful and bold. Rather, with concepts. But in that thoughts are through themselves immediately made valid, whereas concepts on the contrary must be made comprehensible, the form of writing [Form der Schreibart] thereby undergoes a change, a look [Aussehen - appearance, finish, complexion] demanding a perhaps painful\footnote{Or: embarrassing; cf. Aphorism #43, cited above.} effort, as with Plato, Aristotle (my translation; Hegel’s italics; my bolds).

Es ist nicht mehr so sehr um Gedanken zu tun. Wir haben deren genug, gute und schlechte, schöne und kühne. Sondern um Begriffe. Indem aber jene durch sich selbst unmittelbar geltend zu machen sind, als Begriffe dagegen begreiflich
gemacht werden sollen, so erhält dadurch die Form der Schreibart eine Änderung, ein vielleicht peinliche Anstren- gung erforderndes Aussehen, wie bei Piaton, Aristoteles (Aphorism #61; Werke 2:557-8).

It is not so good for philosophy to have a proposition \textit{[Satz]} and to be able to say: it is or is nothing (my translation; Hegel’s italics; my bolds).

Es wird der Philosophie nicht so gut, einen \textit{Satz} zu haben und sagen zu können: das \textit{ist} oder ist \textit{nichts} (#69; Werke 2:559).

Here it appears Hegel was again addressing the mere “form of a judgment,” the judgment as an “identical relation,” which simply states that something “is or is not.” This helps us read what in the \textit{Phenomenology} is called the proposition’s mere “appearance of the determinate sense” (§61/3:59). On this model, philosophy merely “has” a proposition and “is able to say” something about a matter, pure and simple. This merely \textit{possessed} proposition and the ease with which it is \textit{able to say} something purportedly true is precisely what overlooks the other vicissitudes of reality that the speculative proposition does not want to miss – that “the subject has a number of determinatenesses other than that of the predicate, and also that the predicate is more extensive than the subject” (SLM 90-91). Sentences that can account for such extensiveness – both interpretively and productively – are then charged with the task of marshaling the movements of Hegel’s larger, systematic presentations.
iii) Employed at the level of Hegel’s system: both interpretive and productive

a) ‘Not yet’: the speculative sentence used to track the ‘very matter itself’ of philosophical inquiry

It is only natural that a philosopher should find, however deliberately or fortuitously, however immanent or imported, the mode of expression that best fits the content she wants to express. We might think of Spinoza’s more geometrico, Leibniz’s fundamental principles, or Kant’s synthetic a priori judgments, as the necessary and fitting expressions of those writers’ idiomatic ways of systematizing philosophical thought, although none of these writers would consider such types of utterance merely “idiomatic,” because such language always makes a claim to universality, and the same would be true of the “speculative sentences” we are watching grow from the grounds of Hegel’s dialectal negotiations.

Without ever perfectly defining the limits or universal applicability of his “speculative sentences,” Hegel is seeking at one and the same time to delimit his philosophical task and to set forth, disperse, or enact a proper philosophical methodology for that task. This search for the proper expressive units starts to constitute what Hegel will call the “life” of the system or the “life of the whole” (PS §2/3:12). Organic, living thought cannot consist of lists, mere agreements, or mere propositions, because Hegel

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94 Think also of how Aristotle – almost in parallel with what we’ve just seen in Hegel – distinguishes two types of syllogism: one as a truth-seeking form, and another as an argumentative form, and this serves to divide his philosophy into the propositional/truth-claiming and the rhetorical-persuasive. See Martin Heidegger, Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy, trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009, on this clear division.
wants a methodological organicity to his system. The speculative sentence helps achieve that end, not just by doing away with older propositions, but by reconfiguring them as organic, reusable entities. We have seen that the speculative sentence “uses what it destroys,” thereby setting forth a dialectical methodology for both criticizing and including the thing criticized. And in that speculative sentences are sentences that express the truths of speculative philosophy, they are again a methodological necessity, for Hegel will write that “the dialectical movement has propositions for its parts or elements” (§66/3:62).

We can now ask how speculative sentences meet this, particularly methodological demand, that speculative sentences befit the systematic exposition of a speculative philosophy. One answer is given repeatedly throughout the “Preface” and “Introduction” to the Phenomenology: the spekulativer Satz is a method (at the level of the sentence, and then again at the level of both writing and reading) for following die Sache selbst.

But what is die Sache selbst? We could render this German phrase as “the matter itself,” but it is also sometimes rendered by Miller as “the heart of the matter,” “the real issue” (SLM §3), “the very nature of philosophical exposition” (ibid. §66), and “the thing itself” (ibid. §17). In those passages of the “Preface” that deal directly with the speculative proposition, we read: “the dialectical movement likewise has propositions for its parts or elements; the difficulty indicated seems therefore to return always and to be a difficulty of the matter itself [Sache selbst]” (§66/3:62).95

95 This final Millerian translation is misleading; die Sache selbst should not be confused with Kant’s Ding-an-sich, “thing-in-itself.”
96 “…die dialektische Bewegung gleichfalls Sätze zu ihren Teilen oder Elementen habe; die aufgezeigte Schwierigkeit scheint daher immer zurückzukehren, und eine Schwierigkeit der Sache selbst zu sein.” This is fully played out in the “Reason” chapter of the Phenomenology, where die Sache selbst takes center stage.
The objective and the precise nature of this ‘difficulty’ were again recorded in the 43rd ‘Aphorism from the Wastebook’ (quoted above) where we are privileged to catch sight of Hegel sketching the task of the *Phenomenology*, and already heading for *die Sache*, instead of for mere ‘principles’ or the murky ‘consciousness of the matter’:

In the study of a science it is necessary not let oneself be put off by the principles. They are general and mean very little. As it seems, the only one who gets their significance is the one who gets the particular. Often the principles are bad. **They are the consciousness of the matter [die Sache], and the matter is often better than the consciousness** (my bolds).¹⁰⁷

Hegel is there already describing the *effort and strain* of the concept that we above saw thematized in §58 of the *Phenomenology*. Here it is most instructive that *die Sache* is hovering in the middle of the paragraph, thwarting approach from all manner of ‘principles,’ ‘consciousness,’ and ‘individuality.’

For this “matter itself” then returns in 1807 in order effectively to bookend Hegel’s “Preface” to the *Phenomenology*. It appears three times in the sentences of the book’s first paragraph, as if to constrain that introductory magisterium, while deploying Hegel’s method right off the bat. Then, in the final paragraphs of the “Preface,” we find Hegel conceding that his philosophy is “unlikely to be favorably received,” but he hopes

nevertheless that it will “succeed in winning acceptance through the inner truth of the matter [die innere Wahrheit der Sache]” (§71/3:66; my bolds). Here we hear a conflation of Aristotle’s auto to pragma, “the matter itself” and his aute he aletheia, “the truth itself” in Hegel’s “inner truth of the matter.” There are many clues that Hegel’s die Sache selbst translates Aristotle’s auto to pragma. For Aristotle, as for Hegel, “the matter itself” is the engine of philosophical inquiry. In Aristotle’s Metaphysics, it is explicitly i) what drives philosophical inquiry forth: “But as men proceeded in this way, the matter itself led them on and compelled them to seek further.” It is also simultaneously ii) what constrains, delimits, or circumscribes the inquiry: “constrained as it were by the truth itself.” So: for Aristotle, this sort of method would require i) a compulsion toward “truth” and “the heart of the matter.” This translates into a drive for adequate expression, as well as for a mode of interpretation that can take entities, relations between entities, and stages and aspects of entities alike as entire, as accurate expressions of truth. We find this, for example, in Aristotle’s legetai pollakhos, “it is said in many ways,” whereby Aristotle’s “being” gets submitted to a variety of categorical expressions. Secondly, for Aristotle this method would require ii) constraint, which leads to a type of interpretation that is capable of registering criticism and error, without simply leaving criticism and error in the historical dust. We find this, for example, in Aristotle’s drawing out of philosophical aporiai, “deadlocks,” “problems.”

This brief comparison with Aristotle’s method should begin to demonstrate that Hegel is in fact not inventing something new in his ‘speculative propositions’ that track

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98 Presaging Husserl, et al.  
99 Metaphysics A.3, 984a18; cf. 984b9, 986b31.  
100 Physics I 5, 188b29-30; cf. De partibus animalium I 1, 642a18-20, 27.  
101 See, e.g., Categories 1; and Metaphysics Theta.  
102 See, e.g., Metaphysics Beta.
‘the matter itself,’ so that even the ‘destructions’ and ‘abolishments’ of the speculative sentence are grounded in what Hegel sees as a continuity with earlier philosophical traditions.

b) ‘Already’: the speculative sentence used to treat what absolute knowing has achieved

But at the same time, we have been made to admit that Hegel’s methodology demands something very new and particular from his conceptual vessels: not just the ability to track truth in motion, but also the ability to articulate the truths those motions have produced. We have read that, for Hegel, in the speculative proposition the conventional form of the proposition is proclaimed ‘not suitable for expressing speculative truths.’ Let us now ask how this works at the level of the achieved truths of Hegel’s system.

We have seen that speculative propositions are propositions that cannot be interpreted following the logics by which conventional sentences are made intelligible. In order to suit Hegel’s methodology, in the speculative proposition the conventional logics of propositional “subsumption,” mere “predication,” and “copulation” (vide Heidegger below) are thwarted. In a conventional subsumptive proposition – for example, “S is P” – a particular, the subject, is subsumed under a universal, the predicate. In “the rose is wild” (S is P), the particular “rose” is subsumed under the general predicate “wild.” In a more current terminology: the rose is taken to be a member of the set of wild things. The subsumptive proposition works on the assumption that, between the subject and the predicate, there is a shift in degrees of generality: the particular subject is described with
a *universal* predicate. And we can note that this shift in degrees of generality usually entails a *shift in degrees of reality*: a thing-like subject is subsumed under a thought-like predicate. So: the rose is a thing, and wildness is a concept made universal in thought by having worked through or observed many instances of “wild.” Such a proposition describes things, objects, or representations with ideas that are seemingly nowhere to be found in the world - as if they are *explanatory impositions*. The particular (whether a thing-in-itself, an object of consciousness, or a representation), as the subject of the sentence, gets subsumed by a universal predicate *in mentem*, formed by the mind.

“Predication” describes the same motion from the other angle, where the general or external “attribute” *describes* or *predicates* the thing predicated. And “copulation” describes the link of *equation* or *identity* between a subject and its predicate, where the degree of *subordination* between these terms is minimal.

If we take the stance of Hegel’s philosophy seriously, these modes of *describing* by *ascribing general properties* or *equating similar things* hold little water. The culmination and major presupposition of Hegel’s thought is that of “absolute knowing,” which can only be grasped through a working out of the whole of Hegel’s system (*PS§17/3:22-23*). The stance of absolute knowing could be summarized as follows: thoughts and things share a set of supremely basic determinations, but these determinations can only be properly spelled out by the mediations of a thoroughgoing dialectical negotiation – because thoughts, according to Hegel, may be thingly, while things may be rationally constituted.  

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104 See Brandom 2011 and Houlgate 2006 for deep discussions of this epistemological position.
Hegel’s *Phenomenology* has deduced such a position by exhibiting an exhaustive series of (mediating, dialectical) confrontations between various thought formations and various objects of thought. It has shown that these confrontations undermine themselves every time. And the distinction between the “sides” of each confrontation is, every time, shown to be false. It is instead demonstrated that the sides of each confrontation are *mutually necessitating* or *reciprocally constitutive*. This would not be the case in a subsumptive statement of knowledge like “the rose is wild,” at least when this statement is read as a subsumptive proposition. If both “the rose” and “wild” can exist quite independently of one another, and the subject uttering the sentence can have no involvement in its subject matter, aside from his aseptic act of conjoining the two, then there is no account of the deep ways in which the rose is implicated in wildness, and vice versa. But we have read that “the situation is different in speculative thinking” (*PS* §60).

After the first three such major confrontations (between thought and thing entity) of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, the philosopher has already called the relation between thoughts and things one of “pure porosity” (*PS* Chapter III, §136): the rose cannot be separated from its articulated wildness. Again, in the final analysis, the *Phenomenology* deduces that thoughts and things share a supremely basic set of determinations, but only by way of a wrought process of mediation. I say ‘supremely basic’ to indicate that the argument of absolute knowing is in fact a *weak or minimalist argument*, because of its extreme abstractness. (Which, of course, because of such dialectical considerations, also entails extreme concreteness (!), if we follow the models of “absolute porosity” just described, or if we take seriously the contradictions at the heart of Hegel’s mediations – highlighted in Heidegger’s reading of the speculative sentence in Chapter 3 below.)
Hegel is there arguing at the highest level of generality possible. At the more basic and particular level of “representational thought” (which, as we have just demonstrated, remains an inextricable part of Hegel’s system), attributive and copulative sentences continue to function. This is precisely what is allowed for in the retentive aspect of Hegel’s *Aufhebungen*, discussed above. But on this minimalist reading of “absolute knowing,” the *Phenomenology* has got us to the place where we can start to deduce the categories as *determinations of things and thoughts alike*. The deduction of these supremely basic determinations is then the task of the *Science of Logic*. It is within this systematic framework that the conventional form of the proposition “is not suited to express speculative truths” (*SLM* 90). Under this model of “speculative truth,” it is clear that a determination of a thing cannot be merely *subsumed* under (or copulated with, or predicated of) a determination of a thought. The *Science of Logic* will have rather to move by way of *speculative sentences* that establish (by verbal demonstration) the deductive movement from determination to determination.

So, when we first hear in the *Science of Logic* that “being is in fact nothing” (*SLM* 82), we are not reading of a particular entity, “being,” getting subsumed under the predicate “nothing” that describes it, nor are we reading a “copulative” proposition whereby “being” is simply equated with, or joined to “nothing.” As Heidegger rightly reads it, “The ‘is’ in the speculative proposition thus has another sense than it does in the conventional assertion; it does not *copulate*, but rather it mediates the extremes of the proposition […] The ‘is’ here means: ‘has its truth in’” (“Das ‘ist’ hat demnach im spekulativen Satz einen anderen Sinn als in der gewöhnlichen Aussage; es *kopuliert* nicht, sondern es *vermittelt* die Extreme des Satzes […] Das ‘ist’ bedeutet hier: ‘hat seine
So we might say that we are instead encountering a “speculative proposition” that reads: “being has its truth in nothing.” If we take that proposition as a truthful whole, it becomes the subject of a new sentence. And again, we must ask: and what does that have its truth in? By such a process, Hegel proceeds to the next chapter in the *Science of Logic*.

More than simply “working for” or “working within” Hegel’s systematic philosophy, such sentences are, Hegel claims, enacting a more truthful approximation of truth. But are the mediations required by such a presentation explicit or implicit? In the formalistic multiplication and substitution of predicates described in §50 of the *Phenomenology*, “one never learns what the thing itself is.” There Hegel is making reference to Kant’s incessant repetition that we “*can think but cannot know*” things-in-themselves.\(^{106}\) Without the mediations implicit in the speculative proposition, we would indeed be able to do no more than “think” the objects of philosophy as mere “formalistic multiplications, substitutions.” But the process of mediation at the center of the speculative proposition allows for *actual knowing*, articulated in internally mediated sentences that, in turn, mediate one another in the broader concatenations of the system.

By the approach of the speculative proposition, Hegel is overthrowing Kant’s claim and is instead claiming that we can both think and know things-in-themselves.\(^{107}\) Hegel gives an indication of this epistemological predicament in the *Encyclopedia Logic*:

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107 In this connection, note that Hegel speaks of “things-in-themselves,” “things themselves,” and “the in-itself of things” (*EL* §41, Add.2) as synonymous. Also, “object,” *Gegenstand*, in Hegel, is classed with these “things in themselves.” (Here I am assuming that Hegel’s principal referent is to Kant’s *Ding-an-Sich*, but Hegel is also issuing a side-long assault on the colloquial German use of *Ding an sich*.)
thoughts are not merely our thoughts, but at the same time the in-itself of things and of whatever else is objective” (EL §41 Add. 2). That is a good articulation of the epistemological stance that is reached by the end of the Science of Logic. In §60 of the Phenomenology, we have read that the speculative proposition must express that “the concept is the object’s own self,” again a proper articulation of what Hegel’s epistemology demands. Finally, in the Science of Logic, we read: “What we are dealing with in logic is not a thinking about something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it, nor forms which are supposed to provide mere signs or distinguishing marks of truth, etc.” (SLM 50). Such “objective” thought would do fine with copulative and subsumptive propositions. But we are rather “dealing with” things that are mediated through-and-through by the propositional structures of our thought, as well as by what Hegel sees as the propositional structures (if conceived speculatively) of reality. To drive home the stakes of this requirement, in the Encyclopedia Logic, Hegel neatly summarizes the epistemological claims of what I have described above:

Neither the concept nor the judgment is found only in our heads and they are not merely formed by us. The concept dwells within the things themselves, it is that through which they are what they are, and to comprehend an object means therefore to become conscious of its concept. If we advance from this to the judging of the object, the judgment is not our subjective doing, by which this or that predicate is ascribed to the object; on the contrary, we are considering the object in the determinacy that is posited by its concept (EL §166, Add.; my italics).
In order to effect this philosophical truth that “neither the concept nor the judgment is found only in our heads and they are not merely formed by us,” in order to “express the concept” (*PS* §51/3:50), something odd must happen to philosophical sentences. The following chapter will show how Hegel molds the speculative sentence *syntactically* into the adequate vessel for this task.

Chapter 3: Syntactic Fine Points: The Speculative Sentence in §60-61 of the *Phenomenology*

*Subsections:*

i) Transitioning into conceptual thinking

ii) The grammatical stakes of the speculative sentence

iii) The speculative sentence reverses the sentence, conflates its parts: the “counterthrust”

iv) Reading the speculative sentence: the interpretive side of things

v) A foxy critique of Kant: the productive side of things

vi) The speculative proposition named: what was it for Kant?

vii) The speculative sentence dissected: what is it for Hegel?

viii) “Speculative rhythm”: a poetic simile

ix) Stretto: true plasticity

i) Transitioning into conceptual thinking

In the previous chapter, we saw that what Hegel calls the “conventional way of relating parts of a proposition,” or again, the sentences of “argumentative thought” (dramatized in the copulative, subsumptive, and ascriptive models of propositional functioning), are incapable of meeting the demands of the sort of *presuppositionless, speculative, conceptually rich, thoroughly mediated* thinking Hegel is after. Such
demands then propel Hegel to transition to his discussion of the *speculative sentence* in §60-61 of the *Phenomenology’s* “Preface,” all the while *retaining* the insufficient motions of the various sentence types of “argumentative thought” he has been critiquing. We are now in a position to analyze the precise motions of Hegel’s presentation of the speculative sentence in §60-1, our questions now being: what are its mechanisms, and what are its syntactic demands?

As in Chapter 2 above, I will first give a new translation of §§60-61. Again the implicit claim here is that the translation itself is the first step in our interpretation.

60. In view of the fact, however, that such thinking has a content, be it of representations or thoughts or a mixture of both, it [argumentation] has another side which makes comprehension difficult for it. The remarkable nature of the other side is closely connected with the above given essences of the idea itself, or rather it expresses the idea just as it appears as the movement that is thinking apprehension. – Namely, just as, in its negative behavior, which was just under discussion [*wovon soeben die Rede war*], argumentative thinking itself is the self into which the content returns, in its positive cognition, on the other hand, the self is a represented *subject*, to which the content relates itself as accident and predicate. This subject makes up the basis to which the content is attached and upon which the movement runs back and forth. Otherwise does the subject behave in comprehensive thinking. Since the concept is the object’s own self, which presents itself as *its becoming*, it is not a resting subject that, unmoved, carries the accidents, but is rather the concept that is self moving and that takes its
determinations back into itself. In this movement that resting subject itself founders \([geht… zugrunde]\); it enters into the distinctions and the content, and moreover makes up the determinateness, that is, the distinguished content as well as its movement, instead of continuing to stand over against it. The firm soil \([der feste Boden]\) that argumentation has in the resting subject thus shakes, and only this movement itself becomes \([wird]\) the object. The subject that fills its content ceases to go beyond it and cannot have any other predicates or accidents. The dispersion of the content is thereby conversely bound together under the self; the content \([er]\) is not the universal that, free from the subject, could befit many others. The content is hence in fact no longer the predicate of the subject but is the substance, is the essence and the concept of what is under discussion \([wovon die Rede ist]\). Representational thinking, since its nature is to run through the accidents or predicates, and rightly, because they are no more than predicates and accidents, to go beyond them, is inhibited \([gehemmt]\) in its running-through, since that which has the form of a predicate in the proposition is the substance itself. It suffers, if we might represent it thus, a counterthrust. Starting from the subject, as if this were to remain underlying as ground, it finds that, since the predicate is rather the substance, the subject has gone over into the predicate and has herewith been suspended \([aufgehoben]\); and since, thus, what seemed to be the predicate has become the whole and independent mass, thinking cannot wander about freely, but is held back by this weight. - Usually the subject first lies at the foundation as the \textit{objective}, fixed self \([\text{fixe Selbst}]\); from here, the necessary movement to the manifoldness of determinations or of predicates goes forth; here
the knowing I itself enters into the place of that subject and is both the knotting of the predicates and the subject holding them. Since, however, that first subject enters into the determinations themselves and is their soul, the second subject, namely the knowing one, still finds in the predicate what it wanted to be through with and over beyond which it wanted to return into itself, and instead of being able to be the doer in the moving of the predicate [in dem Bewegen des Praedikats das Tuende] – arguing whether this or that predicate should be attributed [beizulegen] – it rather still has to do with the self of the content, it is not supposed to be for itself, but is rather supposed to be together with this.

61. Formally, what has been said can be expressed thus: the nature of the judgment or of the proposition in general, which involves the distinction of subject and predicate, is destroyed by the speculative proposition, and the proposition of identity, which the former becomes, contains the counterthrust to that relation. -- This conflict between the form of a proposition generally and the unity of the concept that destroys it is similar to that which takes place in metrical rhythm between quantity and accent. Metrical rhythm results from the hovering middle and the unification of both. So too in the philosophical proposition the identity of subject and predicate should not annihilate their distinction, which the form of the proposition expresses, but rather their unity should come forth [hervorgehen] as a harmony. The form of the proposition is the appearance of the determinate sense or the accent that distinguishes its fulfillment; but that the
predicate expresses the substance and the subject itself falls into the universal, this is the *unity* wherein that accent fades away.

60. In Ansehung dessen aber, daß solches Denken einen Inhalt hat, es sei der Vorstellungen oder Gedanken oder der Vermischung beider, hat es eine andere Seite, die ihm das Begreifen erschwert. Die merkwürdige Natur derselben hängt mit dem oben angegebenen Wesen der Idee selbst enge zusammen, oder drückt sie vielmehr aus, wie sie als die Bewegung erscheint, die denkendes Auffassen ist. - Wie nämlich in seinem negativen Verhalten, wovon soeben die Rede war, das räsonierende Denken selber das Selbst ist, in das der Inhalt zurückgeht, so ist dagegen in seinem positiven Erkennen das Selbst ein vorgestelltes *Subjekt*, worauf sich der Inhalt als Akzidens und Prädikat bezieht. Dies Subjekt macht die Basis aus, an die er geknüpft wird und auf der die Bewegung hin und wider läuft. Anders verhält es sich im begreifenden Denken. Indem der Begriff das eigene Selbst des Gegenstandes ist, das sich als *sein Werden* darstellt, ist es nicht ein ruhendes Subjekt, das unbewegt die Akzidenzen trägt, sondern der sich bewegende und seine Bestimmungen in sich zurücknehmende Begriff. In dieser Bewegung geht jenes ruhende Subjekt selbst zugrunde; es geht in die Unterschiede und Inhalt ein und macht vielmehr die Bestimmtheit, das heißt, den unterschiednen Inhalt wie die Bewegung desselben aus, statt ihr gegenüberstehen zu bleiben. Der feste Boden, den das Räsonieren an dem ruhenden Subjekte hat, schwankt also, und nur diese Bewegung selbst wird der Gegenstand. Das Subjekt, das seinen Inhalt erfüllt, hört auf, über diesen hinauszugehen, und kann nicht noch
andre Prädikate oder Akzidenzen haben. Die Zerstreutheit des Inhalts ist
umgekehrt dadurch unter das Selbst gebunden; er ist nicht das Allgemeine, das
frei vom Subjekte mehrern zukäme. Der Inhalt ist somit in der Tat nicht mehr
Prädikat des Subjekts, sondern ist die Substanz, ist das Wesen und der Begriff
dessen, wovon die Rede ist. Das vorstellende Denken, da seine Natur ist, an den
Akzidenzen oder Prädikaten fortzulaufen, und mit Recht, weil sie nicht mehr als
Prädikate und Akzidenzen sind, über sie hinauszugehen, wird, indem das, was im
Satze die Form eines Prädikats hat, die Substanz selbst ist, in seinem Fortlaufen
gehemmt. Es erleidet, es so vorzustellen, einen Gegenstoß. Vom Subjekte
anfangend, als ob dieses zum Grunde liegen bliebe, findet es, indem das Prädikat
vielmehr die Substanz ist, das Subjekt zum Prädikat übergegangen und hiemit
aufgehoben; und indem so das, was Prädikat zu sein scheint, zur ganzen und
selbstständigen Masse geworden, kann das Denken nicht frei herumirren, sondern
ist durch diese Schwere aufgehalten. - Sonst ist zuerst das Subjekt als das
gegenständliche fixe Selbst zugrunde gelegt; von hier aus geht die notwendige
Bewegung zur Mannigfaltigkeit der Bestimmungen oder der Prädikate fort; hier
tritt an die Stelle jenes Subjekts das wissende Ich selbst ein, und ist das
Verknüpfen der Prädikate und das sie haltende Subjekt. Indem aber jenes erste
Subjekt in die Bestimmungen selbst eingeht und ihre Seele ist, findet das zweite
Subjekt, nämlich das wissende, jenes, mit dem es schon fertig sein und worüber
hinaus es in sich zurückgehen will, noch im Prädikate vor, und statt in dem
Bewegen des Prädikats das Tuende, als Räsonieren, ob jenem dies oder jenes
Prädikat beizulegen wäre, sein zu können, hat es vielmehr mit dem Selbst des Inhalts noch zu tun, soll nicht für sich, sondern mit diesem zusammensein.


As the precipitous presentation of §60 revs up, we are reminded of the grammatical insufficiencies of argumentative thought, in which the subject of the proposition merely “makes up the basis to which the content is attached and upon which the movement runs back and forth” (‘Dies Subjekt macht die Basis aus, an die er geknüpft wird und auf der die Bewegung hin und wider läuft’) (§60/3:57). Here we see
that the current understanding of “positive argumentation” is no better than the grammatical models of mere formalist (“running back and forth”) and materialist (“attached”) thought we read of in Chapter 2 (section ii) above. This subject, though it has overcome the vain negativity of argumentation, does not move past the “convention of running away into representations” or the “arguing back and forth in un-actual thought” of §58. So we saw Hegel effect a more radical break by means of the sentence, “Otherwise does the subject behave in comprehensive thinking” (“Anders verhält es sich im begreifenden Denken”) (§58/3:57). But from all that has been said in the analysis of this sentence in Chapter 2, it should be clear that this clean break will not be as clean as we might like! While “the situation is otherwise in the thinking that conceptualizes,” we have watched Hegel go to great lengths to ensure that the transition he is making here from argumentative to conceptual thought will be more of an enfolding of things past than a transition away from them. So we then find Hegel subtly accentuating the grammatical dimensions of what has come before. And instead of thoroughly negating the model of a stationary subject “upon which the movement runs back and forth,” Hegel simply puts the subject in motion along with its restless predicates: “Since the concept is the object’s own self, which presents itself as its becoming, it is not a resting subject that, unmoved, carries the accidents, but is rather the concept that is self moving and that takes its determinations back into itself” (“Indem der Begriff das eigene Selbst des Gegenstandes ist, das sich als sein Werden darstellt, ist es nicht ein ruhendes Subjekt, das unbewegt die Akzidenzen trägt, sondern der sich bewegende und seine Bestimmungen in sich zurücknehmende Begriff”) (§60/3:57). If, as Hegel says here, “the concept is the object’s own self,” then we are witnessing a stacking of epistemological registers
whereby the speculative “concept” is the very self of the “object” – be it the empirical object of experience or the mediated object of thought. This is the first of many jabs Hegel will make at Kant in §§60-61, to be discussed in section ‘v’ below. Here the concept presents as a “becoming,” so that it will not do to relegate it to a mere correlation with either the subject of the sentence or the object which that sentence describes.

The next sentence of §60 makes the stakes of this mediated, dialectical “becoming” clear:

In this movement, that resting subject itself founders [geht… zugrunde]; it enters into the distinctions and the content, and moreover makes up the determinateness, that is, the distinguished content as well as its movement, instead of continuing to stand over against it.

In dieser Bewegung geht jenes ruhende Subjekt selbst zugrunde; es geht in die Unterschiede und Inhalt ein und macht vielmehr die Bestimmtheit, das heißt, den unterschiednen Inhalt wie die Bewegung desselben aus, statt ihr gegenüberstehen zu bleiben (§60/3:57).

Now, these demonstrative articles themselves, “in dieser Bewegung geht jenes ruhende Subjekt,” “in this movement that resting subject itself founders” (my italics), make the

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[108] Here, this conflated concept-object flies in the face of Kant’s “transcendental object = X,” which served Kant to keep the “object” at bay as a mere “regulative principle” that could be “thought but not known”; see CPR, A105.
But at the level of the sentence, we remain stuck asking more basic questions: doesn’t the subject of the sentence remain in the same place, the same syntactic position? In what sense does it “enter into the distinctions” and cease “standing over against” the movement of the concept? If we take this “subject” to be an epistemological entity, we understand that the “subject that does the knowing is no longer at rest; it founders, geht…zugrunde, “goes into the ground,” “perishes.” It is now seen as the mere part of a conceptual development that is greater than itself; it cannot “continue to stand over against” the conceptual movement, but must rather assume a place in it. Note here Hegel’s play on the German word for “object,” Gegenstand, as it just appeared in the previous sentence (“Indem der Begriff das eigene Selbst des Gegenstandes ist”). Here the subject can no longer withstand the force of the object and its determinations, so it “enters into the distinctions and content,” “instead of continuing to stand over against it,” statt ihr gegenüber steenzubleiben.” The gegen and stehen mirror the Gegen-stand of the German “object,” the thing that, in the first place, was “standing over against” the subject, so that we could almost translate the phrase, “instead of continuing to objectify it.” And the grammatical implications of this confusion are somewhat clarified in the next sentence, where we read: “The firm soil [der feste Boden] that argumentation has in the resting subject thus shakes, and only this movement itself becomes [wird] the object”

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109 We will find that we are justified in doing so just a few sentences later, when we read that “the dispersion of the content is thereby conversely bound together under the self” (sentence 10 of §60/3:58; my italics).

110 But only fully brought to light in §61 below.
Again, epistemologically, the subject who purports to know something has failed in his argumentative negations and demonstrations of knowledge. He stands on no firm ground. And now the entire movement “becomes the object.” Grammatically, we might say that the very designation of subject and predicate, of thing described and attribute attributed, is crumbling, and the only way to salvage the descriptive force of the sentence at all is to take the whole syntactic movement of the proposition as itself expressive of the “object/concept” that Hegel’s speculative grammar is trying to track.

ii) The grammatical stakes of the speculative sentence

With his next sentence of §60, Hegel makes clear that we are now treating the distinctly grammatical register of the movements under discussion, with the reference to “predicates and accidents”: “The subject that fills its content ceases to go beyond it and cannot have any other predicates or accidents” (“Das Subjekt, das seinen Inhalt erfüllt, hört auf, über diesen hinauszugehen, und kann nicht noch andre Prädikate oder Akzidenzen haben”) (§60/3:58). Now we are truly in the realm of the speculative sentence, even before Hegel has openly named it. And we can now hear the truth of the remark (referenced in Chapter 2 above) from Hegel’s Encyclopedia that “the subject and the predicate themselves are each of them the whole judgment” (EL §180): the subject has become bloated and “fills its content,” and because of the essential nature of the subject-predicate relation, no others could take their place. The logic of Hegel’s
“speculative sentence” is that the subject and predicate are what they are but only by dint of their being part of a sentence that makes them what they are. Not only are the predicates or accidents adequate to the subject, but they overwhelm it and have shaken any semblance of “firm footing” that the subject might have had as a mere object of ascription. Here it may be helpful to think back to the “speculative words” or “pure self-movements” presented in §58. If “being-for-itself,” for instance, were to serve as the subject of a sentence, it could be said that the “content is filled.” The sentence expressing such content could read: “Being is for itself.” The “being” so defined is complete because properly self-reflective. It would be pleonastic, superfluous for such a subject to go any further, to “seek other predicates or accidents,” as for example if the sentence were to read “Being is for itself, which is essential” or “Being-for-itself is also red and yellow and wonderful.”

Hegel’s next sentence demonstrates what Stein might call the “completeness” of this sort of grammar: “The dispersion of the content is thereby conversely bound together under the self; the content [er] is not the universal that, free from the subject, could befit many others” (“Die Zerstreutheit des Inhalts ist umgekehrt dadurch unter das Selbst gebunden; er ist nicht das Allgemeine, das frei vom Subjekte mehrern zukäme”) ($60/3:58$). Here again, a compound, hyphenated noun like Hegel’s oft-used “being-for-itself” may just as well be expressed in the sentence, “being is for itself.” “Being-for-itself” is not a universal that could be used in “whatever” other circumstance. If the

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111 Here note that the 1831 revision of the second clause reads: ‘the self [es] is not the universal that, free from the subject, could befit many others.’ The first clause explains why Hegel might have made this change, and why the change is really negligible, for ‘the dispersion of the content is…bound together under the self.’ The self is fully expressive of content, and the content is figured as a self, a subject (whether epistemological or merely grammatical is not made certain here).
subject were a universal like “brownness,” it could befit many other instances: “brownness is found in the table,” so: “the table is brown,” and “brownness is also reminiscent of fall and dung and books.” And if we were dealing with mere universals that could befit many others,” we would again be dealing with a merely subsumptive model of predication where the universal predicate could predicate many other things, or many things could be subsumed under its umbrella: “the table is brown” and “the banana is turning brown” and “that cow is brown.”

iii) The speculative sentence reverses the sentence, conflates its parts: the ‘counterthrust’

But such statements of predication are no longer sufficient, because we then read that “The content is hence in fact no longer the predicate of the subject but is the substance, is the essence and the concept of what is under discussion [wovon die Rede ist]” (“Der Inhalt ist somit in der Tat nicht mehr Prädikat des Subjekts, sondern ist die Substanz, ist das Wesen und der Begriff dessen, wovon die Rede ist”) (§60/3:58). Here Hegel now seems to suggest that even the term “predicate” really will not do in such circumstances, whether grammatical or epistemological. I say “grammatical or epistemological” because we can see in sentences like this that Hegel is indeed “stacking registers” of comprehension and approach (as I discussed in Chapter 1). Here Hegel is equating the terms “content,” “substance,” “essence,” and “concept.” These are all discussed elsewhere in Hegel’s system, and are thought of outside of Hegel’s writing as one side in oppositions that may be termed “structural” (content) “metaphysical” (substance, essence), or broadly “philosophical” or “German idealist” (concept). That is,
content is usually paired with and distinguished from form; substance with subject; essence with appearance; and concept with idea, thought, judgment, intuition, or sense.

But here, they are all being rapidly, seamlessly pushed together: The “content” here may initially have been read in the place of the predicate, and as the predicate. For example, “Being is for-itself,” where “for-itself” is the content of “being.” But it has now become, or been truly read as, the substance: “being is substantially for-itself,” “being-for-itself is.” But then Hegel also says it is the essence: “being is essentially for-itself;” and even the concept: “being is conceptually for-itself” or “being-for-itself is the concept.” In this last iteration, we see that what was originally read as the mere “predicate of the subject” is, rather, supposed to be read as a “concept as such” or a “pure self-movement” (§58): being-for-itself.

This whole sentence (§60, sentence 11/3:58) begins to sound a bit like Aristotle’s concept of “essential predication” as set forth in Topics I and Posterior Analytics I.22, whereby the predicate is no mere accidental, but shows itself to be so inextricable from the reality of the subject that it is “the substance or the essence of what is under discussion.” But in order to achieve this end, Hegel does not work, like Aristotle, at slowly negating less essential predicates. We rather find him here effecting something of a reversal of the more standard propositional models he has been discussing. Again, in the subsumptive proposition, for example, “S is P” means “P (less general) is subsumed under S (more general).” But Hegel writes that “that which has the form of a predicate in the proposition is the substance itself,” and explains, “The content is hence in fact no longer the predicate of the subject but is the substance, is the essence and the concept of

\[\text{112} \text{ Cf. Heidegger’s reading of the speculative proposition, discussed in Chapter 2 above and again below.}\]
what is under discussion.” Alongside Aristotle, there is some other historical precedent for Hegel’s conceit here. Leibniz’s “predicate in notion principle” effectively reversed the grammatical functions of subject and predicate in order more adequately to account for metaphysical realities. Leibniz writes: “In every proposition…the notion of the predicate is contained in the notion of the subject,” and again, “Praedicatum inest subjecto; otherwise I do not know what truth is.” Leibniz says that “this is explicit in universal affirmative propositions, but is implicit or virtual in all other propositions.” For example, it is “explicit in ‘every man is an animal’ that ‘the concept of animal is contained in concept of man’”(ibid. 11). But the more “conventional” way of reading that proposition would be simply to say that “the concept of man belongs to the more general concept of animal.” I point to Leibniz here as a potential cue for the claims Hegel makes. Leibniz’s remark that this is “explicit in universal affirmative propositions” helps explain the at least quasi-universal affirmative propositions (what Kant would call “infinite judgments”\(^\text{114}\)) of “Sense-certainty” in §§95-108 of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Those sentences (“Now is night,” “Here is tree”) work to reverse the subsumptive model of predication precisely because their subject is not a particular but is rather a singular (“now,” “here”) or a universal (“nowness,” “hereness”) that receives a particular predication (“night,” “tree”), rather than a particular that receives a universal predication.\(^\text{115}\)


\(^{114}\) See Zizek 1989, 207.

\(^{115}\) Cf. Pippin 123.
But now Hegel offers a recap, and, as if he has not hammered home the point enough, he would have the next sentence remind us just how and why “representation” (Vorstellung) is not equipped to deal with such syntactic predicaments:

Representational thinking, since its nature is to run through the accidents or predicates, and rightly, because they are no more than predicates and accidents, to go beyond them, is inhibited [gehemmt] in its running-through, since that which has the form of a predicate in the proposition is the substance itself.

Das vorstellende Denken, da seine Natur ist, an den Akzidenzen oder Prädikaten fortzulaufen, und mit Recht, weil sie nicht mehr als Prädikate und Akzidenzen sind, über sie hinauszugehen, wird, indem das, was im Satze die Form eines Prädikats hat, die Substanz selbst ist, in seinem Fortlaufen gehemmt (§60/3:58).

When representational thinking reads a sentence of “essential predication,” it gets caught up, stuck, inhibited. The sentence “the table is brown” would not have been a stumbling block for representational thought. It would have answered, “Yes, it appears so! And the table is also covered with a table cloth! It is also rather large!” But if representational thinking were to read a sentence like “being is for-itself,” it would either discount the whole statement as inanity, a mere copulation of two empty signifiers, or it would get caught in asking what “being” is in the first place, because “being” stands there cramming its predicate, ceasing to “go beyond it.” Or representational thinking would say, “Well, that is a closed system, so count me out,” because the speculative sentence
has about as much authority as God’s name – “I am what I am”¹¹⁶ – and must be either rejected as tautology or bowed before as final. For representational thinking, this situation is rather absurd, and so Hegel’s next sentence tells us that “It suffers, if we might represent it thus, a counterthrust” (“Es erleidet, es so vorzustellen, einen Gegenstoß”) (§61/3:58).

This is the first “counterthrust,” Anstoss, the first “jab” or “fight-back” that Hegel identifies. The second comes in §61, sentence 1 (3:59). I contend that these two are in fact the same counterthrust, but that they are deployed in different epistemological registers in each place. In this instance, we read specifically of representational thinking suffering a counterthrust when it is inhibited or checked by the weird grammar of a sentence whose predicate is really more like an essence. It is instructive that representational thinking undergoes this experience when it is confronted with something that does not fit its pattern of thought. This gives us a new understanding of what I have been calling Hegel’s “stacking of epistemological registers.” Hegel does not merely stack the categories of pictorial representation on those of speculative thought, or again those of metaphysics on those of poetry, etc. In fact, these modes of thought confront one another; they undergo dialectical “counterthrusts,” and it is only by such counterthrusts that we might legitimately equate, say, the predicate of a sentence with the content of a thought, or the conceptual “substance” of a philosophical claim with the “essence” of a reality. In this Anstoss, representational thinking encounters something outside its ken: it had thought in “predicates,” but now instead it finds a “substance.” Note that these registers can be “stacked” precisely because what representational thinking found in the

¹¹⁶ Exodus 3:14, NAS.
“substance” where it was expecting a “predicate” was still in the syntactic position of the predicate. Or: it still looked enough like a predicate to get read in the first place. This intermingling of epistemological and grammatical dimensions again demonstrates the mixed interpretive and productive modalities of the spekulativer Satz.\footnote{And we can note that this is an even more common experience in the realm of theology, which might point to why Hegel has front-loaded us with theological examples (§20, e.g.; discussed in Chapter 1 above) as he approaches the function of the speculative sentence. For example: “The God of the Bible who claims to be love (1 John 4:8) is a tyrannical myth” might be a true and acceptably controlled (let’s say: “representational”) account of a certain reality. When, in Christian conversion narratives, one actually comes to believe in that God, the content of the predicate “love” is filled by the subject “God” (cf. sentence 9 above). Then all the sentences are repurposed, but none are abrogated. The sentence “God is love” becomes true: “God really is love!” The phrase “The God of the Bible” becomes “God reveals Himself in inscripturated revelation.” And the sentence “God is a tyrannical myth” becomes “natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). All propositions are in effect retained, but all have suffered a contentful counterthrust that was syntactically enabled, and have consequently been stacked against a different epistemology: “God is essentially love.”}

iv) Reading the speculative sentence: the interpretive side of things

With the “counterthrust” of this sentence in mind, we may now start to ask: how communicable are the truths of speculative sentences? How much does the counterthrust leave behind? How much should the speculative way of reading expect non-speculative thought to suffer such inhibitions? Hegel’s next sentence answers such questions:

Starting from the subject, as if this were to remain underlying as ground,\footnote{Or: “as if this were a permanent ground.”} it finds that, since the predicate is rather the substance, the subject has gone over into the predicate and has herewith been suspended [aufgehoben]; and since, thus, what...
seemed to be the predicate has become the whole and independent mass, thinking cannot wander about freely, but is held back\textsuperscript{119} by this weight.

Vom Subjekte anfangend, als ob dieses zum Grunde liegen bliebe, findet es, indem das Prädikat vielmehr die Substanz ist, das Subjekt zum Prädikat übergegangen und hiemit aufgehoben; und indem so das, was Prädikat zu sein scheint, zur ganzen und selbstständigen Masse geworden, kann das Denken nicht frei herumirren, sondern ist durch diese Schwere aufgehalten (§60/3:58).

Notice that in the three sentences that preceded this one, the “subject,” “predicate,” and “content” were spoken of in the active voice and in the present tense; those parts of speech were the present agents in Hegel’s consideration. In this sentence, representational thinking itself is the subject. That whole mode of thinking gets irked, and now we find representational thinking reflecting back upon the actions of the subject and predicate, actions that have taken place in the past tense. The subject “has gone over into”; the predicate “has become the whole.” The emphasis in this sentence is on what the thinker observes in these peculiar grammatical and metaphysical motions.

In this sentence, Judith Butler’s approach to Hegel’s speculative sentence may be vindicated in that she (along with Jean-Luc Nancy) most frequently stresses the dimensions of reading or of interpretation in her consideration: “The temporality of the concept is neither static nor teleological, but requires a doubly inverted reading that knows no closure, which will no doubt offend the avatars of common sense, but without

\textsuperscript{119} Or “hindered, halted.”
which no approach to Hegel is possible” (Butler x; my italics). She is quite right to lay
the stress on reading, for we have seen that this first “counterthrust” is experienced
precisely by the thinking subject, who seems to be looking on, reading, and interpreting
the weird sentence before him. Here Butler can properly address the demand that Hegel
calls “wholly determinate” in §63, the demand that so much of philosophy must be “read
repeatedly [wiederholt gelesen] before it can be understood”:

[…] the reading of Hegel’s grammar according to the demands of the speculative
sentence can be read “forward” only to find that the presuppositions that animated
the reading must themselves be read in turn, compelling a reversal that does not
quite undo what has been done (and that, at the very level of grammar, enacts a
notion of negation proper to reading itself) (Butler xi-xii).

Again, this seems entirely fitting to the sentence at hand, but we did note that the
“determinate negative” of §59 was felt on grammatical (reading) and epistemological
(thinking, conditioning) levels simultaneously. As in all of Hegel’s dialectical motions, it
seems that something is given to be read, but it is Hegel’s (presupposition-less) conceit
that that very same thing is also simply given, set forth as a thought, as if of its own
accord, which Butler rightly notes can be most cogently read as an iterative accretion:

It is important to remember that for Hegel, the key terms of his philosophical
vocabulary are rehearsed several times, and that nearly every time they are uttered
they accrue a different meaning or reverse a prior one (ibid. 21).
So while this sentence of §60 may very well provide a full affirmation of Butler’s stress on Hegel’s *reading* practice, it remains undeniable that Hegel also strives to present, externalize, or enact the mechanisms of speculative thought *in writing* (which Butler might have in mind in her conception of “reading” anyway). And it is precisely in this tortured toggle between writing and reading that Hegel is able to satisfy himself with the conceit that the speculative sentence is in fact meeting the demands of epistemological, grammatical, and metaphysical realities all at once.

v) A foxy critique of Kant: the productive side of things

In the next sentence, Hegel again reiterates his thinking, but now with some newly accreted terms:

– Otherwise the subject first lies at the foundation as the *objective*, fixed self [*fixe Selbst*]; from here, the necessary movement to the manifoldness of determinations or of predicates goes forth; here the knowing I itself enters into the place of that subject and is both the knotting [*das Verknüpfen*] of the predicates and the subject holding them.

– Sonst ist zuerst das Subjekt als das *gegenständliche* fixe Selbst zugrunde gelegt; von hier aus geht die notwendige Bewegung zur Mannigfaltigkeit der Bestimmungen oder der Prädikate fort; hier tritt an die Stelle jenes Subjekts das
wissende Ich selbst ein und ist das Verknüpfen der Prädikate und das sie haltende Subjekt (§60/3:58).

I propose that the dash at the beginning of this sentence is appositional in nature. It indicates a recapitulation and a re-writing of what Hegel has said throughout the paragraph. And here we should note that the *sonst* ("otherwise") sends us back as far as the first sentences of §60, where the “positive side of argumentation” was under consideration as a “usual,” “conventional/habitual” thing. We saw something of the movement described here anticipated above when the conventional way of thinking “ran away into representations” and formalistic thinking “argued back and forth in un-actual thought” (§58; my italics). Here, instead, the “necessary movement to the manifoldness of determinations…goes forth.” In this phrase, one can’t help but hear an allusion to the “manifold of determinations” from Kant’s *First Critique* (A108). And indeed, I propose that this sentence recapitulates the above motions of the paragraph, but now with the express aim of leveling an implicit critique of Kant’s “transcendental unity of apperception.”

Let us look at the phrase *das sie haltende Subjekt*, “the subject holding them” in this connection. Hyppolite renders the phrase, “*qui les soutient,*” the subject “that supports them.” The subject here *knots and holds* the predicates, like the “resting subject” earlier in the paragraph who, “unmoved, carries the accidents” (§60, sentence 4).

The Kantian function of the “transcendental unity of apperception” “makes representation

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120 I will only address Kant here insofar as it is necessary for the present discussion of Hegel’s paragraph. Like most Hegelian nods to Kant, this brief discussion will not do Kant justice; it is merely meant to further elucidate Hegel’s words in §60.
possible” (CPR B132) by a series of actions that look not unlike Hegel’s “knotting and holding.” The transcendental unity of apperception “accompanies” (B131), “makes a connection” (A108), and “synthetically combines the manifold into one cognition” (A108), just as Hegel’s “fixed self” here “lies at the foundation” of the “manifoldness of determinations.” Note that Hegel can also be seen translating Kant’s “original-synthetic or transcendental unity of apperception” in §23 of the Phenomenology’s “Preface”:

The subject is taken up as the firm [fester] point to which the predicates are fastened, as to their support, by a movement which belongs to the one who knows about it [die dem von ihm Wissenden angehört], and which is therefore not regarded as belonging to the point itself; but only through the movement could the content be presented as subject.

Das Subjekt ist als fester Punkt angenommen, an den als ihren Halt die Prädikate geheftet sind, durch eine Bewegung, die dem von ihm Wissenden angehört, und die auch nicht dafür angesehen wird, dem Punkte selbst anzugehören; durch sie aber wäre allein der Inhalt als Subjekt dargestellt (§23/3:26).

The “firm point,” *fester Punkt*, of §23 is the same function as that described in §60 as the “fixed self” (*fixe Selbst*). The phrase *die dem von ihm Wissenden angehört* confirms yet again that Hegel is at work translating and critiquing the transcendental unity of

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122 Both carry some deliberate Hegelian verbal estrangement, in that the *Punkt* of §23 is Latinate and the *fixe* of §60 is French.
apperception, for it is the very function that Kant says turns the “manifold representations” in an “intuition” into “my representations,” representations that “belong to a self-consciousness” (B132; Kant’s bolds):

…as my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must yet necessarily be in accord with the condition under which alone they can stand together in a universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not throughout belong to me (B132-3; Kant’s bolds).

But in translating this Kantian function, Hegel has elided (or again: “stacked”) the difference between what he was talking about as grammatical entities, and what are now largely presented as Kantian epistemological entities. The grammatical subject has become the thinking subject, in a move that is not necessarily warranted by Kant’s writings (“here the knowing I itself enters into the place of that subject and is both the knotting of the predicates and the subject holding them”). As Jean Hyppolite explains: “One sees [in Hegel] how the positive side of this representational thought joins its negative side. It is in effect the ‘I who knows’ that is substituted for the subject of the proposition in order to connect the predicates with one another.”¹²³ So we understand what use this serves in Hegel’s paragraphs, but its repurposing of Kant is, again, a little off, as might be expected. Note that when Kant makes a similar elision of the grammatical and the epistemological, his “knowing I” or “knowing subject” enters not

into the grammatical subject, but into the grammatical copula.¹²⁴ And even there, Kant does not use the copula as a place for the subject to “enter in,” but rather as the whetstone whereby the unity of a judgment is assessed as either objective or subjective:

I find that the judgment is nothing but the manner in which given modes of knowledge are brought to the objective unity of apperception. This is what is intended by the copula is. It is employed to distinguish the objective unity of given representations from a subjective unity (B141).

However, it does not seem that Kant’s “transcendental unity of apperception” has a necessary connection with any one grammatical function. Again, here Hegel is in effect casting Kant’s “transcendental unity of apperception” as the old usual way – the ‘conventions’ or ‘habits’ of §§58-9 – and he is now both attacking and building upon it with the demands of a speculative grammar.

And Hegel’s attack is also a pillaging. We can now observe him stealthily taking over the following three functions of Kant’s “transcendental unity” of the apperceptive faculty:¹²⁵ a) identity: where Kant had said, “The I think must be able to accompany all my representations” (B131); b) synthesis, or the “unifying activity” whereby the transcendental unity of apperception “makes out of all possible appearances that can ever come together in one experience a connection of all of these representations in accordance with laws” (A108); and c) the identity of “self-consciousness,” whereby the

¹²⁵ See Pippin 19 for a useful discussion of these three functions.
subject is “conscious of the identity of the function by means of which this manifold is synthetically combined into one cognition” (A108). We may read Hegel’s sentence again, inserting these nods to Kant with the letters a, b, and c:

Usually the subject first lies at the foundation as the objective, fixed self; from here, the necessary movement to the manifoldness of determinations or of predicates goes forth; here a) the knowing I itself enters into the place of that subject and is both b) the knotting of the predicates and c) the subject holding them ($60$).

Pippin describes the epistemological consequences of this state of affairs: “My asserting that $S$ is $P$ is not an assertion of mine unless I am implicitly aware as I assert that I am asserting, not entertaining the possibility that, $S$ is $P$” (Pippin 21). But as we move to Hegel’s next sentence, we will see that this state of affairs is precisely what Hegel is dismantling and seeking to move beyond, as the final sentence of §60 puts the final nail in Kant’s insufficiently speculative coffin:

Since, however, that first subject enters into the determinations themselves and is their soul, the second subject, namely the knowing one, still finds in the predicate what it wanted to be through with and over beyond which it wanted to return into itself, and instead of being able to be the doer in the moving of the predicate – arguing whether this or that predicate should be attributed [beizulegen] – it rather
still has to do with the self of the content, it is not supposed to be for itself, but is rather supposed to be together with this.

Indem aber jenes erste Subjekt in die Bestimmungen selbst eingeht und ihre Seele ist, findet das zweite Subjekt, nämlich das wissende, jenes, mit dem es schon fertig sein und worüber hinaus es in sich zurückgehen will, noch im Prädikate vor, und statt in dem Bewegen des Prädikats das Tuende, als Räsonieren, ob jenem dies oder jenes Prädikat beizulegen wäre, sein zu können, hat es vielmehr mit dem Selbst des Inhalts noch zu tun, soll nicht für sich, sondern mit diesem zusammensein (§60/3:57).

This sentence seems to break under the strain of Hegel’s above re-writing of Kant. Here the two “subjects” that had been conjoined are burst asunder because of the conceptual weight of the grammatical subject: “That first subject enters into the determinations themselves and is their soul.” We may take this to be referring strictly to the grammatical subject, the written concept, the conceptual material, for this is simply a recapitulation of what we read about above, where the subject is adequately and totally mapped by its predicate: “The subject that fills its content ceases to go beyond it and cannot have any other predicates or accidents” (§60, sentence 9). “That first subject […] is their soul,” but remember Hegel’s limit on this way of thinking: the “pure self-movements” of the concept “could be called souls if their concept did not designate something higher than that” (§58, sentence 2; my italics).
The “second subject” is the epistemological one – the knower, the thinker, maybe even the reader. It is, at this point, just frustrated. It wants to assume the rather awkward title of “doer in the moving of the predicate,” *in dem Bewegen des Prädikats das Tuende.* But the conceptual weight, the “contentfulness,” of the predicate is obstinate. The thinking subject “wanted to be through with it.” It wanted to “return into itself,” not in an act of Hegelian “good reflection,” but in mere escape from the absurdity of the conceptual claim. This subject wanted to revert to the convention described in §58, where “formalistic thinking argues back an forth in un-actual thought,” here “arguing whether this or that predicate should be *beizulegen,*” “attached” or, even, “attributed.” The grammatical and conceptual material of the proposition has in effect forced this “second subject” to tarry, to “be together” with the first subject.

And this fitful, strained series of negotiations now gives way to yet another presentation of the same strife, but now explicitly as a *syntactic problem,* “expressed formally,” in Hegel’s presentation of the “speculative sentence.”

vi) The speculative proposition named: What was it for Kant?

The first sentence of §61 finally introduces the speculative proposition\(^\text{127}\) proper:

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\(^{126}\) The translators have a field day with this one. Hyppolite (Hegel 1946, p. 61) gives “l’element operant,” the “operative element,” or the “element that does the work.” Pinkard translates it: “what sets the predicate in motion” (Hegel 2008, 57). Baillie inserts some commentary in his translation: “the determining agency in the process of resolving the predicate” (Hegel 2003, 65). We might even render it: “the agent in the agitation of the predicate.” Cf. James 1:22 “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (*NAS*).

\(^{127}\) As I noted in Chapter 2, the phrase *spekulative Satz* as such appears in the *Phenomenology* only here and once again in the first sentence of §65.
Formally, what has been said can be expressed thus: the nature of the judgment or of the proposition in general, which involves the distinction of subject and predicate, is destroyed by the speculative proposition [durch den spekulativen Satz zerstoert], and the proposition of identity, which the former becomes, contains the counterthrust to that relation.


This paragraph begins with the word Formell, “formally,” which would indicate that the preceding paragraphs were not formally minded. In those paragraphs, Hegel had used largely epistemological language (“subject, object”) and conceptual language (“concept, form, determinateness”). Here he will address the same motions but at the level of the formal grammatico-philosophical entities called “judgments” and “propositions” or “sentences.” The adverb formell may also serve to indicate that considerations of the “thinking subject,” the Kantian epistemological center and its frustrations, have come to a head, and there is nothing more to say there, for we saw §60 end with that thinking subject encountering a dead-end Kantian sollen, an “ought”: “soll nicht für sich, sondern mit diesem zusammen sein,” “it is not supposed to be for itself, but rather to be with this [self of the content].”
Hegel speaks here of the “nature of the judgment or of the proposition in general.” It gets “destroyed” by the “speculative proposition.” I have discussed the conceptual difficulty behind Hegel’s use of this (at first glance un-dialectical) verb in Chapter 2 above. Here, let us note that it is odd that Hegel ranges the “judgment” and the “proposition in general” together. It is safe to say that Hegel often uses the words judgment (Urteil) and proposition (Satz) interchangeably, but we can also note that the word “judgment” will not appear again in the following five paragraphs. We might conjecture that this is because the proposition or sentence (Satz) is in fact the less specialized term, and it therefore has greater chances at “succeeding in being plastic” (as Hegel will state his objective at the end of §64) and moving away from Kant’s entrenched usage of such terms. Also (as noted in Chapter 2), because Hegel is keen throughout his systematic works to “teach philosophy to speak German,” we may conjecture that he recruits and privileges the Satz precisely because in un-philosophical German it can signify both a specialized philosophical “proposition” and the colloquial German “sentence.”

It is the task of another thesis altogether to track the differential uses of Urteil and Satz through the meandering paths of German Idealism. We may say, though, that in the wake of Kant’s three Critiques, the following general distinction between judgment and proposition can be made: Urteil (“judgment”) is the broader term that can include the

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130 And, indeed, this philological history has been adequately propounded; see especially Liebrucks 1970 and Wohlfahrt 1981.
multifarious syntactic patterns demanded of all the sentence types delineated in Kant’s “table of judgments” (CPR A70/B95). Such “judgments” can include both simple sentences (consisting of subject, copula, predicate) that express affirmation (A is B), negation (A is not B), etc., as well as the syllogistic forms of, say, hypothetical and disjunctive utterances (“if A is B, then C”; “either A is B, or C”). “Propositions” (Sätze), then, are the narrower set of simple sentences that make up the more complex judgments – so again, affirmative, negative, and infinite judgments would qualify as “propositions” for Kant. This may be illustrated in an aside Kant makes in the section of his first Critique called “On the logical function of the understanding in judgments.” He gives the following example of a disjunctive judgment: “The world exists either through blind chance, or through inner necessity, or through an external cause” (ibid. A74/B99). He then goes on to speak of the parts of that judgment as propositions: “Each of these propositions occupies one part of the sphere of the possible cognition about the existence of a world in general, and together they occupy the entire sphere,” adding that, “In a disjunctive judgment there is therefore a certain community of cognitions” (ibid. A74/B99). This shows that for Kant, at least, judgments are the broader category, and judgments can be made up of propositions. At least in such systematic places, Kant does not then allow himself the liberty of speaking of the above disjunctive judgment as a whole sentence or proposition, for which the German word would again have been Satz. In a personal note to that same section, Kant had scribbled, “Judgments and propositions are different. That the latter are verbis expressa, since they are assertoric.”¹³¹ That would then limit “propositions” to Kant’s second category of “modality,” the assertoric, which

¹³¹ CPR 209 (A74/B99); see also note ‘EXXXVIII,’ CPR p. 23.
consists of statements of truth, fact, or actuality (CPR A74/B100). The Latin *verbis expressa* means “what is made explicit through words,” “express words,” or even, simply, “indicative statements.” Under this definition, even a simple sentence with a modal qualifier, such as “A is *possibly* B” would not properly be a “Satz.”

As mentioned at the start of Chapter 2, the term “speculative proposition” is not Hegel’s invention, but we also do not find it in Schelling or Fichte or Hölderlin. The phrase appears *once* in Kant’s oeuvre, and there with a bit of a pejorative tone. In an Appendix to the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant defines the difference between “theoretical,” “practical,” and “speculative” cognition. *Practical cognition*, on the definition given in the *Logic*, consists of “imperatives…or the grounds for possible imperatives,” by which Kant means “every statement that expressed a possible free action by which a certain end is to be made actual” (*Logic* 94). For Kant, *theoretical cognition* consists of expressions of “what is,” and such cognitions “have as their object not an *acting* but a *being*.” In contradistinction, *speculative cognitions* are defined as follows:

> By speculative cognitions, on the other hand, we understand those from which no rules of behavior can be derived or which contain no grounds for possible imperatives [as practical cognitions do]. Such merely speculative propositions are very numerous, e.g. in *theology* (*Logic* 94; Kant’s italics).

Kant goes on to say that all speculative cognitions are *theoretical*, in that they purport to be treating “what is.” But not every theoretical cognition is speculative, because some theoretical cognitions can have practical (by which he means: imperative) import. These
categories are totally reconfigured in Hegel. Many of the sentences we have just read from §60, for example, turn precisely on the conflict between practical and theoretical cognitions. The phrase that interests us is Kant’s “such merely speculative propositions.” Why did Kant start talking about propositions here? Why the slip from “cognition” to “proposition”? When discussing the theoretical and practical, he mentions only “cognitions.” But there is something “mere” about speculative cognitions: they are called “merely speculative propositions.” And they are “very numerous,” for example, “in theology.” And yet, surely these speculative propositions don’t attain to the status of the “regulative principle” that Kant’s theological claims have in his Second Critique, for then they would be “practical cognitions.”

We can start to imagine why Hegel would have jumped on these rather neglected speculative vessels, but we will find that Hegel’s delineations are nowhere near as tidy as Kant’s. On the one hand, it will in fact be seen that most of the examples Hegel offers of speculative propositions are in fact simple, assertoric, indicative sentences (cf. those in §§20, 23, and 62, e.g.) that leave little “ground for possible imperatives,” meaning that they have little immediately practical application. On the other hand, Hegel’s discussion of the speculative proposition very quickly unfolds into a discussion of speculative utterances in general, which consist of “speculative modes,” “philosophical exposition” (§64), “speculative predicates” (§66), and a general “presentation” that “must remain true to the nature of the speculative” (§66). This confirms Nancy’s reading of the speculative proposition as a dispersed “program of an absolutely other grammar” (Nancy 2001, 13), with the emphasis on the generalized program.
vii) The speculative sentence dissected: what is it for Hegel?

But, now moving past Kant’s categorical distinctions, how is the “nature of the judgment or of the proposition in general” destroyed by the spekulative Satz? Hegel wrote: “the nature of the judgment or of the proposition in general, which involves the distinction of subject and predicate, is destroyed by the speculative proposition, and the proposition of identity, which the former becomes, contains the counterthrust to that relation.” In this “formal” presentation of many of the same movements that have come before, we move from one sort of sentence to a new sort. The first sort “involves the distinction of subject and predicate;” the second sort “contains the counterthrust to that relation.” From what we have gathered in Chapters 1 and 2, we can now say confidently that, in such movements, not only of a process of knowing, but also simultaneous processes of reading, writing, and interpreting are at stake.

The first sort of sentence does not merely “receive a counterthrust” from the second sort. Hegel says that the first sort of sentence “becomes…the proposition of identity,” and then that proposition of identity (which is a “becoming” of the first mere “distinction of subject and predicate”) contains the critique of the first sentence. Note that we have not actually acquired a new sentence. The sentence receives the counterthrust from itself! Because of this, Gillian Rose can rightly speak of the speculative proposition as a “simultaneous affirmation of identity and non-identity” (Rose 52), but note that she is there borrowing language from Hegel’s 1801 Differenzschrift, and Hegel has made some important modifications in the interim. The actions Hegel sets forth above, actions

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that serve to dramatize how the “conventional way of relating the parts of a proposition” is reworked, may in one sense be said to occur “simultaneously,” but our whole exposition of these fraught paragraphs of the *Phenomenology* have also proven that “simultaneity” is really not conceptually sufficient to account for the play between identity and non-identity that we have witnessed. The whole thing has taken so long, and the “simultaneity” (if there is any to speak of) has at least been a hard won, *achieved* simultaneity (it is certainly nothing like the simultaneity of a “copulative” proposition, as Heidegger made clear for us in Chapter 2 above). This is signaled in the word “becomes.”

And this becoming again happens through a rather violent internal “counterthrust.” In §60, we heard that representational thinking *suffers* a counterthrust. Now the normal proposition *becomes* a proposition of identity, and that proposition *contains* the counterthrust. Heidegger gives a close reading of this passage which we should read in full, because he does well to interject the idea of “contradiction” where we have heard Hegel speak of “distinction,” and to point to Hegel’s movement beyond Kant’s “analytic and synthetic” where we have been hearing only of Hegel’s “identity and difference”:

Contradiction is essential for the instrument of Hegelian thinking, for the *speculative proposition*. In the speculative proposition the form of the conventional assertion, which subsumes a particular, the subject, under a universal, the predicate, *is disturbed*. An example of a speculative proposition is: “the finite is infinite.” Subsumption is not possible, the *asserting movement* suffers, as Hegel says, a *counterthrust*, it reverses itself: “the infinite is finite.”
Both propositions together make up speculative truth, the speculative proposition, which is neither analytic nor synthetic, but \textit{identical}, that is, the “predicate” is no longer posited in partial equation with the “subject” (as in the conventional proposition), \textbf{but rather fully} (Heidegger’s italics; my bolds).


Heidegger also speaks of a “counter-concept,” which may be a good way of viewing the “counterthrust” Hegel has presented as an essential moment in conceptual development:

That the infinite is finite can be linguistically deduced from the fact that, \textit{qua} \textit{infinite}, it \textbf{already contains the counter-concept}. The “is” in the speculative proposition thus has another sense than it does in the conventional assertion; it
does not *copulate*, but rather it mediates the extremes of the proposition, a linking different from the former: it mediates the finite *within* the infinite, and the infinite *within* the finite. The “is” here means: “has its truth in.” *Truth* is for Hegel, as for the whole of idealism, certainty, known-ness [*Gewissheit*, *Gewusstheit*], and indeed absolute certainty. Thus that proposition says: the infinite has its truth in being finite, and conversely. The unrest which characterizes the speculative proposition, which effects the counterthrust, lies in contradiction, in negation. The “not” is, then, embedded in the matter itself, it is not merely *in mentem* [in the mind]. Since the negation of the finite itself is negated, the fundamental forward-striving contradiction subsists between the negation and the “is”; it is suspended in the absolute identity of an “is” that is exposed as the theme of the entire Science of Logic [sic] (Hegel’s italics; my bolds).

Gegenstoß bewirkt, liegt im Widerspruch, in der Negation. Das Nicht ist dann in
die Sache selbst eingelassen, es ist nicht bloß in mentem. Indem die Negation des
Endlichen selbst negiert wird, besteht der fundamentale forttreibende
Widerspruch zwischen der Negation und dem »ist«; er wird in die absolute
Identität eines »ist« aufgehoben, das sich noch als das Thema der gesamten
Wissenschaft der Logik herausstellen wird (ibid. 849-50).

Heidegger’s analysis (“it mediates the finite within the infinite, and the infinite within the finite”) helps explain why Hegel had said that the proposition of identity “contains” the counterthrust, rather than that the identity “is” the counterthrust. Hegel, then, has demonstrated, both in §60, and then here “formally” (formell), in the first sentence of §61, that the following four functions of the speculative sentence are internal to its syntax:

1) First, the speculative sentence contains its own counterthrust, or “counter-concept,” by which its very own linguistic and epistemological assumptions are put into question. This “counterthrust” is made up both of a) the peculiarity and “fullness” of conceptual material, when “thinking is hindered by this weight” (§60) and starts moving between subject and predicate, and of b) the play of identity and non-identity that speculative sentences set in motion when “the distinction of subject and predicate…becomes the proposition of identity” (§61; my italics), effecting a change of the whole proposition, and not just one of its parts.

2) Second, the linking verb of the speculative sentence both plays with and employs the normal function of copulation and more thoroughly mediates the subject and
predicate. In Heidegger’s helpful summary, “S is P” then means “S finds its truth in P, and vice versa.”

3) Third, the speculative proposition contains moments of both identity and non-identity; of both contradiction and reciprocity. But they are best expressed as *simultaneously mediated* moments, wrought by a process of becoming and counter-thrusting, and not as simply *simultaneous*.

4) Fourth, the speculative proposition purports to be tracking epistemologically *mediated realities*, not merely entities *in mentem*. As Heidegger says, it claims to be expressing truths “embedded in the matter itself.”

viii) “Speculative rhythm”: a poetic simile

In the second sentence of §61, we find all these internal syntactic mechanisms dramatized in a riddling poetic analogy: “– This conflict between the form of a proposition generally and the unity of the concept that destroys it is similar to that which takes place in metrical rhythm between quantity and accent” (the German text is cited in my following paragraph). In this new presentation, the precise terms of Hegel’s comparison must be analyzed precisely. We first read of the “*rhythm*” of speculative thought in §58, where argumentation had “refused” to “intrude into the *rhythm* of the concept” (my italics).¹³³ There it was the *concept* that *has a rhythm*. Here, the concept is likened to *one of the parts* (“quantity and accent”) of the *conflict that takes place in*

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¹³³ “This refusal to intrude into the immanent rhythm of the concept, either arbitrarily or with wisdom attained from elsewhere, constitutes a restraint which is itself an essential moment of attentiveness to the concept” (§58).
(metrical) rhythm – a subtle difference. So: Hegel’s “concept” *has* an immanent, internal rhythm; but it also *plays a part in* the rhythm that pulses between “the general form of a proposition” and “the unity of the concept.”

The German of this difficult passage reads: “– *Dieser Konflikt der Form eines Satzes überhaupt und der sie zerstörenden Einheit des Begriffs is dem ähnlich, der im Rhythmus zwischen dem Metrum und dem Akzente stattfindet*” (3:59). At first glance, Miller is right to translate this sentence with the most obvious calques: Rhythmus = rhythm, Metrum = metre, and Akzente = accent, so: “the conflict that occurs in rhythm between meter and accent” (*PSM* 38). But Rhythmus here is more properly translated as the English “meter,” as in *steigender Rhythmus*, “iambic meter,” or *fallender Rhythmus*, “trochaic meter.” And it seems that the “conflict” Hegel has in mind is the one found in *quantitative poetry* between quantitative meter and pitch accents. So Metrum may be translated “quantitative meter,” referring to the metrical patterns of verse, while Akzente may be translated “pitch accent,” or the spontaneously placed accents that pepper the underlying movement of the steady, expected quantitative feet below it.

I contend that *quantitative meter* is at stake here because in *accentual* meter (such as we find in English verse), there is little or no “conflict” between meter and accent. In accentual verse, iambic pentameter, for example, sets up the expectation that the words in a verse exhibit their accents on the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth beat of each line, *just as the meter dictates*. In the first line of Homer’s *Iliad*, on the other hand, written in quantitative meter (which would have been common to Hölderlin and most German poetry of Hegel’s time), the “quantitative” dactylic hexameter dictates that long syllables come on the first beat of each foot, which looks like this: /--/--/--/--/--/. But the
accents of the words that make up that line follow the pitch of the words Homer employs, which sounds like this: /-/-/-/-/-/-/. Such a “conflict” would be visually represented in the difference between “/-/-/-/-/-/-/” and “/-/-/-/-/-/-/.” In such poetry, the prescribed quantitative metrical pattern is at odds with the spontaneous accentual material dictated by the words of Homer’s natural language. I ground the translation “in metrical rhythm between quantity and accent,” then, first in an attempt to find a coherent reading of Hegel’s text.

Secondly, we may ground this translation in a reference to Hegel’s Aesthetics, where we read of similar “conflicts” with specific reference to the mechanisms of quantitative poetry. Hegel makes the difference between accentual and quantitative poetry plain in the following passage:

This whole demand may on the whole be ascribed to our habit of seeing our

**German iambics** treated with the same continual fall and tempo of the syllables.

Yet the **classical** iambic trimeter acquires its beauty especially from its not consisting of six similarly timed iambic feet but on the contrary precisely in allowing spondees at the start of the dipody and dactyls and anapaests at the close, and in this way the **continual repetition of the same time-measure and anything like the beat is avoided**. Besides, the lyric stanzas are far more variable, so that it would have to be shown *a priori* that a beat is absolutely necessary in them, because *a posteriori* it is not to be found.134

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This “avoidance” of the “continual repetition of the same time-measure” and the “beat” is analogous to the “destruction” effected by the speculative proposition (§61, sentence 1), which, Hegel will write, should nevertheless “not annihilate their distinction.” What Hegel describes as a “conflict…between quantity and accent” in the second sentence of §61 is pictured in the Aesthetics as a “running parallel”: “But the really animating thing in rhythmical time-measure is introduced only by accent and caesura which run parallel with what we came to recognize in music as the rhythmical beat (ibid.).” The “caesura” mentioned here is a poetic device that Hegel does not include in the simile of the Phenomenology’s §61, but we might hear Hegel’s presentation of it in the Aesthetics as at least somewhat akin to the “hindrance,” “checking,” and “inhibiting” movements of the speculative sentence. As another element in the “conflict” of metrical rhythm, the caesura demands a pause in the flow of the line, while the quantitative meter and its accents continue to run spontaneously “in parallel”:

Above all, however, as I have mentioned before, the start and finish of the single feet must not rigidly correspond with the beginning and end of single words; for, first, if a complete word runs over past the end of a foot, the effect is to link together rhythms that would otherwise fall apart; and, secondly, if the verse accent falls on the final syllable of a word running over from one foot to another, the further result is a noticeable time-interval, because a word-ending as such necessitates something of a pause; and consequently it is this pause, coming in unison with the accent, which becomes felt as a deliberate time interval.
occurring in the otherwise unbroken flow of time. Caesuras like this are
required in every line (Aesthetics 1018; Hegel’s italics; my bolds).

In §60, we have read of a sort of reversal of the roles of predicate and subject, whereby “that which has the form of a predicate in the proposition is the substance itself” (§60) and where “the content is hence in fact no longer the predicate of the subject but is the substance, is the essence and the concept of what is under discussion” (ibid). This converse motion was really discovered as immanent, or at best latent, in the proposition itself. It was even immanent in the “conventional way of relating parts of a proposition” or in what Hegel said “usually” happens between the subject and predicate (ibid.). When Hegel first presents like conventional expectations of poetic meter in the Aesthetics, he speaks of “specific positions” that are “emphasized in accordance with a law,” and immanent in those expectations is also a potential “converse relation.” We might again extend Hegel’s simile and hear the affinities between the self-subverting laws of grammar and the spontaneous variety-making of the laws of poetry, as described in the Aesthetics:

In poetry too each specific time relation has in the first place its particular accent, i.e. specific positions are emphasized in accordance with a law, and these then attract the others and thus alone form with them a rounded whole. In this way a large field is opened up at once for variety in the value of syllables. For on the one hand, the long syllables will generally be strongly marked in comparison with the short ones, so that, if the accent falls on them, they appear twice as important as the shorter ones and they are given prominence over the unaccented
long ones. But on the other hand it can also happen that the accent falls on the shorter syllables so that now a similar but converse relation arises between the syllables (Aesthetics 1018; my bolds).

And this glaring likeness extends into that between the speculative sentence and poetic accentuation (again, in quantitative verse). The proposition of identity (what a speculative reading makes of the former “distinction of subject and predicate”) “contains the counterthrust to that [old] relation” (§61, sentence 1), and likewise the function of poetic accent “produces a counterthrust to the rhythm of the line:”

…in addition to the verse-accent [quantitative rhythm] and the caesura, there is still a third accent which the words already possess in themselves quite apart from their metrical use, and this makes possible a once more increased variation in the kind and degree of emphasis, or the reverse, on single syllables. For, on the one hand, this word-accent may occur bound up with the verse-accent and the caesura, both of which it may strengthen in consequence; but, on the other hand, it may rest, quite independently of these, on syllables which are favoured by no other emphasis and now, as it were, because they still demand accentuation on account of their own value as syllables, produce a counter-thrust to the rhythm of the line, and this gives a new and appropriate life to the whole (Aesthetics 1019; my bolds).
And hence, as we read in the next sentence of §61, “Metrical rhythm results from the hovering middle and the unification of both.” In this *schwebende Mitte*, “hovering middle,” Hegel’s quick nod to Fichte’s darling *Schweben* provides a proper reconciliation of the “destroying,” “counter-thrusting” threats of the elements of poetry that also must “run parallel” to one another (*Aesthetics* 1018) and produce a harmony (§61, sent 4). The “hovering middle” will be a model for the “harmonies” demanded of the speculative proposition.¹³⁵

Before moving on, let us be clear about the terms of Hegel’s comparison. We might speak of three elements in the metaphoric vehicle (poetic meter), and a matching three in the tenor (speculative sentences). But, as in so many of Hegel’s movements, such dialectical trinities seldom hold to the end. We quickly find the “triplicity” popping out into a “quadruplicity” (cf. *SLM* 836). And we have to concede that here Hegel’s congruencies are a bit lopsided. As Adorno reminds us, Hegel’s thought will often “elude literary presentation.”¹³⁶ In §61, the comparison is between the “conflict” in the workings of speculative propositions and the “conflict” inherent in poetics. In poetry, the three terms are: quantitative meter (*Metrum*), accent (*Akzente*), and metrical rhythm (*Rhythmus*). The play of meter and accent is both a “hovering middle” and a “unification”

¹³⁵ And as such this again confirms Heidegger’s reading quoted above that “the ‘is’ in the speculative proposition thus has another sense than it does in the conventional assertion; it does not *copulate*, but rather it mediates the extremes of the proposition, a linking [we might add: hovering] different from the former” (Heidegger 2011, 850).

¹³⁶ See Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. S. Weber Nicholsen, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993, p. 91. But we cannot follow Adorno to the point of conceding that sometimes “Hegel simply cannot be understood rigorously” (95). At the very least, we can *misunderstand* this paragraph rigorously. If we are to say anything concrete at all about the speculative sentence, we ought not to shrink from tracking the train of synonyms Hegel is knotting together in a paragraph that is either just plain confusing, or is both a call for and a true attempt at the “plastic” philosophical exposition (§64) he wishes to teach us.
that makes for metrical rhythm. In that this “hovering middle” and “unification” are
neither merely “meter” or “accent,” nor are they “metrical rhythm,” but rather the stuff
that “results in” metrical rhythm, we may call such things a “fourth term,” and insert
them before the former third. That is the totality of terms Hegel employs in the
metaphoric vehicle of §61: 1) quantitative meter (*Metrum*), 2) accent (*Akzente*), 3) the
“hovering middle or unification of both,” and 4) metrical rhythm (*Rhythmus*).

Then, following the discussion in the *Aesthetics*, we can stack a few synonyms, or
accompanying functions, on each of these terms. 1) “Quantitative meter” was presented
as a “continual repetition of the same time-measure,” a “beat” (*Aesthetics* 1018),
“specific positions” and “a law” (ibid. 1019). 2) “Accent” was ranged with “caesura”
(ibid. 1018) as the functions that break up the monotony of quantitative meter. Accent
was billed as “what makes possible a once more increased variation in the kind and
degree of emphasis” (ibid. 1018), and as what “produces a counter-thrust to the rhythm of
the line,” and “gives a new and appropriate life to the whole” (ibid. 1019). 3) The
“hovering middle or unification” is synonymous with the “similar but converse relation
[which] arises between the syllables” (ibid. 1018), as well as the “parallel” movement
between accent and beat (ibid. 1018). Finally, 4) the *Rhythmus*, the metrical rhythm, is
what is “bound up with” the above, what is “produced from” the above, and what “arises
from” the above (ibid. 1019-19).

In speculative thinking, one might initially think that the three players are: 1) the
conventional proposition, which distinguishes its parts, 2) the proposition of identity,
which shows how what was distinguished is in fact to be simultaneously related, and 3)
the speculative proposition, which gives some nuance to the two. But this is not quite
right. The players are in fact four in number: 1) the *conventional* proposition, 2) the *form* of the proposition, 3) the proposition of identity, and 4) the *speculative proposition* or the “unity of the concept.”

As we have seen above, all of these labels could apply to *one and the same sentence*. But then each label must also be thought of as referring to different functions, moments, ways of reading, ways of writing, or hermeneutic road-stops (Hegel’s “moments”) in the explication of that one sentence. Moreover, these “moments” have their own sets of synonyms, which we have encountered above as they have been set forth in the “Preface,” and in §61 especially. We can now list some of them here:

1) The “conventional proposition” also gets called: “the nature of the judgment or of the proposition in general.” Under this umbrella falls all that we saw in §§58-9 concerning “argumentative thought” in both its negative and positive ways of relating.

2) The “form of the proposition” is one remove from the “conventional proposition.” It is the conventional proposition with a *bit* of formal awareness. It also gets called: “the distinction of subject and predicate” (§60). It is aligned with “the counterthrust to the relation” of the conventional proposition, which had not recognized its own distinctions. It is said to “express” the distinction of subject and predicate in §61, sentence 4 (here this “expressing” explicitly demonstrates that layer of remove from the conventional proposition above). It is referred to as “the appearance of the determinate sense or the accent that distinguishes (the determinate sense)” in §61, sentence 5; and there the implication is that the “conventional proposition” had a determinate sense, but that sense is now *expressed* or *manifest*. 
3) The “proposition of identity” is synonymous with: “the identity of subject and predicate” and “their unity” (§61, sentence 4). It is summarized in the motions of §60, and again in the portion of §61, sentence 5, that reads: “the predicate expresses the substance and the subject itself falls into the universal.” At this stage, we realize the identity of the formerly distinguished parts. While that articulation (“predicate expresses substance; substance falls into universal”) starts to sound like the “speculative proposition” itself, at this stage, the play of substance and subject is figured by Hegel as a mere unity, a mere identity, and that unity is not to be confused with the “unity of the concept” that makes up the “speculative proposition” proper.

4) Finally, the “speculative proposition” is synonymous with: “the unity of the concept that destroys” the facility of the distinctions of the propositional “form,” and the mere identities of “propositions of identity.” It is also synonymous with the “philosophical proposition,” and with the “harmony” that the “unity” of the proposition of identity comes forth as (§61, sentence 4). It is called the “fulfillment” of the determinate sense of the mere form of the proposition (§61, sentence 5). Finally, it is referred to as the italicized “unity wherein that accent fades away,” and here Hegel is mixing his metaphorical vehicle in with his metaphorical tenor – in a final act of plasticity.

ix) Stretto: true plasticity

For indeed, the intention of Hegel’s grand simile was to demonstrate that “only that philosophical exposition which rigorously excludes the kind of habitual relationships
of the parts of a proposition could succeed in being plastic” (“erst diejenige philosophische Exposition würde es erreichen, plastisch zu sein, welche strenge die Art des gewöhnlichen Verhältnisses der Teile eines Satzes ausschlösse”) (§64, sentence 2/3:60). We see here that this “rigorous exclusion” is also a rigorous suspending (Aufheben), enfolding, and ultimate re-purposing of all three of the syntactic moments or functions that have gone before. At the close of Hegel’s chapter on poetic versification in the Aesthetics, he makes a comparison that helps us understand the speculative proposition’s objective of linguistic plasticity:

In this respect we may compare the principle of rhythmical versification with plasticity. For here the spiritual meaning is not yet independently emphasized and does not determine the length of syllables or the accent; on the contrary, the sense of the words is entirely fused with the sensuous element of sound and temporal duration, so that this external element can be given its full rights in serenity and joy, and ideal form and movement can be made the sole concern (Aesthetics 1022; my bolds).

Likewise, the particularly “plastic” ideal of poetic meter has been used to set forth the ideal for philosophical propositions. For we have read in §61 (sentence 4): “So too in the philosophical proposition the identity of subject and predicate should not annihilate their distinction, which the form of the proposition expresses, but rather their unity should come forth [hervorgehen] as a harmony.” It is only in such a “unity coming forth as a harmony” that we can truly affirm Rose’s reading of the speculative proposition as the
“simultaneous affirmation of identity and non-identity” (Rose 52). Here, the third moment mentioned above, “the identity of subject and predicate” is still a simultaneous affirmation of “their distinction.” That distinction was brought out not just in the simple “argumentative” presentation of the proposition, which we left long ago in its toggle between negation and affirmation. The distinction is brought out in what Hegel here calls the “form of the proposition.” And now we start to understand the adverb, *formell*, that started §61.

Let us now re-read §61 with an understanding of the four conflicting “moments” in both the presentation of speculative sentences and the workings of poetic meter, which the former is not unlike. I have numbered these moments below:

Formally, what has been said can be expressed thus: 1) the nature of the judgment or of the proposition in general, which involves 2) the distinction of subject and predicate, is destroyed by 4) the speculative proposition, and 3) the proposition of identity, which 1) the former becomes, contains 2) the counterthrust to that relation. – This conflict between 2) the form of a proposition generally and 4) the unity of the concept that destroys it is similar to that which takes place in 4) metrical rhythm between 1) quantity and 2) accent. 4) Metrical rhythm results from 3) the hovering middle and 3) the unification of both. So too in the 4) philosophical proposition 3) the identity of subject and predicate should not annihilate 2) their distinction, which 2) the form of the proposition expresses, but rather 3) their unity should come forth as 4) a harmony. 2) The form of the proposition is 2) the appearance of the determinate sense or 2) the accent that
distinguishes 4) its fulfillment; but that 2) the predicate 3) expresses the substance and 2) the subject itself 3) falls into the universal, this is 4) the unity wherein that 2) accent 4) fades away.

This finally “unity” is italicized (by Hegel) to distinguish it from the mere unity or identity of the “proposition of identity,” which is merely part of – a path to – the articulation of the speculative sentence or the “unity of the concept.” In speculative articulations, we now find that even the speculative sentence is not enough, and when here the “accent fades away,” we do not get a complete and perfect speculative sentence, but rather an incitement toward further speculative truths, for, as we have repeatedly been reminded: “the dialectical movement…has propositions for its parts or elements” (§66). Likewise, if we were to follow Hegel’s simile any further, metrical verse would also proceed beyond mere unity to a “unity in which the accent fades away.” In the Aesthetics, the discussion of quantitative meter gives way to the “destruction of that first plastic feature,” just as “art necessitates.” And this results in rhyme, and a whole chapter devoted to it:

But if this principle is sacrificed and if nevertheless, as art necessitates, the sensuous element is always to be a counterpoise to pure intellectuality, then in order to compel the ear's attention, with the destruction of that first plastic feature of naturallongs and shorts and of sound not separated from rhythm and not emphasized independently, no other material can be adopted except the express, firmly isolated, figured sound of the linguistic syllables as such. / This leads us to
the second chief kind of versification, namely rhyme (Aesthetics 1022).

We may concede that the “unity of the concept that destroys” metrical rhythm is in fact rhyme, where that first “accent fades away” and a new “convention” or “form” is taken up “in order to compel the ear’s attention.”

But in the Phenomenology Hegel leaves his darling metaphor behind, and now shifts from these poetic apprehensions of the “speculative proposition” to elucidating its mechanisms through examples, durch Beispiele. These examples have been examined throughout Chapters 1 and 2 above. We conclude our reading of the speculative sentence, then, with this precipitous stretto, where such contrapuntally dense articulations send us into an analysis of Gertrude Stein’s off-rhyming poetic “completeness.”

Chapter 4: Completion: Gertrude Stein’s sentence-making practice and theories

Subsections:

i) Introductory: hermeneutic difficulties

ii) Theorizing “completion” in the Lectures in America: Stein’s prime syntactico-theological vessel, and her prime methodological demand

iii) Completion: both monadic and expansive

iv) Completion meets “serving god and mammon”: theology or just biblical allusion?
v) Completion and the sacred, the wonderful
vi) Completion “for myself and strangers”: hermetic trashing

i) Introductory: hermeneutic difficulties

Having compared Gertrude Stein’s innovations in syntax and theology with those of Hegel, and then having watched Hegel’s discussion of the “speculative sentence” come to a head in a climactic poetic simile, we now turn to Stein’s poetic experiments themselves. The principal objective of this part of the thesis is to excavate and then examine Stein’s sentences for the theory of sentence-making they might offer up. As Stein herself says, sentences, “not only words but sentences and always sentences have always been Gertrude Stein’s lifelong passion,” and likewise her sentences will be our passion here, so it is expedient to begin our inquiry with an actual example of one of Stein’s weird syntactic concatenations.

I confess that my interest in Stein began when reading sentences like the following from Tender Buttons, which force the reader to concede that something wonderful is happening, without quite knowing what or why. The following sentence seems to defy the rules of sentence-making, while it also includes many intelligible, normal phrases. It seems to make sense, while destroying sense. And it seems to be concerned equally with the objective as with the subjective, with the mundane as with the extraordinary, with the disparate as with the interconnected:

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To bury a slender chicken, to raise an old feather, to surround a garland and to
bake a pole splinter, to suggest a repose and to settle simply, to surrender one
another, to succeed saving simpler, to satisfy a singularity and not to be blinder, to
sugar nothing darker and to read redder, to have the color better, to sort out
dinner, to remain together, to surprise no sinner, to curve nothing sweeter, to
continue thinner, to increase in resting recreation to design string not dimmer \(TB\ 24\).

While it might not be readily apparent that such an odd sentence could be approached as
a “theological” entity, we can start by saying what such a sentence is not. As delineated
in the Introduction to the thesis as a whole, I see Stein and Hegel as proposing ways of
theorizing the function of the basic propositional form when the models of i) literary
description, ii) metaphysical participation, iii) poetic enactment, and iv) performative
effect fail to account for what a sentence is doing. This is what I mean: i) Here, the
sentence has elements of description, but it is not descriptive – the stacking of infinitive
phrases guards against that. ii) The sentence seems to participate in the reality we know
(“to sort out dinner, to remain together”), while conjoining parts of that reality in
unfamiliar ways (“to curve nothing sweeter,” “to sugar nothing darker”). iii) The sentence
may be enacting a reality, mimicking the movements of reality, or it may just be reveling
in its own nonsense. iv) The sentence may be performatively bringing a reality into
existence, or it may be a simple, static entity-unto-itself, performing nothing.\(^{138}\) More

\(^{138}\) Cf. Laura Riding Jackson’s assessments of Stein’s “nothingness” in Chapter 1 above.
concretely, the above sentence either does not have a copula or is eliding an implicit copula. The sentence consists of a series of infinitive phrases with accompanying objects: “to X a Y,” “to bury a slender chicken.” The relationship between these infinitive constructions is unclear. One wants to make sense of them, or one wants to call them nonsense and be done with it. In either case, the sentence has posed a challenge to the standard “S is P” model of propositional functioning that we saw Hegel reworking so tirelessly above.

In light of all these interpretive confusions and thwarted expectations, the following assessment by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, from an October 2nd, 2013, symposium on Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, is very helpful, and deserves to be quoted in its entirety. DuPlessis notes that, in addition to what I have mentioned above, Stein’s works also defy the “close reading” strategies of New Criticism, as well as the “cubist” reading strategies that Marjorie Perloff and Marianne DeKoven,\(^{139}\) for example, have used to historicize Stein, and to make her palatable. I have put what I see as DuPlessis’ crucial phrases in italics below:

> The thing about close reading that we’re a little bit forgetting when we talk about it now is that close reading is also associated with new criticism which is an extractive reading strategy that goes to themes and to folding things in to a kind of poise that is often paradoxical. Stein is very difficult to do this with. So you can exercise the tactic of close reading, meaning you can do a wonderful job

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of…doing the dictionary thing very very well and finding this kind of splay of
words, but you can’t resolve the narrative or the thematics or so on. In many ways
Stein has subtexts but she has no texts. And that becomes a very strange reading
effect. So you can say that something hits the surfaces of the words, and then
generates a material out of those dictionary definitions of the surface. But the
cubist strategy, which some people have talked about, notably Marjorie Perloff
and others, where you see different sides of an object – it’s a little bit more
complicated than that, because what’s happening, to me, is that when you get a
word or a phrase – and Stein often works by small phrases: ‘A spoon is’ or ‘A
sudden,’ you know, you can segment the phrases – but what happens is: instead of
going in, like, here’s the surface of the object and here’s the bottom of the object,
and here’s the side and so on – the cubist thing – you go out! And some of those
goings-out from these words are actually cul-de-sac, that is, you can’t go any
further. You just go out to this, and then nothing happens. And some of them go
very, very far, so they’re irregular in their shape, whereas the cubist thing is not
irregular in its shape.¹⁴⁰

That “going out” gets at the heart of my thesis. I wish to ask into what Stein’s phrases
“go out.” And, as we saw in Chapter 1, the answer cannot simply be that they go out
directly into God, or into some view of reality that is explicitly theological. But we will
be intimately concerned with these “irregular shapes” and the type of totality of which
they are an interactive part. The answer should include some sense that Stein is using

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68woE9OsOwY).
such sentences to make sense, that such sentences are, to her mind, more sufficient, more adequate ways of mapping reality than we are accustomed to find in more “normal” human utterances, and that these sentences are accounting for quasi-theological totalities, in however bizarre a fashion.

In tandem with such hermeneutic considerations, a brief word on how we will be approaching Stein’s body of work as a whole is in order. Stein’s most palatable contributions to an explicit study of language come in her late-life “explanations” or concerted attempts to theorize her own work, both in and around her American lecture tour (Lectures in America, Transatlantic Interview, Narration, e.g.) and in slightly more obscure works for publication (e.g. “Composition as Explanation,” How to Write) of the same era (1930-46). Here, of most interest to this thesis is Stein’s attempt at something like a “speculative grammar” throughout Lectures in America, where she offers the results of her life-long laboring over her concept of syntactic “completion.” But Stein also offers implicit theorizations of language throughout all her works, and especially, most drastically, in The Making of Americans and Tender Buttons. Because in the final analysis it is only amidst all the experimental baggage of those works that we will be able to discern and extract the full contribution Stein makes to our question of a “theological syntax,” this chapter will treat the theoretical pronouncements of Lectures in America, while Chapter 5 will be devoted to the propositional practices of The Making of Americans and Tender Buttons.

ii) Theorizing “completion” in the Lectures in America: Stein’s prime syntactico-theological vessel, and her prime methodological demand
We will now pick through Stein’s Lectures in America for the principles and principal terms within it that relate to a theory of sentence-production. My prime concern is with Stein’s use of the term “completion,” which serves as the axis between her odd sentence-making practices and the theories of totality that instruct those practices. I hope to make clear in the following why I believe “completion” is best assessed as a “theological” concept. This is because it carries within it ideas of totality, of “god,” and of particular entities as they come to be mappable only in light of more diffuse, universal, or potentially spiritual realities. Within this book of hers, Stein presents terms such as “completion” in tireless iteration and minutest variety, mixing such totality and god questions with myriad questions of grammar, history, and identity. We will make a feeble effort to amass those variations, but it should therefore be said at the outset that the following discussion is not for the faint of heart. In order to “define” Stein’s term, we will have to wade into the deep waters of her presentation. This will require a sometimes dizzying attempt at close reading.\footnote{141}

\footnote{141 If more categorical clarity is needed: this chapter will center around the following four problematics: i) Stein’s conception of totalities or totalness; ii) her theological presuppositions and deployments; iii) her take on history, and iv) her project of stacking units of speech or conflating linguistic entities. All these will be approached as contributing factors in Stein’s bizarre theorizations of the sentence. Within those theorizations, there are many Steinian repetitions, refrains, catchwords, or terms to watch out for. Stein repeats them, “massages” them, “unpacks” them, or gives them nuance through dogged re-inscriptive variation. We should correlate these catchwords with the above four problematics: i) The question of totality and total descriptions is represented by the words “completion, containment, concentration, everything, everything that is,” and even the indeterminate “anything.” ii) The theological problem centers again around the word “completion,” but with the accompanying words “god” and “God,” the conflict between “god and mammon,” and the project of “writing directly,” and “using” or “thinking of” “everything.” iii) The historical questions come forth in Stein’s divvying things up into “centuries,” and then speaking on distinct, historically locatable “ways of writing,” as well as “ways of living” that inform the “ways of writing.” The historical problem will also unfold into more general questions of “time,” temporal “repetition,” temporally bound “insistence,” and temporally determined “intensity.” iv) The problem of conflating linguistic units finds its mascots}
In the opening chapter of *Lectures in America*, entitled “What Is English Literature,” we find Stein already knee-deep in these questions of totality, of god, of history, and of various linguistic units that compete for attention. What is more, these questions are introduced by way of an odd tautological statement of Stein’s epistemology in the first sentence of the book: “One cannot come back too often to the question what is knowledge and to the answer knowledge is what one knows” (*LIA* 11).

We may take this sentence as typical of Stein’s method. So many of her peculiar ways of writing break out upon us in that initial statement: that is the first sentence of the book, but the first *sentence* is also the first *paragraph*, so paragraph and sentence are, at least initially, equal; the statement is oddly punctuated; it begins with an indefinite or general pronoun, “one,” instead of a personal referent; the demand to repeat or return to or “come back often to” a thing is foregrounded; and a noun (“knowledge”) is immediately pitted against a verbal expression of that noun (“what one knows”).

In the next paragraph, the subject of the chapter is introduced (“What is English literature”), and the indefinite pronoun (“one”) of the first paragraph, which expressed objectivity and generality, is replaced by Stein’s subjective “I”: “What is English literature, that is to say what do I know about it.” That “I” will later be the marker of Stein’s authorial pen, her “genius,” and her “difference” from others. This second paragraph consists of two sentences, so paragraph and sentence are no longer equal. And “English literature” is immediately conflated with something else that Stein “means”: “What is English literature, by English literature I mean American literature too.” Here are those two opening paragraphs together:

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in Stein’s words “sentence, paragraph, completion, containment, expression, emotion, name, and replacing.”
One cannot come back too often to the question what is knowledge and to the answer knowledge is what one knows.

What is English literature that is to say what do I know about it, that is to say what is it. What is English literature, by English literature I mean American literature too (LIA 11).

Curiously, the epistemological claim of the first paragraph has unfolded into a tripartite schema: i) “knowledge is what one knows,” ii) “What is X can be answered by saying ‘what do I know about X?’” and yet iii) the bare ontological question remains, as if apart from one’s epistemological framework: “what is it?” We can simply note here that in order to cram such epistemological density into three sentences, Stein has had to make some syntactic contortions. She gives the demand for these contortions midway through the Lectures in America: “I have of course always been struggling with this thing, to say what you nor I nor nobody knows, but what is really what you and I and everybody knows” (LIA 121). Stein’s ideas are both obvious and tortured.

The third coordinate of this epistemology (“what is it?”) can be achieved, Stein elsewhere says, “in a glance or in looking” (GHA 135). But even such information is always subject to the pull of competing objective and subjective claims, as in the difference between “what one knows” and “what I know about it,” where we find that Stein, according to Allegra Stewart, “was always ‘in’ her own consciousness, attempting to put into words, regardless of their associational meanings, the union of two inner realities (those of subject and object) or the marriage of outer and inner realities as it took
place in presentational immediacy” (*SQ* 488).\(^{142}\) Stewart’s claim is substantiated in Stein’s *What are Masterpieces*, where we also find a fitting demonstration of just how overloaded the epistemological “I” in the above two paragraphs is: “At any moment when you are you you are you without the memory of yourself because if you remember yourself while you are you are not for purposes of creating you.”\(^{143}\) As a result of such epistemological cramming, even in the *Lectures in America*, Stein’s punctuation crumbles and her meaning becomes tenuous in such formulations as “that is to say what do I know about it, that is to say what is it.”

While we do not here get the “complete structural disintegration of the traditional form of the English sentence”\(^{144}\) that her earlier commentators would find irksome throughout her works (and that we will indeed encounter in *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons*), we do get a good sampling of Stein’s powers of compression and invention. I would even call these sentences “monadic” in that they compress much of the content Stein wants to express into bizarre little stand-alone packages. The demand for this sort of monadic compression can be epitomized in Stein’s word “complete,” which first appears six pages into “What is English Literature.”

Stein quickly explains that those compressed and involuted sentences of the first two paragraphs are both sufficient and insufficient to her task of explaining “what is

\(^{142}\) A parenthetical methodological note: In this chapter, I am leaning heavily on Stewart’s analysis of the *Lectures in America*, if only because she is one of few commentators who has dealt extensively with this work. Stewart is also one of the only critics I could find who treats Stein’s “completion” for the centerpiece it is, and for the conceptual weight it carries. Considerations of Stein’s “completion” are all too conspicuously absent from Dydo’s otherwise magisterial 2003 *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises*, for example. While the focus on Stewart is regrettable (especially because I don’t agree with many of her final analyses), it itself points to the need – in contemporary scholarship – for the return to Stein’s weightier matters that I am trying to achieve here.


\(^{144}\) Levinson 124.
English literature,” and the “great deal” English literature has had to do: “This as a whole thing could be told in a couple of sentences but it is necessary to make it a great deal longer. Anybody, even I, can understand that necessity” (LIA 12). As with the first sentences of the book, one could take such claims of “necessity” as mere fillers, or as a justification of Steinian rambling. But I believe that in these sentences Stein is introducing the methodological demand she now starts to call “completion.” Already on the table here is the question of “description” as it meets temporal and syntactic length, brevity, and an as of yet unexplained “necessity” in the face of “the whole thing.” The “whole thing” is a reference to the preceding sentence, where Stein had said that English literature “has had a great deal to do and also it has a great deal to not do” (LIA 12). The idea is that that “whole thing” could be compressed into just a few sentences, like what I was calling the “monadic” sentences of the first two paragraphs. But somehow this would not be sufficient, and so “it is necessary to make it a great deal longer.” Why? Stein proclaims the possibility of monadic compression, but she does not explain this necessity for lengthening, except to say that “Anybody, even I, can understand that necessity.” Suffice it here to say simply that the question of compression and the question of lengthening have come in the same breath.

iii) Completion: both monadic and expansive

These two questions meet in Stein’s term “completion,” which I argue describes an authorial demand that can be met both in “the expansive” and in “the monadic.”

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145 See Thornton Wilder on Stein’s use of the split infinitive in his introduction to FIA.
Stein’s written inventions can be i) *expansively complete* by seeking to say more, to account for more, and to include more in their scope. In this capacity, we can understand the necessity to “make it a great deal longer” (*LIA* 12). But Stein’s descriptions can also be ii) *monadically complete* by compressing much into little, saying more in fewer words, packing more into less, and cramming, replacing, or rejecting certain parts of speech. In this capacity, we understand that the “whole thing could be told in a couple of sentences” (ibid. 12), just as Allegra Stewart claims most content can be expressed, once “distilled in the alembic of Gertrude Stein’s consciousness” (*SQ* 488).

A few more pages into the *Lectures*, Stein offers two expressions that might serve to mark this difference: i) expansive completeness may be referred to as “this complete quality of completeness” (*LIA* 24), while ii) monadic or “distilled” completeness might be termed “this directness of completion” (ibid.). But we must note that both of these forms of completeness are always set forth in tandem, and if anything, the “expansive completeness” usually wins the day. For example, earlier in Stein’s career, even the 925-page ever-unfolding, ever-expanding “completeness” of *The Making of Americans* shows itself to be *not complete enough* for the author, when mid-way through that book Stein starts conceiving of — and even beginning — another book.\(^{146}\)

Sometime then I will give a history of all of them and that will be a long book and when I am finished with this one then I will begin that one. I have already begun that one but now I am still writing on this one and now I am beginning this portion of this one which is the *complete* history of Alfred Hersland and of

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\(^{146}\) This would become her *A Long Gay Book*. 
everyone he ever came to know in living and of many other ones I will be
describing now in this beginning (MOA 479; my italics).

That picture of completeness might be enough to make us despair of Stein’s task, and
indeed it makes her do so in The Making of Americans (see MOA 348, 453-461, e.g.). But
it also demonstrates that Stein’s completion is a writing demand that is being met both in
finishing things and in beginning ever anew, in order to show the incompleteness of the
first thing finished. Note, however, that the other type of completeness, completeness by
compression, is also exhibited in this passage, where the “complete history of Alfred
Hersland” is in a sense accomplished in chapters V and VI of The Making of Americans.

Such compressed completeness becomes Stein’s working mode especially in
pieces like Portraits and Repetition, where she would seek to make “a complete portrait
by suggestion” (TAI 24). There, instead of always beginning again, and conceiving new
books in the midst of an already long book, Stein instead says, “I want to indicate it
without calling in other things” (ibid. 25). And here we should note that “rejecting”
verbal material is also part of the project of completion: “I did not have to call in other
things to help. I do not like to do this, there is so much one must reject to keep the even
smoothness of suggestion” (ibid. 25). Allegra Stewart calls this Stein’s “struggle for
directness”: “In her own struggle for directness, Gertrude Stein strained words and
exerted pressure upon them, and renounced ‘names’ (nouns) and dissected grammar” (SQ
491). The demand for “completion” shows that such rejecting and renouncing was meant
not only for directness, but also for totalization and inclusion, but on the condition of an
arduous process of distillation. In commenting upon Stein’s Portraits and Repetition,
Allegra Stewart writes that Stein’s “‘portraits’ really leave out what everyone else can see, and her ‘plays’ make visible what nobody else can see” (SQ 488). Stewart is here referring specifically to two post-1914 genre classifications of Stein’s – the “portrait” and the “play” – but we might generalize these classifications, for at stake in them are really two modes of authorial operation. The first is that of “rejecting” certain verbal items – “leaving out what everyone else can see” – and the second is “replacing” certain items in order to “make visible what nobody else can see.” Stewart also suggests that we correlate these modes of writing with impressionism and expressionism:

The portraits are impressionistic, the plays, expressionistic. Or, to put it another way, the portraits reflect her receptivity to the substantial, whereas her plays reflect the “play” of her mind with the purely phenomenal. She subjectifies the world in portraits and objectifies the contents of her consciousness in plays (SQ 488-9).

Under that rubric, “rejecting” would be impressionistic and “replacing” would be expressionistic. While this is a historically viable approach, Stein herself does not use such terms. But we might make the following correlations: i) monadic completion achieves “simplicity” in impressionistic rejecting, while ii) expansive completion achieves “complicated simplicity” in expressionistic replacing.

At the very least, these correlations teaches us that Stein seeks completion in many different registers. It is her “only thought,”147 her all consuming project, but it is

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147 See TAI 34; the relevant passage discussed in Chapter 5 below.
also the aim and quality of her projects, such as the “complete portraits” of *Portraits and Repetition*, or the “complete history” of Alfred Hersland *within* the exhaustively complete *Making of Americans*. What is more, it is an epistemological demand, as we have seen in the opening sentences of *Lectures in America*.

This personal epistemology is further enforced by the personal parameters of completeness that would make it “her only thought.” Her approach to literature only got underway when Stein came to know “what is and what is not [her] business” (*LIA* 13):

[... ] when at about sixteen I suddenly concluded that I would not make all knowledge my province. / And so my business is how English literature was made inside me and how English literature was made inside itself (ibid. 14).

It seems that her complicated life started to simplify around age sixteen. But here the epistemological cheese gets even more binding: Stein delimited the task of the complete knowledge she was supposed to have, meeting the demand for compression at the level of knowledge; but then she started to study that knowledge as “what one knows,” and as something being “made” *both* inside herself and inside itself. We are forced to return to the epistemological dilemma of the second paragraph of *Lectures in America*: “What is English literature that is to say what do I know about it, that is to say what is it” (ibid. 11). For English literature is precisely what presented Stein with a canon in which “the thing written is *completely contained* within itself” (ibid. 16; my italics). So completion can be the *quality* of any given product of English literature, the thing “being made inside itself,” *while also* being made inside Stein herself (ibid. 14).
This sort of autobiographical completion then of necessity entails historical and even geographical determinants: “As I say description of the complete the entirely complete daily island life has been England’s glory” (ibid. 17-18). The “completion” germane to English literature is one encouraged by the insular life of England’s writers (for it is “being made inside them”), and the “complete history” that they are a part of (for it is “their glory”). In the chapter of the Lectures entitled “The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans,” we find Stein defining the sense of “history” used both in the Making of Americans and throughout her works. She marks a difference between “history” and the “historical” thus: “Although as I tell it it will sound historical, it really is not historical as I still very much remember it. I do remember it. That is I can remember it. And if you can remember, it may be history but it is not historical” (LIA 135). History, it would seem, is the more personal category: what the author “tells,” “does remember,” and “can remember.” The historical, though, would seem to be something outside the author’s ken, something she can no longer “very much remember,” something beyond the mere remembered accounts of personal history. Stein’s problem comes to a head in gathering the “history” material of The Making of Americans: “I was faced by the trouble that I had acquired all this knowledge gradually but when I had it I had it completely at one time” (LIA 147). Compare this with the sentence discussed above: “This as a whole thing could be told in a couple of sentences but it is necessary to make it a great deal longer” (ibid. 12). Maybe she had to erase her personal, involved, remembering process in order to write a history at all. She had to move from the concatenation of materials to a completed, non-concatenating presentation of the same information: “And a great deal of The Making of Americans was a struggle to do this
thing, to make a whole present out of something that it had taken a great deal of time to find out” (LIA 147). This leads to a category distinction vital to Stein’s history-writing, a distinction between the “whole thing” and the “completed whole thing.” Here we can take “completion” as the authorial finish on something that was already a “whole thing”:

It is singularly a sense for combination within a conception of the existence of a given space of time that makes the American thing the American thing, and the sense of this space of time must be within the whole thing as well as in the completed whole thing (LIA 160; my italics).

It is crucial to note this distinction, so that we can take completion as a category of historiography, and also of the thin veneer of artificiality necessary to the task of turning “something that it had taken a great deal of time to find out” into “a whole present.” Completion is then a way of taming time.

Finally let us note that Stein will also generalize these personal, epistemological, and historico-geographical determinants of “completion” to the point of a universal artistic demand. In Chapter 4 of Lectures in America, entitled “Plays,” Stein speaks of completion not only as her business, nor only as the business of the “island-life” that inspires English literature, but also as the business of all art: “The business of Art…is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present” (LIA 104-5; my italics). So completion is also something Stein demands of others, of any successful artwork.
This congeries of passages from the *Lectures in America* should serve to introduce us to this demand that Stein places on writing, a demand that seems to shoot in all directions, but which consistently goes by the name “completion.” We may summarize the above analysis by marking off the following seven coordinates in the completion game: 1) Completion is the *epistemological* demand for *delimiting* the task of the student, determining a writer’s “province,” simplifying, reducing, and even rejecting certain objects of knowledge. 2) Completion is also the *epistemological* demand for *expanding* one’s task, accounting for as much as possible, countenancing “everything,” or stressing the complications of any simplicity. 3) Completion is the *monadic quality* of a sentence, a unit of speech, a work, or even a body of work, whereby compression, density, distillation, replacement, and telegraphic summarization are the methods, while the demand remains one of “using everything.” 4) Completion is the *expansive quality* of a unit of speech or an entire work, whereby complicating, listing, writing more, conceiving new books, and “making it a great deal longer” is viewed as a necessity. 5) Completion is a *process internal to* the writer or thinker, whereby “complete expression” takes shape, or something is “made inside” the author. 6) Completion is the same *process but internal to an artistic work or a national literature or an art movement*, whereby “complete expression” is achieved, or the work is “made inside itself.” 7) Completion is a *way of tracking and describing historical data*, when the writer of a “history” (even an abstract, weird, idiomatic, Steinian history) has “acquired all this knowledge gradually” but then has it processed for description or analysis “completely at one time” (*LIA* 147).

iv) “Completion” meets “serving god and mammon”: theology or just biblical allusion?
In the *Lectures in America*, Stein’s discussion of “completion” quickly gives way to an accompanying set of terms that yet again complicate the picture. The project of completion has a curious relationship to Stein’s question: “the question can one serve god and mammon, and the further question if one can should one” (*LIA* 12; my italics).

In Chapter 1 above, we delineated some potential theological approaches to Stein’s work. Here, Stein’s theorizing bears most resemblance to the theological approaches that Laura Riding Jackson proposed. We should find that in “completion” the textures of Stein’s writing are beholden to the pressure of a conception of God which limits what and how things can be said “completely.” We will also find Stein working as a “theologian” by attempting to assume the vantage point of God, relegating the types of completion listed above, while standing in a creating, involved, but separated relation to them. The first theological approach tends toward monadic completion, while the second allows for expansive completion.

As Stein presents it, the “question of god and mammon” initially relates to completion because it is yet another one of those monadic curiosities that “could be told in a couple of sentences” but is “necessary to make a great deal longer” (*LIA* 12). Stein quotes Matthew 6:24, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon,” (*KJV*) on the second page of her *Lectures* but makes no mention of her source, nor does she give any promise that she will herein develop a theology or even use this New Testament quotation to any sort of theological end. She writes:

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148 Again, “completion” was discussed above as making a seven-fold demand on the writing process: it describes 1) epistemological limitations, 2) epistemological expansions, 3) the distilled, monadic quality of a piece of writing, 4) the expansive quality of a piece of writing, 5) a process of compression and formation internal to the author herself, 6) a process internal to an artistic work itself, and 7) a way of mapping historical processes.
Besides this there has been again and again in English literature the question can one serve god and mammon, and the further question if one can should one. But the important question can remain and does remain what is god and mammon insofar as it concerns English literature. Has this question to do with prose and with poetry as both or as either one. I wish to very largely go into this because in it is the whole description of the whole of English literature and with it and after it although not entirely out of it comes American literature (LIA 12-13; my italics).

Note that the conjunction from the King James Bible (“Ye cannot serve God and mammon”) is here not accompanied by its negation (she writes: “can one serve god and mammon”). Stein seems to be asking, “Can one serve both?” And then again she asks, “If one can serve both god and mammon, should one do so?” Stein does, however, quickly define her terms, and it seems that the proper task for a good writer (by Stein’s assessment) is to “serve god:” “Now serving god for a writer who is writing is writing anything directly, it makes no difference what it is but it must be direct, the relation between the thing done and the doer must be direct. In this way there is completion and the essence of the completed thing is completion” (LIA 24; my italics). “Serving god,” then, is not a theological pursuit but an authorial demand that leads us back to directness and completion. By contradistinction, “serving mammon” is indirectness, and a sort of pandering to one’s audience, which, we can guess, would be analogous to the concern with material wealth, as telegraphed in the Aramaic word mammona, riches:
If he [a writer] uses these words indirectly he says what he intends to have heard by somebody who is to hear and in so doing inevitably he has to serve mammon. Mammon may be a success, mammon may be an effort he is to produce, mammon may be a pleasure he has from hearing what he himself has done, mammon may be his way of explaining, mammon may be a laziness that needs nothing but going on, in short mammon may be anything that is done indirectly (LIA 23-4; my italics).

It is worth noting, however, that Stein’s writing very often slips into what is here classed as the “mammonic.” For example, (following the above italicized terms) she describes portions of her Tender Buttons as a “success” in her Transatlantic Interview, writing, “Insofar as creation is successful a reader realizes it as a successful entity, and in this you can see how successfully you have mastered your material” (TAI 27). She describes her own “effort” repeatedly throughout The Making of Americans (though in so doing she may have been trying to shed the mammonic trappings of such effort), and often falls into a “laziness that needs nothing but going on” in that novel. And she undoubtedly takes pleasure in “hearing what she herself has done,” as is evidenced in her interviews, the Lectures in America, and in her repeated refrain that she is “writing for herself and strangers” (see MOA 289, 485, e.g.).

Seeing as Stein’s writing principally “serves god” but is tessellated with elements of “serving mammon,” we can now better see why the truly harassing question is not “should one serve god or mammon,” but rather, “can one serve god and mammon” (as Stein puts it on pp. 12-13, quoted above). Such a conjunction then allows Stein to situate
her work between “writing the way it has been written” and “writing the way it is being written that is to say the way the writing is writing” (*LIA* 54). The former serves mammon, the latter serves god, but both inevitably convene when Stein *writes intelligibly and incorporates* the tradition of English literature in her new creations – “writing the way it has been written” – while *also* writing less intelligibly, pursuing a direct line between “the thing done and the doer,” and thereby serving god in writing “the way writing is writing.”

v) Completion and the sacred, the wonderful

Our principal objective here is to show the connection between “serving god and mammon” and “completion.” Completion is, on our first reading, the crowning achievement of one who “serves god” and thereby produces “completion and the essence of the completed thing is completion” (*LIA* 24). Allegra Stewart’s assessment of this passage imports much that is not germane to Stein’s articulation, but it is worth quoting because Stewart is at least concerned to countenance the theological dimensions of Stein’s terms:

As the activity of the individual soul alone with its “object,” writing affirms the freedom and autonomy of man amid the flux of things and the determinations of space and time. Writing is “sacred,” and Gertrude Stein often warns writers against trying to serve two masters, “god and mammon” (*SQ* 490).
We have already seen that Stein’s warning is not so clear, but we agree with Stewart that Stein’s demand for directness is clear: “After 1909, this affirmative effort of hers consisted chiefly of recording the motions of her own mind. Writing became for her an exercise (or ritual) in concentration, for the act of concentrating one’s attention liberates consciousness from every necessity except its own autonomous activity” (SQ 489). The “affirmative effort” Stewart describes is in reference to what she calls Stein’s “seeking to recover mystery, and to reawaken wonder” (SQ 489).

I find very little textual evidence that this was Stein’s project, and I do not think that “reawakening wonder” is a good definition of Stein’s “serving god.” The most Steinian definition of “mystery” and “wonder” might be something like the passage already quoted from the Lectures: “I have of course always been struggling with this thing, to say what you nor I nor nobody knows, but what is really what you and I and everybody knows” (LIA 121; my italics). We may agree with Stewart’s revised thesis, however: “Gertrude Stein’s analysis of the obvious…confronts the given in ordinary human experience with full awareness of its mystery” (SQ 492). Stein’s project is one of “struggling with this thing” and ultimately one of articulating knowledge, in no matter how weird and tautological a form: saying “what you nor I nor nobody knows, but what is really what you and I and everybody knows.” Stein’s work flies in the face of all mystical revivals of “wonder and mystery.” And not only does Stein work contra mysticism, she also goes to great pains to deflate it: “If you believe in anything deeply enough it turns into something else and so money turns into not money. That is what
mysticism is.”  

On this definition, we might say that it is precisely serving mammon that produces such naïve approaches to a writer’s production of wonder and mystery. That is a truer reading of Stein.

What is more, Stein eventually explains that this whole “god and mammon” question is not for her a “religious” matter at all: “As I talk of serving god and mammon I do not of course mean religion in any sense excepting the need to complete that which is trying to fill itself up inside any one” (19; my italics). She is digging in her heels in this obsession with completion and authorial “filling itself up inside any one.” But she qualifies the project: “of course it is only those who have an active need to be completely completed who have all this as a bother” (LIA 20). Christ’s charge that “ye cannot serve both God and mammon” demands choice, responsibility, and initiation into the claims of God as over against those of mammon. Stein demands initiation into the writer’s task of directness and completion, but she tempers it with the admission that some don’t require this stuff, and to some the initiation would be superfluous: “it is only those who have an active need to be completely completed who have all this as a bother.” So take it if you want it, but the call to “serve god” may very well not be part of your bottom nature.

Again, the choice is not religious; it is not Joshua’s call to “chose ye this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15, KJV): “And this choice when there is a choice a writer can and does feel as a choice between serving god and mammon. This choice has nothing to do with religion, it has nothing to do with success. It has to do with something different than that, it has to do with completion” (LIA 22).

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But now we might ask: why then import this religious baggage at all? Here, and following the suggestions of Chapter 1, we might think of Stein as creating something of a “dispersed” or “implicit” theology. But we must temper such an idea with the many earnest, theologically probing moves Stein has made, which to my mind at least suggest more than a mere “secular” or “replacement” theology. If Stein is seeking to replace more traditional theological models, we should at least think of that replacement project as one that consists of an earnest use and at least a prolonged, involved competition with the insufficiently “complete” (because too dogmatic?) theologies of her forebears. Here, for example, we can concede that Stein “imports this religious baggage” in order to negate it; but again the negation (a la Hegel) uses what it covers over, and seems to require a genuine (if destructive) interest in it.

Here we find that the glorious thing about English literature (all of which “lives inside” Stein herself, while she is also a proud part of its lineage) is really that it obviates the whole question of god and mammon. As we read further, we find that it is precisely because there is “really no vital question as to the God and Mammon” that English literature can have “its complete solidity, its complete imagination, its complete existence” (LIA 16). Stein writes, “English literature has existed each piece of it inside itself in a perfectly extraordinary degree compared with other literatures that is other modern literatures” (ibid. 16). But this reading is at odds with Stein’s use of “serving god” in the sense analyzed above (“serving god for a writer who is writing is writing anything directly” (ibid. 24)), which she then uses to class such English writers as

150 Note Stein’s sudden capitalization of God and Mammon here.
Chaucer and Shakespeare (ibid. 24). “Serving god and mammon,” then, is part real category and part mere biblical quotation; it is partially a way of classifying approaches to writing, and it is then again something that Stein claims can be done away with at the level of a broader assessment of English literature.

And maybe Stein’s theology works in a similar way – both disposable and at times oddly constitutive of her work. While her actual belief in God is not made explicit in the Lectures in America, she will elsewhere suggest a committed atheism: “It is the habit to say there must be a god but not at all the human mind has neither time or identity therefore enough said” (GHA 148). It is questionable, though, whether that passage constitutes a denial of God *per se* or yet another use of theological vocabulary in order to explain something else – time, identity, the human mind. More radically, Stein may be confirming Laura Riding Jackson’s claim that Stein thought herself God, and here grants any “human mind” the status of an a-temporal, non-identifiable god.

It is only necessary here that we note that Stein’s thought can have affinities with the theological while having no sustained, direct interest in it. Again in *The Geographical History of America*, we find Stein affirming, while toying with, certain Judeo-Christian attributes of God. For example, she affirms the incomprehensibility of the universe, as the Bible does: “The only interesting thing is that no one knows the limits of the universe” (*EA* 122). And she affirms the difference between finite humans and an “unlimited” other reality, as the Bible does: “You live on this earth and you cannot get away from it and yet there is a space where the stars are which is unlimited and that contradiction is

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151 And again cf. Wilder’s Introduction to *FIA*.
152 Cf. *SQ* 493 and Isaiah 40, e.g.; elsewhere Stein undercuts the biblical affinities of such claims: “What was it somebody said that the only thing God could not do was to make a two year old mule in a minute” (*MOA* 165).
there in every man and every woman and so nothing is ever settled” (EA 308). We also
find Stein’s thought in odd agreement with the Judeo-Christian biblical idea that there is
no hope for a worldly utopia or general progress in human life: “After all that is what life
is and that is the reason there is no utopia” (EA 281; cf. SQ 494), so that while Stein is
always pushing for “newness” and “difference” in her work, that project does not extend
into her hope for the world, leading Allegra Stewart to note, for example, that “Gertrude
Stein was herself much less optimistic about the universe than Bergson was and believed
much less in progressive evolution and the efficacy of action” (SQ 499).

I stress the dimension of Stein’s “mere biblical quotation” because it is not a
“mere” function in her work. While theology and Judeo-Christian realities might mean
nothing to Stein she nevertheless uses them, and especially at the level of *texturing her
works*. As we have seen above, “serving god and mammon” has meant both nothing and
everything. It has been a “mere biblical quotation” and yet a totally vital biblical
repurposing. We might even say that Jesus’ words served Stein’s *Lectures* as a deep,
abiding, constitutive plaything. Here again, recall the biblical textures of *The Making of
Americans*, as discussed in Chapter 1 above. In that novel, Stein’s poetry imitates the
formal expertise of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah, while exhibiting no necessary connection to
the types of truth they related.

The point that matters for our inquiry is that Stein felt no need to ground her
theological borrowings in anything – neither in a tradition of thought, nor even in a
lineage of explicit claims to “truth.” Her “serving god and mammon” helped her home in
on the project of “completion.” It was explanatorily useful both at the historical and at the

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153 Cf. *SQ* 494, and the reflections on history and theology in *The Making of Americans*: “It is like
the generations of the Bible, they really do not take so very long” (*MOA* 151).
154 See our discussion of ‘The Modern Jew’ in Chapter 1 above.
authorial level, but in the end it seems it was most fruitfully employed as yet another impulse toward her crafting of adequately truthful sentences. This then is a particularly odd and even ruthless approach to ideas, one that we might call Stein’s “hermetic trashing.”

vi) Completion “for myself and strangers”: hermetic trashing

Before moving to an assessment of Stein’s sentence-practice in *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons*, we will examine one of her principal phrases in the former book in light of the above. Here again the cheese gets a bit more binding, and the existential outlook gets considerably darker. We have seen that Stein’s theological implications and biblical borrowings are ultimately trumped by her hermetic writing principles. We also saw ‘serving god and mammon’ break down as an insufficient way of describing what English literature was up to. Or we might say that Stein resuscitates the project of English literature by showing that it is most forceful when it has fully abandoned the tasks either of “serving god or mammon” or of both “serving god and mammon.”

Stein then asserts the same breakdown again, but not in order to explain the triumphs of English literature but rather to refine any author’s hope of audience: “there is no possibility that in satisfying anybody there is not the satisfying everybody and so there is no question as between serving God and mammon” (*LIA* 17). This syntax is so beautiful. It is not that Stein is now content to “satisfy nobody;” it is rather that she sees
that an attempt to “satisfy anybody” is also potentially a “satisfying everybody.” So Stein famously resolves to write “for herself and strangers.”

It is important to highlight this ambition. It is weird, and it is at once freeing, alienating, and maybe superrelatively hopeful. It is an ambition that is explicitly set forth in this phrase, “for myself and strangers,” in *The Making of Americans*, but then reworked throughout Stein’s career, and especially in some odd formulations in the *Lectures in America*. I am starting to call it her principle of “hermetic trashing,” whereby things are both *always* hermetically *valuable* – to Stein, and to whomever else might be listening – but also so indeterminately valuable as to be “trashed” around and left open to a potential relevance for “anybody,” “everybody,” or maybe even “nobody.” I am using the term “hermetic,” then, to signify preciousness, a mulling over, a feeling of possession and coveting, and a feeling of necessary loneliness. I am using the term “trashing” to speak to Stein’s abandon, her recklessness, her lack of care for any particular reading recipient, and her remarkable disregard for all claims to “use,” “truth,” and “function” in her written products.

Notice that neither term negates “meaning” as a potential ambition. Stein’s project, rather, “required drastic renunciations and ascetic intellectual discipline, and it involved not being understood as well as being misunderstood” (*SQ* 492). Or again, in Stein’s own words, “there is no possibility that in satisfying anybody there is not the satisfying everybody and so there is no question as between serving God and mammon” (*LIA* 17). The formulation at first sounds dark: “there is no possibility.” But then “there is no possibility that in satisfying anybody there is not satisfying everybody”; there is

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155 See *MOA* 285, 489, e.g.
nothing to say that when “anybody” is satisfied, “everybody” may not also be satisfied. But this is rather lonely, for it leaves us with “no question as between serving God and mammon” – no oblation to God, and no satisfaction in material gain. Attempting to satisfy God may satisfy God or anybody or everybody; satisfying mammon may satisfy self or anybody or nobody. Again, this is the resolution Stein’s thought resolved upon in the mammoth, lonely, self-involved, history-obsessed, but other-cataloguing *The Making of Americans*:

I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way that I can do it. Everybody is a real one to me, everybody is like some one else too to me. No one of them that I know can want to know it and so I write for myself and strangers (MOA 289).

In this passage Stein is much more alone than in the above sentence from the *Lectures*, here bereft of friends who might “want to know it.” So she writes for “herself,” someone who will be alternately interested and despairing of her own project, as the many self-evaluative pages of *The Making of Americans* themselves show. But she also writes for this weird indeterminate category, “and strangers,” who fulfill the “anybody” and “everybody” positions of “there is no possibility that in satisfying anybody there is not the satisfying everybody” (*LIA* 17).

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156 E.g. *MOA* 348, 453-461.
Later in *The Making of Americans*, we read of a disillusionment that compels “young ones” to suicide (*MOA* 484). This superficial disillusionment (thank goodness it is superficial) is superseded by Stein’s “complete disillusionment”:

Complete disillusionment is when you realize that no one can for they can’t change. The amount they agree is important to you until the amount they do not agree with you is completely realized by you. Then you say you will write for yourself and strangers, you will be for yourself and strangers and this then makes an old man or an old woman of you (*MOA* 485).

This truer disillusionment leads to trashing, to the writer’s essayistic “throw away,” and also to hermetic truth, to monadic articulation and Stein’s desire for the “completion” discussed above. Such an approach is exemplified in sentences like this from the *Lectures*: “That is true enough. Anything is true enough. But that certainly is” (*LIA* 21). What is at work here? Has Stein abandoned all hope, or has she found the very thing that will encourage her to keep writing and writing?

She has in a sense discovered the principle of impartiality: “Either nothing is worth writing about or everything is worth writing about. That anybody can understand” (*LIA* 34-5). But she is not impartial about the objects of her writing only. She has also been forced to be impartial as regards her readers, for “the amount they agree is important to you until the amount they do not agree with you is completely realized by you” (*MOA* 485). We might call this the *ethical* demand of Stein’s “hermetic trashing” and her “completion.” This demand then extends, in the *Lectures in America*, to Stein’s project of
truthful description or adequation, but her goal is not to serve those whose acceptance one would normally covet, those who would give her efforts at description a seal of approval. She is, rather, impartial as to the recipient, *in order that* she may deliver the true content – “what exists,” and not “what is dreamed of”: “The thing that has made the glory of English literature is description simple concentrated description *not of what happened nor what is thought or what is dreamed but what exists* and so makes the life the island life the daily island life” (*LIA* 14-15; my italics). Such “ethical” dimensions of Stein’s “hermetic trashing” will also explain Stein’s peculiar definition of “genius”:

One may really indeed say that that is the essence of genius, of being most intensely alive, that is being one who is at the same time talking and listening. It is really that that makes one a genius. And it is necessary if you are to be really and truly alive it is necessary to be at once talking and listening, doing both things, not as if there were one thing, not as if they were two things, but doing them, well if you like, like the motor going inside and the car moving, they are part of the same thing (*LIA* 170).

Here Stein’s “genius” writing is ethical precisely when it becomes a conflation of epistemological, interpretive, and authorial levels of functioning: “being one who is at the same time talking and listening.” There is even the suggestion here that, if she can approximate a God-like position, she can be simultaneously *alone creating* and *busy listening*. Stein’s answer to the question of audience is better than Hegel’s, or that of most philosopher-poets: Stein will “write for herself and strangers,” rather than demanding
initiation into her system, all the while keeping herself separate and holding forth the example of her own quasi-theological genius.

Such a stance then opens Stein up to many potential innovations at the creative level. In the following quote, we can hear her explicitly addressing “herself and strangers”:

I wonder now if it is necessary to stand still to live if it is not necessary to stand still to live, and if it is if that is no perhaps to be a new way to write a novel. I wonder if you know what I mean. I do not quite know whether I do myself. I will not know until I have written that novel (MOA 172; my italics).

The stress is taken off. She need not know if this is interpretable, if others “know what I mean” or even “whether I do myself.” But Stein’s “for myself and strangers” nowhere means that she has closed off her project and is functioning in full despair of an audience, because, as we saw above, “there is no possibility that in satisfying anybody there is not the satisfying everybody” (LIA 17). Her solipsistic, hermetic genius remains open to the possibility of reaching an anybody who might be everybody.

This “genius” then extends to every person in the programmatic question of The Making of Americans: “How do you like what you have” (MOA 171, e.g.). The question at first seems banal, but it becomes the linchpin between Stein’s hermetic trashing and her desire for a complete catalogue of every single nature she encounters. In Stein’s

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157 The question in fact consists in a series of Steinian categorical plumplings: “how” asks about texture, way, mode, and quantity; “do” signifies the question, and the address; “you” addresses one’s identification and one’s investment, as against Stein’s genius “I”; “like” signals desire, investment, withstanding, and toleration; “what” works metonymically, in asking about an object
works, the question is just as precious as it is repetitive: “How do you like what you have…and now how do you like it?” And the question further opens up onto one of intelligibility. Stein seems to expect that any human character would answer the question with an admixture of clarity and confusion: “But I am inclined to believe that there is really no difference between clarity and confusion, just think of any life that is alive, is there really any difference between clarity and confusion” (MOA 174; my italics; cf. 173). In Allegra Stewart’s eyes, it is just this sort of question that made Stein break from a consideration of “communication” to a more mystical, universal emphasis on “communion”: “The meditative element became dominant in the writings of Gertrude Stein when she began to write portraits – in other words, at the time when she ceased to worry about communication and emphasized communion” (SQ 493; see also SQ 495). I argue that this was Stein’s project not beginning with the portraits, but almost from the very start. Indeed, Stein’s “object was only to be present both to her writing and to her reader” (SQ 502). But, as has been demonstrated, for Stein this writing was a rather unknown (“in process”) writing, and this reader was as much “anybody” as she was “everybody.” Here is a final definition of Stein’s hermetic trashing: for a writer writing, “that physical something by existing does not connect him with anything but concentrates him on recognition.” And we are again reminded of Stein’s God-like intentions: “This is the Moment of Recognition. Like God on the Seventh Day we look at it and say it is good” (FIA xi).

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of possession as among many objects of possession; and “you have” signals emphasis and a partitive extrapolation from what others have and what else you may want to have.

We have, then, discussed “completion” as an epistemological task, as a theological curiosity, and as a venture into Stein’s peculiar, hermetic genius. I hope to have demonstrated that this category is utterly dispersed and complicated by the formations of Stein’s sentences. It is also our first step in theorizing her sentence practice. In the following chapter, we move from “completion” to a discussion of “description,” “singularity,” and “everything” as Stein presents such terms in Tender Buttons and The Making of Americans, and then presses her syntactic constructions to move far beyond them.

Chapter 5: The complete sentences of Making of Americans and Tender Buttons: Stein’s sentence-making practices

i) Introductory: a constructive, comparative analysis
ii) Does Stein make sense?
iii) Completion: what its practice consists in
iv) Description, and its devolution
v) Character, and its devolution
vi) Everything: completion developed in The Making of Americans’ “everything”
vii) Singularity, and its devolution
viii) Registrations of error
ix) Stein’s semi-theoretical sentences in Tender Buttons itself
x) Conflating realities, conflating sentence types
xi) Conflicting sentence types fissured in Stein’s “pivot”: a new type of making sense
xii) Prepositions: loving them

xiii) Sentence, paragraph, poem: what is emotional? Where does it all end?

i) Introductory: a constructive, comparative analysis

We now want to ask how Stein’s theoretical remarks on sentence-making are played out in her practice of writing sentences. For this task, we will examine sections of The Making of Americans (completed in 1911; fully published in 1925) and Tender Buttons (1914). Here, I simply want to offer a hermeneutic proposal. I want to propose that, if we take the ways of reading developed in the preceding chapters seriously, we may have something of a novel but deeply fitting interpretive approach to these well-known but nevertheless still obscure works of Stein.

The above chapters have doggedly focused on syntax, but also on the question of the epistemological pressures that may have lead Stein and Hegel to innovate in syntax in the ways they did. Foremost among those ‘pressures’ was what I have been calling a quasi-theological epistemological weight, which included Stein’s attention to ideas about God, but also ideas about “totality,” “everything,” and “everyone.” We see that such pressures manifest as an almost obsessive demand (in The Making of Americans and Lectures in America alike) first to catalogue everything, and then to find ways of expressing that everything without catalogues, but rather with complex, convoluted syntactic patterns, and with new, weird figures of speech. This leads to Stein’s creation of the idea of “completion,” which appeared in the Lectures as both a literary tool and a sort of cornerstone in the Steinian world-view.
Here we will discuss two of Stein’s most difficult works: her “novel,” *The Making of Americans* and her “poetic” *Tender Buttons*. We will present them comparatively and constructively, so that our analysis can put the focus on the literary categories and techniques at work in Stein’s thought, those techniques that are most immediately pertinent to our thesis. But we will nevertheless continue to mark the literary differences of the two works under consideration. This constructive approach should be in accord with Allegra Stewart’s assessment that “it does not matter very much what Gertrude Stein called her compositions, not only because she was not concerned with forms, but because, no matter what she wrote, it was a ‘piece’ of an integrated consciousness, a work of the human mind absorbed in knowing” (*SQ* 492), and consequently, “many of her portraits and plays, taken in isolation, seem fragmentary and unintelligible. The whole of her work, however, has unity and meaning” (*SQ* 505). But we will not be able to ignore what seems “fragmentary and unintelligible,” and our attempts at synthesis will be everywhere arrested by the semantic import of the isolated parts of a purportedly meaningful whole.

In *The Making of Americans*, for example, we find various types of sentence that were intended to set forth this goal of literary “completion.” I find it most helpful to think of Stein’s novel as a 925-page attack on the novelistic commonplaces of “description” and “identity” (we spoke of Stein’s problems with these categories in Chapter 1 above). The novel in fact reads as an extended attempt to replace description and identity with what Stein calls “everything,” and I believe that such a genesis is totally analogous to, or congruent with Stein’s concept of “completion” as set forth in the preceding chapter. So ultimately, it is most salient to see *The Making of Americans* as the torturous, never-
ending account of the development of literary “completion” as Stein’s proper way of approaching the world. That project is then seen through in the new types of sentences Stein makes that are able to “account for everything,” and in her obsessive sculpting of certain parts of speech, like the preposition and what I will call the pivot, which can be seen as a project that is then carried over into Stein’s more “poetic” works like Tender Buttons.

In Tender Buttons,\(^{159}\) we may say that Stein’s general idea is to take those very same productive, writerly goals and to “go small” with them, to “get specific.” She is generally thought in this work either to be describing everyday, household objects, or simply to be testing the limits of language, object be damned. Tender Buttons has been assessed as “a masterpiece of verbal Cubism,” but also as “a modernist triumph, a spectacular failure, a collection of confusing gibberish, and an intentional hoax.”\(^{160}\)

Indeed, I think Stein was both “describing normal objects” and submitting those objects to the very limits of the capabilities of the English language. But I propose that we ought to approach her project with all of the hermeneutic suggestiveness of our above chapters. This is what I mean: I believe that in her later-life, relatively short poetic pieces like Tender Buttons, Stein is testing the limits of language in order adequately to describe the simple objects before her – again attempting to meet the philosophical demand of an adeqauatio rei et intellectus that I mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis. But I think she is doing so with all the weight of the theological presuppositions we described, as

\(^{159}\) And later with even greater degrees of abstraction in works like Stanzas in Meditation and How to Write, which we will cite in passing when pertinent below.

well as with all the instrumental richness of the literary world of “completion” that we saw her developing (Chapter 4) in the Lectures.

In a word, I mean that when, in Tender Buttons, we see Stein going out to describe, say, “a surface,” she is approaching that surface as subject to all the epistemological, literary, and theological pillowing we have seen her develop. So, at one level, the “surface” is part of Stein’s “theological” space (see Chapters 1 and 4) in which the writer is “serving God and mammon,” in which biblical and extra-biblical literary textures are melding with the empirical textures of the “surface,” in which a vague conception of God (however abandoned, however caricatured) is limiting the conditions of intelligibility by which this object might be mapped, and in which Stein herself may be playing the very God who does this limiting and allowing. And I argue that, precisely because of all of these pressures, Stein is here coming at the project of literary adequation with a deep sense of the inadequacy of the modes of description, enactment, participation, and performativity (as said in the Introduction to this thesis). And so, at the height of Stein’s sentence-making in Tender Buttons, we hear of “a surface,” and we immediately watch that “surface” sink into the morass of the realities we have just delineated:

Any time there is a surface there is a surface and every time there is a suggestion there is a suggestion and every time there is silence there is silence and every time that is languid there is that there then and not oftener, not always, not particular, tender and changing and external and central and surrounded and singular and simple and the same and the surface and the circle and the shine and the succor
and the white and the same and the better and the red and the same and the centre
and the yellow and the tender and the better, and altogether (TB 21; my italics).

But I argue, however silly it may sound, that Stein has, in such a sentence, just brought us
closer to “a surface” than most philosophers and authors ever will. Let us now examine
how such sentences are working within and throughout the finely wrought textures of The
Making of Americans and Tender Buttons.

ii) Does Stein make sense?

I am arguing, then, that in works like these, Stein is “making sense,” but that such
“making sense” is best assessed in ways we have gathered in the preceding chapters. This
line of thinking is in full agreement with Ronald Levinson, who in 1941 made a very
astute but widely ignored reading of Stein. He was fighting, in that little entry to The
American Journal of Psychology, against B. F. Skinner’s reading of Stein as an
“automatic writer” (Levinson 125). He contended that such literary works were decidedly
not “the cold and unmeaning products of Miss Stein’s unhappy faculty of disengaging
from her central self an ‘elbow’ with nothing significant to say and with no power to
import interest into the saying of it” (ibid. 125). Levinson instead spoke of “quite

161 Cf. Allegra Stewart: “After 1909, this affirmative effort of hers consisted chiefly of recording
the motions of her own mind. Writing became for her an exercise (or ritual) in concentration, for
the act of concentrating one’s attention liberates consciousness from every necessity except its
own autonomous activity” (SQ 489). Stewart somewhat saves her own thesis when she writes that
“Such introversion differs radically, of course, from the introspection associated with anxiety or
other neurotic maladjustments” (SQ 490). This is Stewart’s silly late-1950s psychologism, but it
points to a healthy revision of her thesis: Stein’s introversion, if she had one at all, is a sort of
“objective introversion.” It is not self-obsessed, and it is not introversion for introversion’s sake.
definite stylistic doctrines of Miss Stein’s” (like those I have defined in Chapter 4), which were “on the conscious level of her mind,” and which dealt “with the subtler issues of literary composition” and “notions of the ideal function of language” (ibid. 125). He said that Stein’s writings had “a definite something to be ‘about’” (ibid. 126), while they put in question the very concept of “about-ness.” Levinson concludes:

From whatever quarter the wind of doctrine blew, it propelled Miss Stein toward an appreciation of the potential interest to the literary craftsman of the subtle issues, half psychologic, half philosophic, which turn upon the final categorial analysis of the creative word (ibid. 128).

I hope in this study to have identified some potential “quarters” from which the wind of doctrine blew, as well as to magnify below some of Stein’s very peculiar and idiomatic “categories,” which inform her work with the “creative word.”

The danger I see in Skinner’s approach is the danger of approaching Stein with a lazy hermeneutic. This sort of hermeneutic persists in contemporary commentators like Ulla Dydo, whose treatement of Stein is otherwise so rich and comprehensive. Dydo, as if accepting Skinner’s “automatic writing” thesis, tells us about the type of reading that would correspond to it:

Again: “In seeking such interior freedom, Gertrude Stein suppressed all subject matter as such in behalf of this on-going inner movement, which she tried to express without interposing any conscious purpose between her mind and its object, excluding both memory and conceptual forms” (SQ 490). Stewart has a philosophical agenda. “Contemplative participation is only another name for the process of knowing in which, according to Schopenhauer, the artist becomes the ‘pure will-less subject of knowledge’” (SQ 504).
I want to read, not read into or pin down, the poems. I read aloud, listen to the changing permutations. The more the language empties out of references and antecedents, nouns to pronouns, the more new readings open.\footnote{Ulla Dydo, \textit{Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises: 1923-34}, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003, p. 503.}

This sounds good, at least initially. And this approach is in many ways in accord with what we have said about Hegel’s demand for “determinate negation” and a ceaseless “emptying out” of terms before they can be reclaimed for their content-ful fullness. But we should be careful. Why can’t we “read into” or “pin down” the poems? Would Stein not at least want us to try? I hope to have suggested in the preceding chapters that, indeed, we \textit{ought to} press Stein’s potential meanings for all they’re worth; we ought to “read into” (in order to read about, read on, read through, read while, and read in order to step into) Stein’s world of “completion.”

To go a step further, we can even confirm that Stein \textit{thought of herself as making sense} in the obscure phrases of \textit{Tender Buttons}, when we look to her own assessment of that work in her later \textit{Transatlantic Interview}. There she writes:

\begin{quote}
I took individual words and thought about them until I got their weight and volume complete and put them next to another word, and at this same time I found out very soon that \textit{there is no such thing as putting them together without sense}. It is impossible to put them together without sense. I made innumerable efforts to make words write without sense and found it impossible. Any human being putting down words had to make sense out of them (\textit{TAI} 18; my italics).
\end{quote}
That should be enough to signal that Stein’s mode of operating was not that of “automatic writing,” and that the end goal was to make a deep sort of “sense,” at least at the level of writerly production.

We find an even bigger objection to the reading of Stein as a nonsensical, automatic writer in her definition of the word “genius,” discussed in Chapter 4 above. Stein thought of herself as a genius, and her definition of that word shows an utter attentiveness that consists of a simultaneous “talking and listening”: “One may really indeed say that that is the essence of genius, of being most intensely alive, that is being one who is at the same time talking and listening” (LIA 170; my italics; cf. SQ 501). Stein reinforces this definition in Everybody’s Autobiography (her sequel to The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas), where she shows the total involvement of her creative process: “you have to be a genius to live in it and to exist in it and express it to accept it and deny it by creating it” (EA 281; cf. SQ 494), and again in The Geographical History of America, where we see the ontological and empirical emphasis of the demand that the genius “rest with what is”: “She [here Stein is speaking of herself] says she wanted that she should be the only ideal one, but she is, what else is she but that, she is, and so the human mind rests with what is” (GHA 49). And this again confirms that Stein’s writings were non-automatic (and were rather riven with the very dual demand we have seen Hegel approaching in the simultaneous interpretive and productive modalities of his speculative sentence), just as in her earlier Autobiography she had pronounced her

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163 Cf. SQ 504; and observe Stein’s liberal (almost normal!) use of the comma here.
“intellectual passion for exactitude in the description of inner and outer reality” (*AABT* 259).

The furthest she gets from this “exactitude” is only in *enjoyment* of it, which Allegra Stewart rightly assesses: “she gives the impression of childlike intentness, as though she were concentrating upon each movement in an absorbing game” (*SQ* 502). We can agree with Stewart, then, that Stein’s “work is dominated by the spirit of play, and it filled with a peculiarly pervasive feeling of delight and freedom from care, even when she is describing the wars she has seen” (*SQ* 502). But we cannot follow Stewart’s thinking when it leads to a claim that I believe is the exact opposite of Stein’s intention: “It is in the present moment that the mind is free to act creatively and to ‘make’ out of the ‘given’ subject matter new objects that have no causal connections with the course of events in the external world” (*SQ* 490). This in turn leads Stewart to treat Stein, falsely, as something of a Kantian (*SQ* 491), and this again would open us up to the hazy hermeneutic of a Dydo or a Skinner.

### Completion: what its practice consists in

We have seen in fact that Stein’s “completion” consists *both* of a hermetic “in-itselfness” (in the author and in the objects of thought) and of an actual effort to describe actual things. Stein confesses both of these sides of the project of completion with specific reference to *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons*. On the one hand, it tracks the “containment within itself” of actual objects: “something I had had, in The

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164 And even something of a Christian; see bottom of same paragraph.
Making of Americans and in Tender Buttons [sic], that is a thing contained within itself” 
(TAI 194; cf. 199); on the other hand, it is an objective, descriptive project: “In Tender 
Buttons I described anything” (ibid. 189).

This really reveals Stein’s efforts to meld her own personal descriptive 
synesthesia and her effort to treat words as standing on their own, without reference: “I 
began to wonder at about this time just what one saw when one looked at anything really 
looked at anything. *Did one see sound, and what was the relation between color and 
sound, did it make itself by description by a word that meant it or did it make itself by a 
word in itself*” (TAI 191; my italics). And in such obsession over the insufficiencies of 
her efforts to describe, Stein moved description (both automatic and deliberate) to the 
side, in favor of her “realization of what poetry really is”:

> It really does not make any difference who George Hugnet [the object of her 
portrait] was or what he did or what I said, all that was necessary was that there 
was *something completely contained within itself* and being contained within itself 
was moving, not moving in relation to anything not moving in relation to itself 
but just moving, I think I almost at that time did this thing…Well it was an 
important thing in itself for me but it was also an important thing because it made 
me realize what poetry really is. / This has something to do with what Edgar Allan 
Poe is (LIA 202-4; my italics).

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165 But we must be careful in speaking of Stein’s synesthesia. She does not frequently speak 
this way. It would seem that she instead works *after* or without consideration for melody, 
music, or sound, which she says should only be a “by-product”: “Melody should always be a 
by-product it should never be an end in itself it should not be a thing by which you live if 
you really and truly are one who is to do anything and so as I say I very exactly began again” 
(LIA 201).
The mention of Poe is striking in that it again reminds us that, even in this “shift” toward completion, description and all the older literary conventions have not been entirely left behind. Again, here we see Stein working in line with Hegel’s efforts to track *die Sache selbst*, “the matter itself” (as discussed in Chapter 2) – for Stein, “what poetry really is” – and realizing that one must adjust one’s methodology for it, *but* again that one does not thereby necessarily have to leave the old categories like “description” behind. This methodological adjustment is what enables the movement from the sentences of *Making of Americans* to those of *Tender Buttons* – not a shift in Stein’s authorial operations, nor a change in the relative semantic value of her sentences, but rather a shift toward the deepening of her aim at “completion.” Let us now see how “description” gives way to “completion.”

iv) Description, and its devolution

*The Making of Americans* is the long tale of Gertrude Stein’s *reworking* of the literary category of “description.” As part of this process, in *The Making of Americans* itself, Stein marks the success of her descriptions: “Later in the ending of his middle living it came to be a more subtle repeating. Now repeating was in him a varied vigorous pounding. This is now a description” (*MOA* 246; my italics). She seems to be saying, “Look! I have done it. I have successfully described something!” But we then find a shift from description of *objects and characters* in the narrative to “a description of such a way of hearing repeating” (*MOA* 293), that is, of a faculty of the author doing the describing.
To get at Martha Hersland, for example, Stein *turns inward* and reveals *herself* in the process of describing Martha: “Now I will tell of the meaning to me in repeating, of the loving there is in me for repeating” (ibid. 294). And then that impulse in turn is immediately given back to the characters: “Now there will be a little description of loving repeating being in one of such of them” (ibid. 298). Just as Hegel’s speculative sentence demanded a conflation of objective and subjective registers, Stein’s “description” demands this bivalent movement *into the character* and *into the one describing the character*.

Two-hundred pages later, Stein’s “description” of landscapes undergoes a similar involution. She describes a place *not* by way of its scenery or characters, but by way of the psychological experiences of its inhabitants, so that the first description of a *college* in the novel is: “Mostly no one there was conscious of a grandfather” (*MOA* 431). This is, of course, not new; a Jane Austen would also have “described” a place by way of the psychological associations it engenders; but Stein is here effecting a deliberate dismantling of the whole literary process, and the result is a bit weird: “mostly no one there was conscious of a grandfather.” This does not, again, mean that Stein can’t also give a typical description of a landscape; she will do so five pages later: “a fine prospect of sunset and a long line of elms defining a road that led back through the town of Farnham to the wooded hills behind” (ibid. 436). But Stein is working toward the sort of fluidity of description and non-description that she will announce in *Stanzas in Meditation*, where she boasts: “I can look at a landscape without describing it” (*SIM* III.viii).

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166 See Chapter 2 above.
In the wake of such considerations, in *The Making of Americans*, we watch the author become increasingly circumspect about her use of any sort of colorful, descriptive adjective. This begins in Stein’s avowed embarrassment about certain types of “nature” described in the novel: “The youngest daughter Helen was all spread and all vague in her nature” (*MOA* 266). And likewise certain types of “being” are described with many colorful adjectives that would later find no place in Stein’s vocabulary:

I am thinking of attacking being not as an earthy kind of substance but as a pulpy not dust not dirt but a more mixed up substance, it can be slimy, gelatinous, gluey, white opaqua kind of thing and it can be white and vibrant, and clear and heated and this is all not very clear to me and I will now tell more about it (*MOA* 349).

Having almost accidentally allowed such adjectives as “slimy, gelatinous, and gluey” to enter the scene, Stein writes, midway through the novel, that “To be using a new word in my writing is to me a very difficult thing” (*MOA* 539). In her late-life *Transatlantic Interview*, Stein explains why such verbiage must be purged, commenting on a phrase from *Tender Buttons*:

“Dirty is yellow.” Dirty has an association and is a word that I would not use now. I would not use words that have definite associations. That was earlier work and none of the later things have this. (*TAI* 26)
This radical de-emphasis of words that might have been descriptively useful then twists itself into the problem of how words work in the first place. When Stein slips again into colorful diction in the novel – for example: “engulfing, swallowing, nibbling” (MOA 551) – it is quickly swallowed up in the greyer textures of surrounding adjective-less sentences. And when she offers something as daring and colorful as a simile – “This one as a whole one is like a cannon-ball lying on a bag of cotton” (ibid. 562) – she almost immediately apologizes for it. I will quote her apology in full because it shows the sort of agonizing obsession Stein has cultivated throughout the novel with putting the norms of “description” to the test:

This is not a funny description. I was not certain I should say anything of the cannon-ball and the cotton, I was almost certain I would not say anything in this description about the cannon-ball and the cotton, it was not in me a natural way of conceiving any one, someone conceived this one as a cannon-ball resting on a bag of cotton, I used that in my description, this is not to me a natural way of talking, I have been using it here as I am saying (ibid. 563).

But again note that Stein leaves both the faulty description (the simile) and the apology for it in the pages of her book, demonstrating again the sort of “determinate negation” to which she has subjected the demands of literary description. Has the novel become your typical post-modern description of the fault lines of description? More importantly for

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167 At least one sentence in The Making of Americans seems to imply that meaning is something more than words, but that such intrusive words as those used above can nevertheless be descriptively dangerous: “It would not have any meaning excepting as words if she had ever said it to him” (429). Certain verbal constructions can “have meaning only as words,” but conversely, words are being purged of all but their essential meaning.
our thesis: at the level of syntax, this approach to description has meant that Stein has pressed the bounds of propositional intelligibility. In these problems with description, we have seen that the writer’s subjectivity and the novel’s objects have been conflated; an ability to account for particulars has been torn asunder by the demands of a broader vision; and descriptions have been allowed to elide their referents just as much, and just as quickly, as they create them.

v) Character, and its devolution

In order to efface such novelistic “descriptions,” *The Making of Americans* works, instead, by a series of “stage entrances,” and then by a relentless, tireless, obsessional, and iterative working-through of each of the linguistic items that have entered the book in that way. By “stage entrances” I mean that certain linguistic items appear in the pages of the *MOA* as if they are new *characters*. ¹⁶⁸ This is how Stan Brakhage said *every word* of Stein’s should be read.¹⁶⁹ Marcel Brion echoes the sentiment in an early article for the Paris journal, *Echanges*, in which he compares Stein’s words to individual notes in contrapuntal interplay.¹⁷⁰ This makes for an odd reading task. *New words* in the mammoth *Making of Americans* appear as if they are *new characters* on the scene, if only because the text is otherwise such a morass of monosyllables, of prepositions and non-colorful words. But new words also appear as such because Stein ¹⁶⁸ In the following paragraph, I explain how this very practice will eventually instigate Stein’s denial of the “character” as a viable literary category.


has made a great effort to create a “melting pot” texture of sameness, facelessness, and an emphasis on coordination instead of individuation.\textsuperscript{171} At the level of syntax, this means that *The Making of Americans* functions with a narrow range of diction, and it then must deploy and re-deploy that diction in varied syntactic patterns. This is again because Stein’s innovations throughout are syntax-based, and not image-, reference-, or semantics-based.\textsuperscript{172} Such weirdness draws our attention to syntactic unfolding, and away from the “meaning” of each description or character that may obtain on any given page.

We can briefly anticipate that conjunction and shift by noting what status “character” has in Stein’s writings in general. When Stein turns to a discussion of her contemporaries in *Lectures in America*, beginning with Sherwood Anderson (*LIA* 20), she bewails the death of the “character” in 20th century literature:

> Take Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, in all these it is the title and the form of the book that you remember rather than the characters in the book. That is the reason that the novel has not been a successful form of the Twentieth Century. Proust did it the best, but he made an old-fashioned thing of it (*LIA* 21; my italics).

Always the counter-cultural, by contradistinction Stein made it her aim to depict “complete characters.” In *Lectures in America*, she would write: “In these descriptions it

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\textsuperscript{172} See my discussion of this in Chapter 1 above. This striking “each-word-as-new-character” feeling extends to Stein’s punctuation too. The reader will be startled, for example, when she finds her first question mark on page 630 of a novel otherwise littered with haphazard periods and run-on sentences! Note that Stein herself comments on this whole problem, *MOA* 539.
will be readily observed that habits of attention are reflexes of the complete character of the individual” (LIA 138). But as we move deeper into Stein’s project, we find that the “complete character” was not just a re-assertion of “character” over against its destruction (in Anderson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, e.g.), but was rather the submergence of any individual character into something greater, which greater reality both defines, obscures, and singularizes it (see the discussion of singularity below).

By the time of Stein’s Everybody’s Autobiography (1937), “the novel” with its individuals, its characters, is one-upped by essays and mediations, which don’t require characters: “I tell all the young ones now to write essays, after all since characters are of no importance why not just write meditations, meditations are always interesting, neither character nor identity are necessary to him who meditates” (EA 102; my italics). Here I simply contend that Stein had already approached this destruction of “character” in the method of The Making of Americans, where, as we have said, her character-like words “come on stage” both as new linguistic oddities and as new objects of theorization and conceptual expansion. For example, the following core items offer themselves up for scrutiny in the first hundred pages: “singularity” (MOA 21), “everything” (ibid. 22), “repeating” (ibid. 25), “middle class” (ibid. 34), “bottom nature” (ibid. 47), “religion” (ibid. 59), “it comes to be clearer” (ibid. 86), “more and more” (ibid. 94), and “history” (ibid. 95). The treatment of such conceptual terms as characters in Stein’s novel, then allows her to submerge these “characters” in something bigger, in her project of describing “everything.”

vi) Everything: completion developed in The Making of Americans’ “everything”
In Chapter 1, we read Laura Riding Jackson’s assessment that Stein’s objective is “an everything policy for human intelligence” (CEGS 248). As we saw above, Stein first achieves this policy by effacing her descriptions and characters, by editing the types of words that may be used, and then broadcasting the words she deems worthy: “I may know very well the meaning of a word and yet it has not for me completely weight and form and really existing being. There are only a few words and with these mostly always I am writing that have for me completely entirely existing being” (MOA 540; my italics). In her Transatlantic Interview, Stein makes the stakes of this “everything policy” more clear:

After all, my only thought is a complicated simplicity. I like a thing simple, but it must be simple through complication. *Everything must come into your scheme; otherwise you cannot achieve real simplicity.* A great deal of this I owe to a great teacher, William James. He said, “Never reject anything. Nothing has been proved. If you reject anything, that is the beginning of the end as an intellectual.” He was a big influence when I was at college. He was a man who always said, “Complicate your life as much as you please, it has got to simplify.” (TAI 34; my italics).\footnote{In MOA, we find Stein’s “complicated simplicity” *avant la lettre* (I quote just a small section of Stein’s 16-line sentence): “[…] why do you make everything a complicated thing, do you see, this is a simple thing, everything is a simple thing […]” (MOA 564).}
Here we can see that Stein’s “everything” is the demand behind her complications and her simplicity alike. In Chapter 4, I spoke of “monadic completion” and “expansive completion”; those are the terms of her “complicated simplicity.” In *The Making of Americans*, the two are always working together, in a relentless negotiation of part and whole, when Stein writes:

*Every one* to me just now is in pieces to me. That is to say *every one* is to me just now as pieces to me. That is to say that *each complete one* is only as a piece to me…There are pieces then and that is *whole being*, there is a piece then and that is the whole being of some one, they may be, such a one may be *completely of one kind of being*, but it is *only a piece of such a kind of being as that one is in being* (*MOA* 520; my italics).

Stein’s goal in the novel is completion, in contradistinction to “dramatic constructive imagination,” and, as for Hegel, for Stein completion means actualization: “I am always more and more and that is certain realizing understanding constructing with complete imagination the complete being each one of men and women. The actual things each one are doing I only know from knowing the actual detail in the actual living of each actual one I am ever knowing” (*MOA* 538-9). We should see Stein’s “everything,” then, as the crowning achievement of the novel, in which description, character, completion, actualization, and singularity coalesce into an authorial program that Stein believes to be most adequate.
In her late-life explanatory piece, *Composition as Explanation*, we find the marvelous phrase, “And then there is using everything.”174 This approach to everything as thing-to-be-used is also present in *The Making of Americans*: “[…] all resemblances in that one must be counted in, nothing must ever be thrown out, everything in each one must be included to know that one and then sometime that one is to some one a whole one and that is then very satisfying” (MOA 340; my italics). This instrumental use of “everything” is Stein’s way of guaranteeing representational adequation: “Always there are many many millions of every kind of men and women and this makes many stories very much realler [sic], there being so many always of the same kind of them” (ibid. 385; my italics).175

Finally, let us note that this everything principle applies to others’ sayings, not just to what Stein has controlled in her novel: “There is always, perhaps there is always something in what every one says about any one. In some way anything, everything any one, every one says about any one is a true thing” (MOA 577; my italics). This makes “everything” the great principle of impartiality for Stein – again, either because she is approximating the impartiality of a “God,” or because an implicit theological pressure has made her of necessity impartial. Finally, in *The Making of Americans*, “using everything” has brought Stein to an ultimate, birds-eye-view triumph over description, where “the real thing is like the description,” or full adequation has been achieved. Note, though, that in saying this, a cataract of emotions follow:

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175 And this descriptive adequation is again also always the search for wholeness, completeness: “All these things are true as characteristics in each one but they all think that characteristic is the whole of them. It isn’t. They all forgot their emotion and so […]” (MOA 447).
[...] to see in themselves little growing difference in them and then it is like a map of anything, one is finding that the real thing is like the description. That is very exciting and very depressing and very contenting and very disconcerting and very expected and very astonishing and some then are certain that it is not existing in every one and some are certain that it is existing in every one (MOA 844; my italics).

The “disconcerting, expected, and astonishing” have a theological texture; the “exciting, depressing, and contenting” have a psychological texture; and the adverb “very” points to the need for even more fitting linguistic textures.

vii) Singularity, and its devolution

In opening half of The Making of Americans, Stein’s initial experiments in description were largely concerned with a particular author’s efforts to describe particulars. We have just seen how that project breaks down, and how Stein thinks it must break down of necessity. The first “answer” to that predicament, I believe, is in Stein’s efforts to articulate “singularity.”176 We may say broadly that her idiomatic “singularity” is the thing into which particular identities dissolve. So singularity is the dissolution of the principle of identity in favor of a greater, “singular” expanse of totality.

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176 Unfortunately, I do not believe that her use of the term “singularity” is always in line with the standard logical use of the term. “Singular” for Stein really looks more like her term “completion,” as I have outlined it in Chapter 3 above. And it generally points to a concern with the personal or semi-psychological categories of “personality,” “singularity,” or “individuality” of her characters, but especially where those categories dissolve into a realm of indistinction between author and character, individual and general, identity and non-identity.
Where the above dilations on a particular character like Martha Hersland broke down, Stein’s intentions devolve into thoughts like the following:

I am thinking now about *everything being* what it is, *everything not being* what it is, *something* being what it is, *nothing* being what it is, *something* not being what it is *to some*, I am thinking of this thing and I am thinking about *sense for living in* men and women (*MOA* 672; my italics).

Here all her categories and objects of thought coalesce – “everything, nothing, something, this thing, sense for living.” And this **whole sentence** is an expression of Steinian complete “singularity.” The next step for Stein, both in *The Making of Americans* and in *Tender Buttons*, is to disperse such post-descriptive textures, and to mobilize them on all fronts. We will now ask what *syntactic means* Stein employs to this end of *dispersing completed utterances*.

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**viii) Registrations of error**

177 Such “singularity” first enters the book as a *strain of singularity*, as “as yet an unknown product with us.” And indeed, it first enters as a motif *described* in early passages like this: “It takes time to make queer people, and to have others who can know it, time and a certainty of place and means. Custom, passion, and a feel for mother earth are needed to breed *vital singularity* in any man, and alas, how poor we are in all these three. / *Brother Singulars*, we are misplaced in a generation that knows not Joseph. We flee before the disapproval of our cousins, the courageous condescension of our friends who gallantly sometimes agree to walk the streets with us, from all them who never any way can understand why such ways and not the others are so dear to us, we fly to the kindly comfort of an older world accustomed to take all manner of strange forms into its bosom and we leave our noble order to be known under such forms as Alfred Hersland, a poor thing, and even hardly then our own” (21; my italics; cf. 47). Again, Stein is introducing her terms with Bible-laced imagery – the story of Joseph’s alienation and restitution in Genesis 37-50. The question here is: how does this type of rhetoric, this type of diction give way to Stein’s later *articulations (and not just descriptions)* of singularity (for example on *MOA* 243)?
Stein has begun to efface all sorts of expressions of identity – expressions of description, character, everything. Because these categories have failed under the weight of singular objects of expression, new ways of speaking must be invented that may be expressive of that more dispersed “singularity” (first announced on MOA 21). Again, Laura Riding Jackson gives us a deep interpretive cue here, writing:

[Stein’s] work […] juts out into contemporary time – I mean contemporary time in the sense of a single sequence of generations within immediate view – with the massive prominence of a system of general mental re-evaluation, more comparable in its rigid purposiveness with such a system of general re-evaluation as the Marxian than with anything in the field of literary, philosophic, or artistic theory (CEGS 247-8; my italics).

This “system of general mental re-evaluation,” I argue, is carried out in the accumulation of sentences in which Stein begins to register error, and to express revision. Again, I think this is done to the end of creating a “system” of propositional singularity and completeness, where sentences can be seen to be doing more than merely describing a material universe of material particulars. This will be invaluable for the object-experiments of Tender Buttons, discussed below.
In *The Making of Americans*, many pet phrases help Stein in this endeavor. Phrases like “as I was saying” (*MOA* 93), “to begin again” (ibid. 256), “it comes to be clearer” (ibid. 86), and “more and more” (ibid. 94) come upon the scene and give Stein the license for endless recapitulation, deceptive narrative shifts, registrations of error, and general authorial aberrance, *as she seeks new forms of concatenation*. I am claiming that Stein, all the while, is working to create a literary texture whereby the broadly interconnected realities we have seen her efface (like “the described,” “the particular;” “the singular,” even “the theological”) can be expressed simultaneously. This now extends in to Stein’s syntactic micro-interpretations and unfoldings.

We find standard means of twisting syntax, like *prolepsis*, often in Stein; for example: “The way some things touch some and do not touch other ones, and kinds in men and women then, I will now begin to think some about describing” (*MOA* 482). But it is interesting that even in this example, Stein’s emphasis is on “describing” what has been jutted to the front of the sentence. More curiously, though, we then find Stein using what I am calling “apolepsis,” or the *delaying* of the grammatical object until after it has been implied or referenced with pronouns. Here is an example: “It is a very wonderful thing how much courage it takes to buy and use them and like them, bright colored handkerchiefs […]” (*MOA* 487). Both such figures of speech are being employed in the completion-making, identity-effacing game of registration of error, where Stein claims quite deliberately: “I want to be mistaken I want to make mistakes so that I can see

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178 Where we might expect this phrase – “as I was saying” – always to mark recapitulation, Stein often uses it to mark register or category shift (see *MOA* 121, e.g.), allowing herself to *augment* when she tells us she is merely recapitulating.

179 Cf. the uses of “beginning again” and “drunkenness” in *LIA*.

180 This last expression is always linked to Stein’s methodology: “More and more it will come out in them […]” (*MOA* 94).
something in them which makes of that one a more complete one” (ibid. 538). As we proceed in the novel, we find that the proleptic and analeptic meet in such “complete” syntactic visions as this: “[…] that thinking is existing […] He was not determined in this thing, that thinking is existing” (ibid. 887). Here the very thing jutted to the front and back of the sentence is the thing that the character is wavering about: “he was not determined” in it; he was seeking to understand it, and Stein’s syntax mirrors that seeking. And then Stein reworks the proleptic and analeptic figures of speech so much that, in places, they create a stuttering, self-creating texture. In such sentences, Stein is achieving the anti-propositional “completion” she has been striving for:

To himself it was not a virtue in him that he was never telling anything more about anything about himself about any one that it was right that he should be telling, it was to himself then, this in him, not a virtuous feeling in him, it was a thing it was natural for him to be doing, never to tell anything, it was not right that he should say really to any one (MOA 451).

In such glorious sentences, Stein’s “descriptive,” “everything,” and “singular” projects are seamlessly mixed. This is really the key to her micro-revisions in the very stuff of her syntax; she “wants to make mistakes” so that she can “see something in” her objects which makes them “more complete.”181 The goal of completion set forth in Chapter 4 above is now being achieved in a syntax that bends in on itself from both ends.

181 Later we find that they are even subordinated to Stein’s own autobiographical impulse, or sublimated, diffused, and made more palatable by it. We again note her prolepsis when she is describing this process: “Pieces in being, whole ones in being, words saying what I am wanting, words having existence in them to my feeling, Alfred Hersland and the being in him and the kind
ix) Stein’s semi-theoretical sentences in *Tender Buttons* itself

For a deeper understanding of the meaning of such inventions, we can now look to Stein’s semi-theoretical sentences within *Tender Buttons* itself. Here we find the work explaining itself, theorizing itself (*a la* the theological hermeneutic of *analogia scriptura* and the post-modern emphasis on intertextuality). The challenge, however, is that Stein’s sentences do not immediately present their meanings and intentions at face value, so this will involve some guesswork.

Stein begins *Tender Buttons* by pointing back to the problem of “making sense”: “In any kind of place there is a top to covering and it is a pleasure at any rate there is some venturing in refusing to believe nonsense” (*TB* 4; my italics). This “refusing to believe nonsense” takes “some venturing,” but it is the principle behind what Stein identifies ontologically (“there is a top”) and what she takes aesthetic delight in (“it is a pleasure”). Five pages later, Stein proceeds to issue some sidelong comments on representation, on meaning, and on reference, when she writes:

`Practice measurement, practice the sign that means that really means a necessary betrayl, in showing that there is a wearling. / Hope, what is a spectacle, a spectacle is the resemblance between the circular side place and nothing else, nothing else. /`

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he was of men and women all these things will come soon to be more completely in me, that is certain” (*MOA* 541; my italics). Note: the power of the refrain (makes words maxim-like, makes words merely obsessive, makes words an obvious crutch) between *MOA* 463 and 487. This is Stephen Crane’s device, of course. Refrain now introduces new stories, vignettes (*MOA* 488 ff.). Also see how this devolves into quasi-Aristotelian interpretive and contradictory revisions, massaging (*MOA* 806-8), and pivots (for topic or narrative subject shift) (ibid. 826).
To choose it is ended, *it is actual and more than that it has* it certainly has the same treat, and a seat all that is practiced and more easily much more easily ordinarily (*TB* 9; my italics).

While we may not know what Stein *means* in clauses like “a necessary betrayal, in showing that there is wearing,” we must at least admit that this abstraction is intimately linked to the concrete “practicing measurement” and “practicing the sign that means, that really means […].” And this might encourage us to hear such (presumably) “complete” sentences as these as producing meaning *in a world where*, for example (see the second sentence above), “a spectacle” is truly and completely adequated by “the resemblance between the circular side place and nothing else, nothing else.”

Two sentences later in *Tender Buttons* give us yet other clues as to how we might conceive such propositional conflations. In the first, as if Stein is briefly slipping into a discussion of something like Ezra Pound’s “melopoiea,” she writes: “A cup is readily shaded, it has in between *no sense that is to say music, memory, musical memory*” (*TB* 31; my italics). This riddling syntax includes a sort of proleptic-analeptic “pivot” in the word “between.” Does the sentence suggest that “the cup has in between it (in the middle of it, in between it and other things)…no sense”? Or does it suggest that “the cup has…something in between no sense, which is not quite ‘no sense’ itself”? Again, in light of what we have said above, the hermeneutic point here would be that we, as readers, allow that the cup, the syntactic pivot, and the reference to “music, memory, musical memory” have presented a “completed picture” of those three components of reality. As in our theological approaches to Stein (Chapter 1), we might call the space of
indeterminacy here a “theological” space that allows the mysteries between these words to be read “speculatively” as concrete parts of a created world that have a necessary relation, even if we cannot make immediate sense of that relation.

The second clue we get comes on page 14, when Stein is drawing the portrait of “a virgin a whole virgin.” She writes:

A virgin a whole virgin is judged made and so between curves and outlines and real seasons and more out glasses and a perfectly unprecedented arrangement between old ladies and mild colds there is no satin wood shining (TB 14; my italics).

This phrase, “a perfectly unprecedented arrangement” may be an articulation of the very end of “completion.” *Tender Buttons* is full of such “complete” utterances that seem to be complete precisely because they present “arrangements” of elements of reality (and of the reality of writing) that are, precisely, “perfectly unprecedented.” This sentence enacts that very challenge, because it feeds us many “predicates” that feel right, that feel conventional and adequately descriptive of what we may conceive “a virgin” to be – I mean that it would be (at least poetically) normal to speak of “curves and outlines and real seasons,” of “glasses, old ladies, and mild colds” when describing the realities of virginity. But Stein presents a completed and “perfectly unprecedented arrangement” when she juts all these elements together, and puts the phrase concerning the “arrangement” right in the middle of this odd syntactic…arrangement.
So these two intratextual utterances (pointing to “no sense, music, memory, musical memory” and this “perfectly unprecedented arrangement”) may be taken as further theoretical helps to our efforts to find the “completed” truth of Stein’s sentences.

Finally, we spoke above of the efficacy of ‘registration of error’ or ‘revision’ in achieving a type of sentence that can be ‘complete’ in its attention to the (theological, concrete, and literary) realities Stein is trying to map in her propositional forms. In *Tender Buttons*, we find at least three such sentences. They are as follows:

A little lace makes boils. *This is not true* (TB 15; my italics).

A table means does it not my dear it means a whole steadiness. *Is it likely to change* (ibid. 15; my italics).

Light curls very light curls have no more curliness than soup. *This is not a subject* (ibid. 25; my italics).

In such instances, I believe Stein is forcing her readers to hear the initial *inadequacy* of her first sentence. She proclaims that inadequacy by calling it “not true,” “likely to change,” or “not a subject,” but she also leaves the initial sentence as it is. As we saw in Hegel’s “determinate negation,” such negations do not merely *do away with* the first sentence; they rather tell us something about the content-expressing necessity of the first sentence. In Stein, those registrations of error then force the reader to take *both the initial sentence and its negation* as “complete” expressions of the reality Stein is effecting. Note that each example consists of two propositions, not just one. By demanding that the reader hear two contradictory truths in one “moment of completion,” Stein is extending
the effect of the proposition, or the sentence, beyond the mere boundary of a period. This can now help us to see Stein’s project of literary “completion” at work in her larger, extra-propositional ability to conflate big portions of reality, big epistemological demands, and conflicting sentence types – across sentence boundary, but all the long retaining the grammar and logic of the single sentence.

x) Conflating realities, conflating sentence types

As with Hegel’s speculative sentence, we have seen that one of Stein’s primary modes of inventing adequate sentences is in her stacking of epistemological demands, different elements of reality, and different types of sentences. In this thesis, I have especially emphasize the theological dimensions of reality, because I believe that in those dimensions we get a vivid picture of Stein’s efforts to meld the concrete with the speculative, the positive with the negative, and the worldly with the mysterious – and then to meld both elements with some sense that a distinction is to be made between the Creator and the created elements of such realities. Furthermore, if such “completed realities” are at all theological (in a meaningful Steinian sense), the Creator and created elements must be *intimately linked* and not separated, not as if peering at one another across a cosmological gap.

In *Tender Buttons*, Stein employs her sentences in order to jut together elements of reality that would not have been juxtaposed in more conventional descriptive sentences. Here are some examples:
A seal and matches and a swan and ivy and a suit \((TB\ 4)\).

A PIECE OF COFFEE \((ibid.\ 5)\).\(^\text{182}\)

A not torn rose-wood color \((ibid.\ 5)\).

Note that with such “sentences” (orthographically determined by the period at the end of them), Stein is simply stacking elements of reality that would not normally be put in appositional relation.

Stein then uses these “stackings” in order to rework the “containment” model of how a proposition works, which I discussed in Chapter 3 in connection with Hegel and Leibniz. Toward the start of \textit{Tender Buttons}, Stein writes: “A BOX. \emph{Out of} kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, \emph{out of} selection comes painful cattle” \((TB\ 4;\ my\ italics)\). These many “out of” statements demand that we hear more than a mere copulative (“linking verb”) relation between the parts of Stein’s “completed portraits.” This is important because here Stein’s attention to conflated, static relations (as may have obtained between mere subjects and predicates, joined by a linking verb) breaks out into necessary relations between larger units that contain the smaller, and smaller units that are only made intelligible in light of the larger. Stein meets these ends in what I consider her new figure of speech, the “pivot.”

\(^{182}\) Cf. Puck’s “cup of hay” in \textit{Midsummer Night’s Dream} 2.1.
When Stein writes, mid-*Making of Americans*, that “there was almost a beginning of being interested in him” (*MOA* 422; my italics), the “in him” is both internal to the character being described (as in the phrase, “there was no love in him”) and a reference to the author’s interest in the character (as in, “I was not yet interested in him”). We might call this a polyvalent preposition (the “in” works in two senses), or an over-determined prepositional phrase, but I am using the word “pivot” to describe such a figure of speech because Stein will continue to rework this device until it is reduced to a mere pivot motion between whatever syntactic constructions hang from either side of it, and this device is then seen everywhere in works like *Tender Buttons* and *Stanzas in Meditation*. We witness the always unexpected and rarely immediately intelligible dimensions of the pivot in more complex constructions, like this from *Tender Buttons*: “The reason that there is more snips are the same shining very colored rid of no round color” (*TB* 11; my italics). In that sentence, “snips” splays the potential meaning of the combined phrases. Stein develops her pivot by setting (the above discussed) prolepsis and apolepsis against one another, and by endless permutations of such bizarre moves (see *MOA* 887, e.g.).

In *Tender Buttons*, I argue that the pivot is employed in order to efface the barrier of the sentence, and also in order to put the descriptive adequacy of any propositional unit into question (or to put it to work!). Some of Stein’s pivots merely serve to connect sentences without dividing them: “is there any result, hardly more than ever” (*TB* 7). Others serve the function of a “pun,” where one word takes on new meaning as it accumulates new associations: “Make a little white, no and not with pit, pit on in within”.

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183 While Stein’s creation of such sentences is indebted to zeugma and anacoluthon, it may have more immediate influences in Henry James’ and Stephen Crane’s experimentations with word order, especially their use of prolepsis (anticipation of the grammatical object).
(ibid. 33). But we also witness what we might call the “homophonic pivot,” where the relations between sentences are put in question because of the similar set of sounds that obtain between sentences: “Sauce sam in. / SALMON. / It was a peculiar bin a bin fond in beside” (ibid. 37).

More deeply, and in consonance with Hegel’s “speculative proposition” as discussed above: at points in Tender Buttons, certain words function as pivots between different epistemological approaches to reality. In the following sentence, the word “there” is bivalent: “…it is simpler and if it were placed there would not be any doubt.” (TB 44; my italics). In such a construction, “there” belongs both to the existential statement (“there would not be any”) and to the locative construction (“if it were placed there”). This is an example, par excellence, of Stein’s conflating various linguistic expressions and various epistemological claims in the space of one single sentence. Here we witness Stein putting the “emotional” content of a whole paragraph into the conflated realities of a single proposition. This, on my reading, is the ultimate purpose of her “pivots.”

xii) Prepositions: loving them

And I argue that the inaugural hint at such pivots in fact comes midway through The Making of Americans, when Stein’s attempts to move beyond the above mentioned writerly categories then become pure relational movements – for Stein and for strangers: “I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way that I can do it. Everybody is a real one to me, everybody is like some one else too to me. No one of them that I know
can want to know it and so I write *for myself and strangers*” (*MOA* 289). We have seen that Stein’s authorial individuality has been emptied out, and the individualities of her characters have also been emptied out and effaced by various verbal means. The “for myself and strangers” method meets Stein’s dual aim of effecting singularity and emptying out terms that might get in the way of that project. She is both “trying to be realizing being” (*MOA* 737) and “getting empty of realizing” (ibid. 746).

Prepositions are Stein’s lovechild in this project. We may even read *The Making of Americans* as *a novel written by a woman who loved prepositions exclusively but who nevertheless had to use other words*. Stein trumpets this love for prepositions in *Lectures in America*:

> Then comes the thing that can of all things be most mistaken and they are prepositions. Prepositions can live one long life being really being nothing but absolutely nothing but mistaken and that makes them irritating if you feel that way about mistakes but certainly something that you can be continuously using and everlastingly enjoying. I like prepositions the best of all, and pretty soon we will go more completely into that (*LIA* 212).

Here I will demonstrate how Stein’s prepositions come on the scene of *The Making of Americans* and tear at the foundations of description, pushing toward a mobile expression of singularity and “everything.”

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184 Note, however, that Stein does not “go more completely into that” anywhere in the *Lectures in America*. 
Right on the opening page of the novel, we are struck by the prepositional interplay of phrases like “dragging along through,” “living down,” “born with,” and “dying away” (MOA 3; my italics). This immediately spins out into an account of characters who “live it down,” and “talk it long” (ibid. 5), “say it long,” “tell it over,” and who are “full of such talking” (ibid. 8). The human characters in those pages are almost eclipsed by these obsessional phrases and the fun Stein is having with them. This prepositional play then quickly becomes too omnipresent to map (see MOA 45, 46, e.g.). We can at least say that those little phrases become insufficient as the novel proceeds, and Stein replaces them with prepositional eddies, small-scale phrases of stuckness, so that we hear of a woman who “had it in her to uphold around her” (MOA 71; my italics), or of a man whose relationship to a woman is detailed thus: “A woman to content him could never be outside him, she could never be an ideal to him, she could never have in her a real power for him” (ibid. 87; my italics).

These prepositions vying for attention could be read in an Aristotelian mode, where they are enacting the category of relation (to pros ti) or of human option and potential, expressed prepositionally, relationally.¹⁸⁵ In the crossfire of this play, the propositional subject comes to be painted relationally, and not as a static, substantive entity: “Yet it certainly was very different now with him. Could one ever have it real to him that in one lifetime a man could have it all so different for him, that a man all alone in his single lifetime could make it so that he could have it to be truly all so different in him” (MOA 13; my italics). We may also read such prepositions in a quasi-Hegelian

¹⁸⁵ See Aristotle’s Categories 6b15 ff.
mode. For Hegel, language “stores the categories”,\textsuperscript{186} for Stein, such grammatical functions store the types of people she wants to describe: “there are many ways of knowing kinds in men and women from habits of training, of grammar” (MOA 391). There she means \textit{both} the habits of grammar of her characters, and the habits that she uses to account for them.

In the section on “singularity” above, we read Stein’s first articulation of singularity in the novel: “Brother Singulars, we are misplaced in a generation that knows not Joseph” (MOA 21). By page 243 of the novel, this concept of singularity is, I argue, being \textit{enacted} with floods of prepositions, while the very trope of verbal “enactment” is being betrayed. The following passage is an example of the height to which sentence-making attains in Stein’s novel. I have italicized all the prepositions. I will quote this passage in full because it demonstrates that Stein has, at this point, found a verbal mode of accounting for something that mere “descriptive” sentences had failed to account for.

As I was saying men and women have many of them \textit{in} them their individual feeling \textit{in} their way of feeling it \textit{in} them \textit{about} themselves \textit{inside} them \textit{about} the ways of being they have \textit{in} them. Some have almost nothing \textit{of} such a feeling \textit{in} them, some have it \textit{a little} \textit{in} them, some have it \textit{in} them always as a conscious feeling, some have it as a feeling \textit{of} themselves \textit{inside} them, some have it as a feeling \textit{of} themselves \textit{inside} them as important \textit{to} them, some have it as being important \textit{to} themselves \textit{inside} them as being always \textit{in} them, some have it as being important \textit{to} the others \textit{around} them, some have it as being

\textsuperscript{186} SLM 57.
inside them that there is nothing existing except their kind of living, some have it that they feel themselves inside them as big as all the world around them, some have it that they are themselves the only important existing in the world then and in some of them for forever in them, these have in them the complete thing of being important to themselves inside them. Some have it as a feeling of being important in them from things they are doing, from religion in them, from the ways of living they have in them, from the clothes they have on them, from the way they have of eating, from the way they have of drinking, from the way they have of sleeping, some have a feeling of importance in them from the kind of living they have in them and the others around then have in them, there are many ways of having a feeling of one’s self inside one, there are many ways of having an important feeling in one, there are some who have in them a feeling of importance inside but not a feeling of importance of themselves to themselves inside them, there are some who have inside them an important feeling in them but not an individual feeling in them, there are many ways for men and women to have themselves inside to them and this is a history of some of them (MOA 243; my italics).

A serious reading of this passage would entail seeing the “singular” object of Stein’s writing as now being adequately accounted for by way of prepositions that tirelessly break the bounds of any particular character as well as any particular authorial stance. Whereas the describing narrator would have said “This, according to me, is this way,”
here Stein (and her characters, descriptions, and everything) are just pawns in the relational game of “in, about, inside, to, outside, around, for, and of.”

As the novel continues to trade in such fare, this prepositional play is developed and crystalized into more compact formulae: “Later as I was saying there was the developing of feeling the natural future for her in her in them and in her father and a very little in her and always a little more and more in all of them” (MOA 412; my italics). Stein’s prepositions become more condensed. And the valence of each preposition becomes polysemous, so that we get the “in him” pivot mentioned above: “there was almost a beginning of being interested in him” (ibid. 422; my italics). As I have said above, such compact prepositional uses presage Stein’s “pivot” words, her words that work in two different clauses simultaneously: “and so on and so on and so each one is in themselves in feeling one having been” (ibid. 732; my italics). These “in” words now serve not as prepositional additions to a sentence, but rather as prepositional pivots between two interlocking sentences.

Finally, we can see that Stein’s prepositional play is a study: “I will come back again and again to describe this kind in men and women. I will come back again and again to every kind there is of men and women” (ibid. 548; my italics). The “why” of that study comes precisely in the “theological” dimensions of Stein’s aspirations we delineated in Chapter 2. Here, Stein’s “description,” shot through with revisionary repetition (“coming back again and again”), is galvanized by the muti-valent interplay of “in” and “of,” all in an effort to grasp “every kind” in an as yet undefined whole. On the one hand, such prepositions have served to limit and circumscribe language when it is under pressure to totalize – either because of the author’s ambitions, or because of an
implicit theological epistemology. On the other hand, we can see Stein’s prepositions as providing her with a quasi-divine vantage point, from which she can play God, marshaling her own creations and their concatenated relations.

In a final affront to the single sentence, we can note that Stein uses such pivots and prepositions in order to conflate extra-propositional linguistic units: the sentence, the paragraph, the stanza, the whole poem, the whole work. This allows her to create what I called “sentence paragraphs” and “subject sentences” in Chapter 1. In the former, the sentence and the paragraph are equal. In the latter, the noun or subject of a sentence consists of a whole other sentence. This allows Stein to align general motions (national, literary, historical) with personal motions (autobiographical, poetic), small linguistic units with big linguistic units, and that in turn leads to Stein’s conceit that “paragraphs are emotional” and “sentences are unemotional.” This does not immediately present a “theological” problem, but it does present a definite theory of the limits of the “completing” potentialities of any given sentence. In Lectures in America, Stein reveals her discovery, made in The Making of Americans, that:

paragraphs were emotional and sentences were not. Paragraphs are emotional not because they express an emotion but because they register or limit an emotion. Compare paragraphs with sentences any paragraph or any sentence and you will see what I mean (LIA 48).
Here she seems to be saying that any paragraph, and any sentence, anywhere will meet these requirements. Earlier in that piece, she had spoken against the use of *explanation* and *feeling* in literature: “As you come slowly to become acquainted with English literature there are two things that at first do not interest you, explanations, that is one thing, and what it is that is felt, that is another thing” (*LIA* 14). We see, then, that the emotional paragraph and the unemotional sentence are meant to combat the monotony of “explanations” and “what is felt” alike. In *Lectures in America*, Stein shows that she effected this effacement precisely by conflating parts of speech with larger units of speech, and emphasizing their interchangeability. She did not make emotional paragraphs and unemotional sentences by merely separating the two: “You will see that in The Making of Americans I did this thing, *I made a paragraph so much a whole thing that it included in itself as a whole thing a whole sentence*” (ibid. 159; my italics). Another “explanatory” sentence in *Tender Buttons* gives us a clue to how her emotional paragraph works. It would seem that it is emotional not simply because it is longer than a sentence (many of Stein’s paragraphs consist of only one sentence) but rather because it is *in relation*, or it is “*a system*”: “[…] all this *which is a system, which has feeling*” (*TB* 6; my italics).

We may say that this idea of the emotional paragraph (conceived as “*a system, which has feeling*”) then allows Stein to focus not on mere sentences or mere paragraphs, but rather on mini “*masterpieces*” as they appear everywhere in her writings, and to put upon herself the demand that her own paragraphs be mini emotion-inducing.

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187 Cf. the discussion of Hegel’s ‘monadic’ speculative sentence in Chapter 4 above.
masterpieces: “If a masterpiece is what it is how can then its not being one effect it [sic?]. All that is silence because it makes longing and longing and feeling have nothing to do with what a masterpiece is.” The “masterpiece” is situated somewhere between the completed articulation of a sentence and the emotional articulation of a paragraph. And we later find that a “masterpiece” could also be an episode within a book. For example, Stein labels Crusoe’s discovery of Friday’s footprints a masterpiece: “is one of the most perfect examples of the non-existence of time and identity, which makes a masterpiece.” But keep in mind that this episode takes place within one paragraph, within but a few sentences in Defoe’s original work.

In a central moment of poetic ‘masterpiece’ in Tender Buttons, Stein seems to be channeling all of these demands when she offers a straight-up masterful Shakespearean rhyme and a sample of rhyming verse that is worthy of Shakespeare’s songs (but note that this is presented in a prose paragraph, a la the poetry of Melville’s Moby Dick):

“Lovely snipe and tender turn, excellent vapor and slender butter, all the splinter and the trunk, all the poisonous darkening drunk, all the joy in weak success, all the joyful tenderness, all the section and the tea, all the stouter symmetry” (TB 22). Here Stein’s poetic “masterpiece” is totally congruent with her “paragraph” and “sentence” alike.

However, back in The Making of Americans, as the book unfolds, and as we have come to expect, Stein’s non-emotional sentence and her emotional paragraph had become much more expansive and serious categories. They become intimately related to Stein’s quest for an “everything” approach to the world, one which includes the religious, the theological, the harassing thoughts of morality: “yes to be dead is to be dead, to be really

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188 GHA 176; cf. SQ 500.
189 WAM 1; cf. SQ 506.
dead yes, and yet always there is religion always existing and it is better to have everything” (*MOA* 498). In what I consider the most riddling passage of the book (ibid. 574), Stein presents her own peculiar theory of immortality, mobilizing all the above demands on the proposition. Here, I believe the strong undertones of this passage show us just how much is at stake in Stein’s “completion” project:

It would be such a satisfaction always to be right about every one, such a certain, active feeling in me. I want sometime to be sure when I know something that I am completely right in my certain feeling. Sometime I want to be completely certain. I am one that *in this way* am wanting to be completely certain, am wanting to be right in being completely certain and *in this way only in me* can it come to be in me that to be dead is not to be a dead one. Really to be just dead is to be to me a really dead one. To be completely right, completely certain is *to be in me universal in my feeling*, to be like the earth *complete and fructifying*. This is doing talking. I will now begin again. I really am wanting to be sometime right about every one (*MOA* 574; my italics).

In such a passage, we no doubt feel the “disconcerting, expected, and astonishing” dimensions of Stein’s task. In the phrase “in this way only in me” we again get a pivot word: “only.” If “only” modifies “in this way,” then we find a confirmation for Jackson’s first theological approach to Stein, whereby Stein’s methodology is always subject to the theological demands of “being completely certain,” being “universal in my feeling” and

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190 Note Stein’s Joycean “yes” *avant la lettre.*
“being complete and fructifying.” The silent presupposition of a creator God has necessitated the “everything” approach. If, however, “only” modifies “in me” (“only in me”), then we find confirmation for Jackson’s second theological approach, whereby *only Stein*, by assuming the place of God, can effect the “complete and fructifying” work of a project that attains to divine universality.

Stein adds a bit to this thinking when, directly after she has achieved “a very complete history of one” (*MOA* 583), this sense of completion draws her back to her theories of mortality: “Always to me, to be a dead one is a sombre thing, to be certain that it is existing, always there has been in me the being very much afraid of this thing, always it is to me a sombre thing in living” (ibid. 583). So we see that both of the above readings are correct. The “everything” demand both allows Stein to play God and it corners her into the cramped, uncomfortable, “sombre” space of the writer who is crushed under the weight of this silent but constitutive theological pressure, all the while achieving the “completed sentences” that the above analysis has shown progressively, descriptively necessary. We conclude, then, with this cramped strett of Steinian reality-adequating, sentence-bending techniques.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Subsections:

i) The stakes of the comparison

ii) Tools of sentence-interpretation

iii) Tools of theological explication

Hegel’s “speculative sentence” and Stein’s “completion” have met in our efforts to find deeper ways of approaching the philosophical, theological, and literary stakes of the sentence. We have seen that both the speculative and the completed sentence operate at once as interpretive and productive vessels – they teach us how to read, and they form
(at least for Hegel and Stein) the objects of reading in the first place. At this intersection of productive and interpretive modalities, we have identified many “pressures” or “demands” that have weighed heavily on both authors’ syntactic inventions. Principal among these pressures are the demand for theological expression, the demand for truthful “adequation,” and the demand for reworking former models of syntactic functioning while never fully abandoning such models. On all of these levels, we have found rich ground for comparison. In conclusion, we will gather the contributions to a larger field of inquiry that our analysis has furnished. We have gathered tools of comparison, tools of sentence interpretation, and tools of theological explication. I hope that these tools might constitute the final “contribution” of this thesis to related fields of study.

i) The stakes of the comparison

The bulk of the explicitly comparative work in assessing Hegel and Stein and their respective approaches to language, theology, and the sentence in particular, has come in Chapter 1, but I hope that this comparative impulse has also been felt on every page of the thesis, as we have been circling around a central interpretive aim, namely, to come at Hegel in a fresh way because of what our analysis of Stein’s linguistic inventions has brought forth, and vice versa, to introduce a peculiar reading of Stein because of what the analysis of Hegel has suggested about how language can work. Here I mean to suggest that the comparison has itself taught us something about the nature of comparison.

My stressing the intersection between Hegel and Stein has first been a historical project, whereby we question where and when Hegel’s text gets properly unfolded, and
likewise where and when Stein’s text gets properly explicated. I have proposed that such ambitious texts in fact find their compliment in sources that may be separated by many years, and by many traditional differences. This has helped us highlight a set of transhistorical philosophical and literary demands that are shared by my interlocutors, demands that inform why both authors may have set out on their linguistic pilgrimages in the first place. In the course of this study, those demands – I have also called them “epistemological pressures” – were shown to be manifold and complex. Both authors have been occupied much in defining the limits of everyday language (Hegel’s German and Stein’s English), and then in exploding those limits. And we have also justified our comparison because we believe that both authors have done so because the demand to “account for God” was constantly harassing their thought, even if this was not always explicitly admitted to and unfolded. Both authors also seem to have done so because they wanted to articulate ways that language could be read, be seen as adequately truth-bearing, and be produced where the standard, inherited models of sentence-functioning fall short of meeting these ends.

Such a comparison that spans history and genre alike encourages us to approach comparative studies for all they do to thwart expectations of truth being a historically bound thing, and of projects of truthful expression being things that are determined only by their historical emergence.

ii) Tools of sentence-interpretation
At this crossroads of trans-historical and trans-generic comparison, we have met the “speculative sentence” and the “completed sentence” as two hermeneutic proposals that both compliment each other and feel as if they are blossoming together across the centuries. This is because of their shared interpretive proposals. In Hegel’s speculative sentence, we encountered a hermeneutic whereby the syntax of the sentence adequately expresses the dialectical motions of the object of thought. For Hegel, the grammatical subject, object, and copula are in constant interaction with the metaphysical realities of subject, substance, totality, and relation. Only in that constantly mediated, constantly moving propositional framework can a sentence become adequately expressive. For Stein, the completed sentence both describes and enacts a type of totality. It does so by a moving process (similar to Hegel’s) of monadic dilation and compression, whereby totalities can be mapped precisely in the limitations of the sentence, and the limitations of the sentence can themselves become total, monadic realities.

The study of *propositional adequation* at the heart of these sorts of syntactic bind is a much-needed antidote to much literary study in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Hegel and Stein encourage us to resuscitate the question of *adequation*, so that we may now use it to throw into question more recent models of theological and linguistic understanding. Because many post-modern approaches do not allow for questions of truth and adequation, they lack a sober understanding of the achievements of some of the most potent forebears of post-modern thought itself. In defiance of the post-modern de-emphasis on universality, adequation, perfection, and completion, Stein and Hegel challenge us to tame the wildest sorts of reality with the wildest sorts of
propositions, while all the while retaining categories of intelligibility, truth, and propositional coherence.

In this connection, I hope that the analysis of these two authors has also constituted a fruitful gathering of approaches to a hermeneutic of the sentence in general, whereby the sentence is still seen as a meaningful unit, but where its semantic bearings deserve new consideration. I have been tempted throughout to treat Hegel and Stein as slightly more ambitious versions of an Erik Satie – for whom the creative world could be taken as idiomatic, insular, and delightfully, preciously closed. But I have fought that temptation and have intended to make clear throughout that Stein and Hegel are never thinking like that. They are instead always making claims to the universality of their thoughts, and consequentially to the universal necessity of their verbal inventions. These universal ambitions should, I think, allow us to read a wider range of texts in new ways, and with many far-reaching consequences.

iii) Tools of theological explication

Likewise, we have seen these authors’ “diffuse theologies” intersect in Hegel’s “speculative sentence” and Stein’s “completion.” That intersection has in turn allowed us to develop a way of approaching the nature and viability of the proposition that is a crucial supplement to current understandings of how the sentence works. I have highlighted the theological dimensions of the sorts of totalities that are harassing Hegel and Stein because it has become clear throughout this study that a mere consideration of limited syntactic patterns mapping circumscribed totalities was not sufficient to describe
what our authors have been concerned with. In fact, the totalities their sentences are encompassing are more wild, more total, more pressured, so I have found it proper to trace the diffuse, ever-expanding, and even “Creator-ly” nature of these totalities, as such a theological view has proffered deeper insights into what Stein’s and Hegel’s sentences are up against.

In the field of theology, my ambition is to suggest that biblical studies, for example, will be enriched by asking precisely how and why biblical sentences meet their theological end, and not simply assuming that biblical sentences create that end, and end there. As in Hegel and Stein, in the Bible sentences are meeting demands for a sort of truthful theological adequation that creates such high-pressure needs that the very mode of sentence-functioning, and the mode of propositional interpretation, must always be asking how the precise syntactic form of a sentence is meeting its particular descriptive aim. A consideration of such pressures, and of their resultant syntactic innovations, can then be extended to non-theological texts, if we allow for the sort of implicit or diffuse theological understanding that Hegel and Stein have so vitally suggested. It is my hope that purportedly “secular” texts (as Stein’s may appear at first glance) can be more fruitfully read if their syntactic innovations are seen in light of such dispersed theological pressures, as they pop up when we least expect them.

My final ambition, then, is to have been speaking of things that are, at least potentially, universally applicable, even while learning such things always from particular, historically bound texts. This again, then, is what the title to this thesis should indicate: the aim of making contributions to a general study of the question of syntax as it
dissolves to meet its ends, while also forming those ends in its alternating moments of production and dissolution. In the Introduction, I articulated this aim as a three-fold defamiliarizing project, whereby “we are concerned to point to the linguistic where it has been ignored, to push the non-theological where the theological has been made an exclusive principle, and to propound the theological where it has not been heard in the first place.” To the extent that this study has met that end, we have honored the (hopefully, purportedly) universal nature of the claims these two authors have made as they have groped in the dark for sentences that could account for God, and for accountings for God that should arraign our approach to the sentence.

If I have offended the gentle eternal souls of either of my interlocutors, I can only salute them with the parting words of Puck, surely one of the finer theologians – and one of the finer sentence-makers – the world has ever seen; first in words that ring of the operations of Hegel’s speculative sentence: “Wenn wir das unverdiente Glück haben, jetzt der Schlangenzunge zu entgehen, wollen wir bald den Schaden wiedergutmachen,” then in the complete English that Stein made her province: “If we have unearned luck / Now to scape the serpent’s tongue / We will make amends ere long.”

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