

# How Hegel put Goethe's *Urphänomen* to Philosophical Use

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It will be shown that Hegel's philosophical system rested on an appropriation of the concept which lay at the heart of Goethe's scientific work, the *Urphänomen*. In that sense the *Urphänomen* is the *Urphänomen* of Hegel's philosophy. The *Urphänomen*, so transformed by Hegel, and interpreted in the spirit of Goethe's scientific work, can be seen to offer a very important approach for the natural and human sciences today.

It would hardly be controversial to point to a degree of rapport between Hegel's philosophy and the Goethe's scientific work. Indeed Hegel repeatedly praised Goethe's *Theory of Colours* and cast himself and Goethe as comrades in the fight against Philistinism. The Pantheism of Goethe's naturalism, his emphasis on development, his hostility to Newtonian natural science and his holistic approach are widely recognised as attributes shared with Hegel. Indeed, in the words of Daniel Robinson: '[Hegel] and Beethoven were born in the same year. One set Goethe to music, the other to philosophy' (Robinson 1995: 287). But whereas Beethoven's admiration for Goethe was reciprocated, Goethe was far more measured in his appreciation of Hegel's philosophy. Indeed, if Hegel's idealism is contrasted with Goethe's naturalism, the poet and the philosopher seem poles apart.

But the claim of this paper is that the key concept of Goethe's scientific work is the *Urphänomen*, and that the *Urphänomen* was appropriated by Hegel and transformed in such a way that it could be said to be the *Urphänomen* of Hegel's philosophy. Once this connection is made explicit, a reappropriation of Hegel's concept suggests itself, which, by reintegrating some of Goethe's original insight, provides a powerful instrument for the development of holistic science today.

Although the *Urphänomen* can be traced back as far as 1787 in Goethe's thinking, and the first evidence of it in Hegel's writing appears in 1802/03, an exchange of letters in the last decade of their lives provides evidence of a recognition of this relationship by the two writers.

On 24 February 1821, Hegel wrote to Goethe highlighting the importance he attached to the *Urphänomen* and his reading of its place in Goethean science:

"This spiritual breath – it is of this that I really wished to speak and that alone is worth speaking of – is what has necessarily given me such great delight in Your Excellency's exposition of the phenomena surrounding entopic colours. What is simple and abstract, what you strikingly call the *Urphänomen*, you place at the very beginning. You then show how the intervention of further spheres of influence and circumstances generates the concrete phenomena, and you regulate the whole progression so that the succession proceeds from simple conditions to the more composite, and so that the complex now appears in full clarity through this decomposition. To ferret out the *Urphänomen*, to free it from those further environs which are accidental to it, to apprehend as we say abstractly – this I take to be a matter of spiritual intelligence for nature, just as I take that course generally to be the truly scientific knowledge in this field" (Hegel 1984: 698).

Hegel goes on to speak of his philosophical appropriation of the *Urphänomen*:

"But may I now still speak to you of the special interest that an *Urphänomen*, thus cast in relief, has for us philosophers, namely that we can put such a preparation – with Your Excellency's permission – directly to philosophical use. But if we have at last worked our initially oyster-like Absolute – whether it be grey or entirely black, suit yourself – through towards air and light to the point that the Absolute

has itself come to desire this air and light, we now need window placements so as to lead the Absolute fully out into the light of day” (Hegel 1984: 699).

Here Hegel recognizes that in Goethe’s hands, the concept escapes the airless depths of the philosopher’s study, into the light of day where it connects up with Nature and the everyday life of the people. And he observes:

“the two worlds greet each other: our abstruse world and the world of phenomenal being. Thus out of rocks and even something metallic Your Excellency prepares for us granite, which we can easily get a handle on because of its Trinitarian nature and which we can assimilate”(Hegel 1984: 699).

With “Trinitarian” Hegel refers to granite “as a compound of quartz, felspar, and mica” (2009: §126). Hegel rejected the geologists’ view of granite as an arbitrary compound of different matters, and saw within the formation of granite the action of a logical triad which comes to fruition in the moments of the subjective notion, viz., Universal, Individual and Particular. Thus Hegel is here indicating, albeit obscurely, that he assimilates the *Urphänomen* by means of the three moments of the abstract notion, the concept which is to be the subject of a science.

Goethe responded to Hegel’s letter on 13 April, sending him the gift of a prism and an opaque stained glass wine glass which Goethe had referred to in the *Theory of Colours*, with a note saying:

“Seeing that you conduct yourself so amicably with the *Urphänomen*, and that you even recognize in me an affiliation with these demonic essences, I first take the liberty of depositing a pair of such phenomena before the philosopher’s door, persuaded that he will treat them as well as he has treated their brothers” (Hegel 1984: 693).

and dedicating the wine glass as follows:

“The *Urphänomen* very humbly begs the Absolute to give it a cordial welcome.”

In this way, Goethe acknowledged the compliment Hegel had paid him and gave recognition to this lynch-pin connecting their work.

First let us look at Goethe’s idea of the *Urphänomen*.

As he described in his *Italian Journey*, Goethe arrived at the concept of *Urphänomen* by observing the variation of plants, in different parts of Italy, at different altitudes and latitudes. He studied the plants by making botanical sketches of them and sensuously familiarising himself with all the variations of what he took to be the same basic archetype. All plants, he believed, were a realization according to conditions, of an underlying form which he called the *Urpflanze*.

What is striking here is that Goethe arrives at this idea through a process of sustained sensory contemplation, a practice which is characteristic of his whole approach to science. Like Goethe, Hegel also emphasised that science must enter into its object, and follow the immanent movement of the subject matter itself (Hegel 1969: §20). But it is in his emphasis on sensory contemplation that Goethe stands in the starkest contrast to Hegel, something which Hegel acknowledges approvingly in his letter with his reference to the need for philosophy to have a seat by the window. But the idea is in fact not at all strange to Hegel. In his *System of Ethical Life* (1979), written in Jena in 1802/3, Hegel sketches the development of culture in terms of people acquiring concepts through the creation and use of crops, domestic animals and tools, which are at one and the same time, both products of human labour and norms of labour, and which human beings acquire as subjective thought forms by working with them. Hegel refers to this process as subsumption of the Concept under Intuition (and vice versa). This is exactly the process of acquisition of a concept which Goethe is describing: Goethe aims to acquire the idea of the plant by working with its forms over a sustained period of time. Equally one is reminded of Goethe’s report (1996) of his meeting with Schiller in Jena in July 1794 in which he showed Schiller a

sketch of a plant, and over Schiller's objections observed 'that I have ideas ... and can see them before my very eyes'.

This practical side of working with signs is less prominent in Hegel's later works, and Hegel belittled the use of likenesses as signs for concepts in his comments (1971, §459n) on hieroglyphics and Chinese characters. Further, Hegel is concerned with 'thought-objects', i.e., artefacts, whereas Goethe is more concerned with products of nature. Nonetheless, both writers recognized, and indeed began from, material objects as universal representations of a concept.

But whilst insisting on the sensuous character of the *Urphänomen*, Goethe was also adamant that the *Urphänomen* represented the *idea* of the genus, *not* its contingent attributes, and was *not* arrived at by the abstraction of common attributes, but on the contrary by the discarding of everything accidental. So when Hegel observed in the above letter that Goethe begins with what is 'simple and abstract', we see that the *Urphänomen* is indeed abstract in the precisely Hegelian sense of the word.

Further, Goethe takes the *Urphänomen* to be the starting point for a science, something of which Hegel also makes special note, but it is a beginning in a special sense. The discovery of the *Urphänomen* is the outcome of a protracted period of reflection; Goethe emphasised the importance in his 'delicate empiricism' of sustained contemplation and observation of the object, before being able to determine the *Urphänomen*. So determination of the *Urphänomen* marks a nodal point in the development of the science, an *aperçu* which makes possible a leap from contemplation and reflection upon the object to representation of the complex whole in terms of an archetype. After this leap, the development of the science takes the form of an unfolding of what is already implicit in the *Urphänomen*. For example, Goethe boasted (1962) that he could *invent* an infinite variety of plants from his *Urpflanze*. Hegel gives recognition to this aspect of the *Urphänomen* when he praised Goethe for showing 'how intervention of further spheres of influence and circumstances generates the concrete phenomena, ... so that the succession proceeds from simple conditions to the more composite'.

The purpose of the *Urphänomen* is to provide an authentic conception of a whole complex process. We can utter the word 'Nature', but it is just a word. In the course of time, as a representation of the whole, a word such as 'Nature' will accumulate connotations, nuances and semantic associations which contribute to it as a more concrete representation. But in itself, there is nothing in the word 'Nature' more than an empty symbol; it provides no royal road to a conception of the whole. It is an empty whole, a mere sign (*PhG* §23). A complex which is formed by means of collecting together all those objects sharing some common attribute is an inauthentic whole, and such a conception simply shifts the problem from the entity to the attribute without advancing understanding of the entity at all. Other complexes may be indicated by the connection of a thing to the social practice in which it arises, or by subsumption under some genus (both of which presuppose a related existing conception), but a word in itself is insufficient to represent a complex whole.

Goethe's brilliance was his demonstration that the whole can be conceived as an integral *Gestalt* (a 'figure' or 'formation'), only by finding a particular in which the essential properties of the complex whole are exhibited, and conceivable to the human mind because it is given to the senses. This conception is directly opposed to the Newtonian approach of making the whole a production of some hypothetical 'vibration' or 'force' which is in principle unavailable to the senses. As Hegel explained in his critique of the Newtonian notion of force in the *Logic* (1969: §§373ff, 2009: §136b), this merely displaces the problem from a form of motion given to the senses to a metaphysical construction which avoids rather than solves the problem.

Thus, the *Urphänomen* is the principle which allows us to conceptualize the complex whole as a *Gestalt*, not just as an empty symbol, not as the product of an external metaphysical cause, or an abstract collection united externally by an arbitrary common attribute. The *Urphänomen* is a particular which contains everything that is essential to the concrete whole:

‘What is the universal?  
The single case.  
What is the particular?  
Millions of cases’ (1996: 92).

The *Urphänomen* is the idea of the complex whole, but in a form which is given to the human imagination because it is given to our senses. Because it is the most simple, a particular which is stripped of everything inessential, it cannot be described as stereotypical. It is a sign which directly evokes the whole. It is the archetypal phenomenon, which means that it is not the first in time, the Darwinian original of the whole species or kind, but that which is *logically* the most primitive. The *Urphänomen* crowns the pre-history of a science, upon which the various realizations of the *Urphänomen* follow by *necessity*.

So Goethe’s idea about science is: observation and reflection until you get the *Urphänomen*, and then from that simple and abstract beginning, unfold that which ‘must follow lawfully’ (Steiner 1988, Letter to Herder, May 17 1787). As he notes in the 1817 Preface to the *Morphology*, the archetypal animal is “the concept or idea of the animal” (1988 :69).

To those who are familiar with Goethean science, all this is old news. And those who are familiar with Hegel’s *Logic* will already see how close is Goethe’s idea to Hegel’s concept. But let us trace how Hegel appropriates this idea.

Although Hegel’s exercises in the mutual subsumption of Intuition and Concept in the 1802/3 system parallels Goethe’s solution to Kant’s dualism, and so on and suggests a similar understanding of the construction of a culture, it is in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that the connection begins to become clear in the way we wish to bring out.

In order to resolve the contradictions in Kant’s philosophy, Hegel took thought as it really existed, in historically articulated forms of life. The *Phenomenology* tells the story of the development of European civilization from three different points of view. It is a kind of *Bildungsroman* of Western culture. Hegel’s ideas were still in a process of development in 1807, and the three points of view from which the story is told were not quite settled. Approximately they were the way of thinking, the way of living and what I will call the constellation of artefacts through which people reflected on their experiences. Rather than thought being taken in terms of a subject reflecting on an object, subject and object are taken together in a definite form of life, mediated by some cultural constellation.

But the subject-objects whose *Bildungsroman* is being told here is not the whole world. The subjects of the narrative here are states through which Spirit is acting. Further, the *Phenomenology* is coherent only if we assume that a *Gestalt des Bewußtseins* refers to a community with a common, shared culture and way of life. In the present-day context of large multiethnic and multicultural nation-states, it makes more sense to interpret a *Gestalt des Bewußtseins* as a ‘project’. Be that as it may, Hegel had in mind historically articulated forms of life, tracing the development of European civilization as Spirit manifested itself, unfolding as it moved from one people to another.

The point was, self-evidently, to conceive of each *Gestalt des Bewußtseins* as a *Gestalt*, that is, as an integral *whole*, as a ‘shape’ or ‘formation of consciousness’. There are a number of competing ways of conceptualising the complex entity formed by the collaborative activity of people en masse. To see the point of Hegel’s approach, it is worth reviewing some of these competing approaches.

The most well-established means of conceiving of what Hegel calls a formation of consciousness is through some attribute shared by all the individual participants (citizenship, place of residence, religious affiliation, language, occupation, etc.). Such a characterization then allows further properties to be attributed to the collective, and the individuals assigned to the abstract category so created. This is the well-known method of abstract empiricism, practised in sociology departments to this day.

Alternatively, the study of individuals deemed to belong to the formation may proceed on the basis that every individual is a *microcosm* of the formation of which they are a part – the light of the whole being reflected in every one of the parts. Continued such study allows a deeper and deeper understanding of the whole, but this can only be a part of the process of investigation, as it does not answer the question as to what the formation is, and nor does it resolve the problem of which individuals belong to the formation and how. The same methods can be applied by breaking the whole into intermediate parts – industry, politics, and so on. This still leaves open the same question of how such intermediate parts are to be conceived.

Other approaches include the structural and functional methods, but these, like the conceptions of Newtonian physics, ascribe the properties of the whole to metaphysical entities which themselves require explanation. Hegel subject such methods to critique in the section of the *Logic* on the Concept, but it was the solution suggested by Goethe which he adopted as his own. This is made clear in the letter quoted above in how Hegel describes Goethe's use of the *Urphänomen* in such a way that it is clearly recognizable as identified with the abstract concept or *Begriff* in Hegel's *Logic*, and there is a perfect symmetry between Goethe's idea of the simple, archetypal form arising out of a period of sustained contemplation of the subject matter itself, followed by the unfolding of a science by logical necessity out of this simple concept.

Hegel did not approach the problem of conceiving the *Gestalten des Bewußtseins* in terms of its individual elements (persons or groups of persons), but rather as a complex of shared thought-forms, noting again, thought-forms to be understood from the three aspects mentioned above.

Hegel's idea was that the forms of life, ways of thinking and constellations of culture mutually constituted one another. This he had already settled in his earlier systems. In order to grasp such *Gestalten des Bewußtseins* as wholes, he had to determine the *Urphänomen* which expresses the idea or concept of the *Gestalt*. His solution was that in any such society, there would be an ultimate concept of truth or law of inference, and that forms of activity and disputes could freely unfold until the 'the buck stops' at that given criterion for determination of truth or law of inference. The given *Gestalt* would at some point fall into crisis, because no such criterion of truth can avoid at some point falling into contradiction with itself. All such truths are relative, and at some point reach their limit. But if a people never subjected their own laws and customs to sceptical self-criticism, then such a level of coherence could not develop, and nor could the kind of crisis which ultimately leads to the demise of a formation and open the way to its replacement by a new concept of truth. When this kind of sceptical internal critique is not present then the culture is effectively dead and Hegel holds that Spirit has left such a people, and it stagnates. Spirit acts only insofar as the concept manifests itself in the whole.

Thus we see that in every shape of consciousness there is one concept of what it means to be true, which lies at its heart, insofar as it is a form of life in which the spirit acts. This concept is the *Urphänomen* of the given *Gestalt des Bewußtseins*, it is the simplest, most abstract and logically most primitive or archetypal concept of the complex form of life. As remarked above, this idea makes more sense in the context of social life today if we think of the *Gestalt des Bewußtseins* as a project, a project whose *raison d'être* is the concept or *Begriff* which ultimately determines what is right according to the lights of the given project.

The identification of Hegel's conception of the place of an abstract concept (*Begriff*) within a *Gestalt des Bewußtseins*, with Goethe's conception of the place of the *Urphänomen* in a *Gestalt* still leaves a number of questions unresolved, but these issues can be clarified if we move to Hegel's mature system as first presented in the *Science of Logic*.

Although Hegel never updated the *Phenomenology* and maintained it unchanged as representative of his early work, he never refuted it, and it remains a unique record of his view of the development of formations of consciousness, that is, of *manifest spirit*, and the *Logic* is to be interpreted as the *truth of manifest spirit*, or the *pure essentialities* of the *Phenomenology* (§10 1969). This observation is important because it clarifies the oft-disputed question as to what the *Logic* is about, what is it the logic of. At the completion of the development of manifest spirit,

when Spirit arrives at absolute knowledge and is able to look back on itself, Spirit can abstract the truth of its own development in the form of the logic of *Gestalten des Bewußtseins*. This it is able to do because in and through the journey of spirit, people have arrived at philosophical thought and are capable of reflecting on the history of thought and understand the *Logic*. Without people capable of thinking critically in concepts, and the institutions and forms of knowledge which make this possible, it is not possible to have a *Logic*.

This allows us to understand how Goethe's *Urphänomen*, as something given in experience, albeit idealised, can be reconciled with the apparently abstract schemas of Hegel's *Logic*.

A concept is a unit of a *Gestalt des Bewußtseins*, and as such it is not a thought-form in the Kantian or Cartesian sense of that expression, but like the *Phenomenology*, has its three aspects which mutually constitute one another. Only in this sense is a concept something given in experience and not just a subjective thought form existing in some phantom world. The common trope of describing the content of the *Logic* in terms of concepts which 'move' makes no sense so long as the content of the *Logic* is taken to be subjective thought forms. It makes sense only if the content of the *Logic* is understood as the pure essentialities of the *Phenomenology*. For all its abstractness and obtuseness, the *Phenomenology* speaks of an empirical domain in which the *Logic* can be tested and accrue meaning. The idea of the *Phenomenology* is that movement and change in Spirit is constituted by rational criticism of the laws and customs prevailing in the given formation of consciousness. Consequently, the appropriate form of exposition of the science of its pure essentialities is *logical argument*. This makes sense of the form and content of the pure essentialities of the *Phenomenology* as the *Logic*.

Further, Hegel indicates that at least in the initial stages, the concepts of the *Logic* also constitute *Urphänomen* of corresponding *Gestalten des Bewußtseins*. The concepts of the *Logic* are therefore not laws or principles standing aside from Spirit, like Newtonian forces, but are themselves also forms of manifest spirit. This makes it possible to see the sense in which the thought-forms which make up the content of *Logic* are themselves phenomena and reflect the character of phenomena.

So Goethe's demand that a science must begin with a *phenomenon*, albeit an abstract and ideal phenomenon, and not a metaphysical principle, can therefore be satisfied even in this most abstract of Hegel's works, the *Logic*. This is provided that the tripartite understanding of *Gestalten des Bewußtseins* is carried over into the *Logic*, albeit as their *truth*. The truth of Spirit does not stand outside Spirit, but is one of its shapes.

The *Logic* therefore begins with the concept of Being, marking the beginning of philosophical reflection, the concept whose only presupposition is the existence of a community of people capable of philosophical reflection. The concept of Being is subjected to immanent critique, that is, subjected to logical criticism within the scope of arguments inherent within the concept of Being itself. This critique of Being constitutes Hegel's Ontology, the science of Being, elaborated as a *critical science*.

Let us recapitulate Hegel's idea of Ontology. Ontology is a science which is elaborated entirely by an immanent critique of the concept of Being. But the concept of Being, and consequently the *Logic* itself, does not arise from within the science, but arises out of the *Phenomenology*, as its truth. The whole form of movement which Hegel discloses in the science of Being – seriality, in which one concept passes away and is replaced by another – is unique to and characteristic of this science, and arises out of the *Urphänomen*. Whilst the entire science of Ontology arises by rational critique of the *Urphänomen*, the same cannot be said of the origin of the *Urphänomen* itself. The concept of Being can only be made sense as the beginnings of philosophical reflection, i.e., as part of manifest spirit. So from where does this word derive its meaning? There is nothing inherent in these five letters of the alphabet that can provide a subject for critique. The concept of Being is an object of experience and in the context in which Hegel comes to it, qualifies as an *Urphänomen*.

As Hegel famously said:

“Science exhibits itself as a circle returning upon itself, the end being wound back into the beginning, the simple ground, by the mediation; this circle is moreover a circle of circles, for each individual member as ensouled by the method is reflected into itself, so that in returning into the beginning it is at the same time the beginning of a new member. Links of this chain are the individual sciences, each of which has an *antecedent* and a *successor* – or, expressed more accurately, *has only the antecedent and indicates its successor* in its conclusion.” (1969: §1814)

Ontology is one of these circles. It is a circle because it is contained within the closed circle of deductions from a single concept. It does not deduce its successor science, but merely indicates it, for the *Urphänomen*, or abstract concept, which forms the starting point for the succeeding science may be discovered only by a fresh insight; it is not implicit within the former science.

So taking the *Logic* for example, the *Logic* is itself a circle of circles, contains three sciences: Ontology (the science of Being), Essence (the science of Reflection) and Notion (the science of the Concept). Each of these sciences begins with a simple abstract concept (Being, Reflection, Concept), a concept which is posed but not formulated or deduced by the preceding science. The word which is to form the abstract starting point of the new science gains its semantic content from the preceding or underlying science. In order to make the starting point for a new science, the word must be identified with a concept, and it is this simple concept which is the *Urphänomen*.

Two things need to be taken note of here. Firstly, the form of movement is not the same in each case. Every science unfolds the content of its concept in its own unique way. The form of movement found in Essence is not the same as that in Being. Here, in the passage from one relation to another, the former relation does not pass away but remains, although pushed to the background, and the form of movement is *diversification*. In the science of the Concept, the form of movement is *development*, with each new relation incorporated into the concept and all the former relations merged with it. The form of movement is implicit in the *Urphänomen* and is not fixed.

Secondly, the science of the Concept requires special attention here, since, if we are correct, this should correspond to an exposition of the development of a science from its *Urphänomen*, whereas the sciences of Being and Reflection describe those phases of a science culminating in the discovery of the *Urphänomen*. We should expect to find Hegel’s conception of the *Urphänomen* in the first section of the science of the Concept. But before looking at the section on Subjectivity, let us briefly note that Hegel applies this principle consistently throughout the *Encyclopaedia*, and it is not all limited to the three sciences making up the cycle, as indicated for example in Miller’s translation of the *Science of Logic*. Every concept is itself a project, a form of human activity centred around a corresponding sign arising from its conditions and reproducing those conditions.

The Philosophy of Nature for example, is unfolded out of the concept of *space*. In this way Hegel sought to demonstrate the intelligibility of Nature. At first sight, this may appear absurd, and like Goethe’s *Theory of Colours* is nowadays subject to ridicule. But the great achievement of twentieth century natural science, Einstein’s theory of relativity, was unfolded out of a critique of the measurement of distance and time (NB). In fact, much as observation and experiment have played their part in the ever-expanding activity of the natural sciences, it is only insofar as its knowledge is in Hegel and Goethe’s sense logical, that Nature can be said to be intelligible. But Hegel did not see that a Philosophy of Nature would have to be subject to fundamental revision as scientific and technical activity developed and brought to light new contradictions. “Each individual is the Son of his Age,” (1953) and so is his Philosophy of Nature.

The Philosophy of Right for example, is unfolded out of what Hegel calls abstract right, that is, private property, which arose as a resolution of problems arising in Subjective Spirit. The Philosophy of Right takes in economics, the state and world history, all to be unfolded from the notion of private property. The claim that modern history is intelligible only insofar as it can be seen to unfold from the institution of private property, and in the light of the historical experiences of the past two hundred years would lead us to believe that is a claim that is quite defensible.

That is, Hegel adopted the model of science proposed by Goethe, the model in which the essential properties of the entire complex of phenomena is revealed in its simplest particular unit. As we observe the current climatic, financial and social crises affecting the entire globe, thanks to the failure of structural, functional and abstract-empirical science, perhaps it is time that this model of science were taken more seriously.

But the problem is that whilst Goethe showed how an authentic *Gestalt* is conceivable only through the apprehension of its simplest particular phenomenon, the basic principle discovered in the *Urphänomen* still has to be developed. It is one thing to be able to arrange a collection of natural phenomena in sequence, but to trace the unfolding of the logic of the *Urphänomen* out of itself, is possible only if the *Urphänomen* is transformed into a true concept. Goethe's *Urphänomen* is just a sign, albeit a meaningful sign, but not yet a true concept. In itself it is insufficient for the development of a science. This brings us to Hegel's unique development of Goethe's idea which marks his science off from that of the great naturalist and poet.

Whereas Goethe relied upon the intuitive grasp of a process arising from sensuous apprehension of the *Urphänomen*, Hegel had to work out the nature and structure of a thought-object, or concept. He first developed his idea in terms of the acquisition of concepts and the construction of culture by using tools and language, the raising of children and participation in institutions. The tripartite structure of the *Phenomenology* expressed the ideas which were given finished expression in the *Science of Logic*, but now in an abstract, logical form, as the truth of the *Phenomenology*, rather than the nature of manifest spirit.

In the first section of the Science of the Concept, Subjectivity, Hegel presents the concept as having three 'moments': Universal, Individual and Particular. As part of the science of *logic*, these moments are to be understood as moments of the syllogism, but if the *Logic* is the truth of the *Phenomenology*, and the *Phenomenology* concerns concepts as identities of a way of thinking, a way of living and a constellation of culture, then we must read the moments of the syllogism in the same way.

Thus, a Universal is an artefact such as a word or sign, products of which the shared culture of the community is composed, be that works of art, philosophy books or spoken words. It is these signs which can be naïvely spoken of as if the sign was itself a concept, just as money is deemed to have value because it is money, independently of the existence of economic relations.

The Individual is a single thing or event (or the thought of it: Hegel does not make an inside/outside distinction), not just a logical proposition, but an instance of what may be signified by the Universal.

The Particular can only be understood as an instance of human practice by means of which the Individual is connected to the Universal and vice versa, whether that be pointing, signification of any kind or using something in the course of an activity signified by the Universal.

So a concept is the coincidence or unity of these three moments. This is a far more active conception of the *Urphänomen*. Rather than being taken as a moment of contemplation, from which the development of the complex whole may be intuited, Hegel's conception of the abstract notion (*Begriff*) is self-mediated, and by means of the analysis modelled by Hegel in the Science of the Concept, an entire science can be elaborated.

Goethe insisted 'that every observation is already a theory' (Goethe 1996), but he was not able to give positive expression to this insight in his conception of the *Urphänomen*; he still saw the



*Urphänomen* as something given to experience independent of human activity. Hegel provided the solution to this dilemma. The *Gestalt* can be grasped as a concept only insofar as the *Urphänomen* is grasped as a concept.

Hegel demonstrated that an entire science may be generated out of the abstract concept of its subject matter, but it should be clear that Goethe's general idea of the *Urphänomen* is insufficient for this task. The unit of a *Gestalt des Bewußteins* is a concept, and only when the *Urphänomen* is rendered as a concept, may Goethe's original intention be realised. The entire *Gestalt des Bewußteins* is reflected in its every concept, and may be generated out of the concept which is its *Urphänomen*. This is true of any *Gestalt*, whether we take that *Gestalt* to be an entire social formation, a science or a finite project.

Clark Butler put it this way in his commentary on the letter quoted above:

“Goethe's *Urphänomen* became for Hegel sensory actualizations – or at least analogues – of the abstract schemata of his *Logic*. And Goethean ‘natural science’ is thus transformed into Hegelian ‘natural philosophy’. Hegel is aware that the shadowy world of pure imageless thought in the *Logic*, which grounds Goethean natural science just as Goethean science in turn lends tangibility to the same logical abstractions, is considered inaccessible by Goethe. But he requests the poet's indulgence for philosophy” (1984: 693).

Although Butler accurately perceived the relationship, he rated Goethean science as worthless and sees only a “shadowy world of pure imageless thought” in the *Logic*. In fact, Goethe's conception of science deserves to be taken seriously. Two hundred years ago, before the key breakthroughs in any of the biosciences, he was not able to fully work out his idea. But Hegel did see how to give the *Urphänomen* real substance, how a concept understood as the unity of individual, particular and universal moments as outlined in the *Logic*, has the internal resources to found a science. Goethe knew that he could not withstand the tide of Newtonian science in the nineteenth century, that the abstract-empirical modes of natural-scientific enquiry would swamp all opposition, and that science and human society itself would be fragmented into mutually unintelligible silos. On the other hand, the significance of Hegel's *Logic* for science has been lost.

Taken together, what Goethe and Hegel have to say for science is this: in order to conceptualise a complex phenomenon as a *Gestalt*, it is necessary to form a concept of its simplest *archetypal* phenomenon; this archetype is not to be a principle or force or structure which is in principle outside of and beyond experience, but on the contrary, is in principle given in experience. The semantic content of this archetypal phenomenon is drawn from an underlying level of reality, and exhibits all the properties of the complex whole, while being simple and indivisible. This is the *Urphänomen*, and provided we can form a *true concept* of the *Urphänomen* it is the proper starting point and foundation for a science adequate to our times.

So the proposal of this paper is that Goethe's approach to science should be reinstated on the understanding that a complex process can be understood as a *Gestalt* only on the foundation of a concept of the simplest unit of its subject matter. The first task of any science then, as Goethe insisted, to enter into the subject matter and identify this unit, this *Urphänomen* or *Begriff*.

6,140 words

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