HEGEL AND CREATIVITY

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HEGEL AND CREATIVITY

What I hope to do in this paper is to sort out three basic senses of the word 'creativity' in order to make clear why creativity is not a basic category in Hegel's philosophy. When it is read as a systematic philosophy, Hegel's philosophy runs counter to nearly every current usage of the word 'creativity,' whether it be theological, common sensical, artistic or scientifically empirical. Which is not to say that creativity has no place in his philosophy. But, whereas Jewish and Christian theology, modern art, modern common sense and empirical science take creativity to be of *fundamental* significance, Hegel—as Professor Schmitz's paper shows—"weakens" the theological, epistemological and aesthetic doctrines of creativity to an argument concerning the necessity of contingency presented in his *Science of Logic*.

To the end of weaving a contextual web in which Hegel's elimination of creativity (as a fundamental category) might become intelligible, I shall proceed in three stages. First I shall outline the three Ideas of Cosmogony within which the idea of creation itself becomes intelligible. These are the ideas of (1) Generation, (2) Production and (3) Creation per se, i.e., Creation *ex nihilo*. They correlate with the orientations of Myth, Metaphysics and Dogmatic Faith, respectively. Secondly I shall try to trace the origins of the Christian doctrine of Creation *ex nihilo*, and show how that doctrine once sedimented to the level of common sense, provides the clue to what Professor Quine has called "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." Thirdly, I shall try to indicate why Hegel's most fundamental argument, his logical theory of *categoreal* genesis, can only be understood when we have grasped the dogmatic character of Myth, Metaphysics and Christian Faith, on the one hand, and the dogmatic character of scientific empiricism on the other. True to the cliché about Hegelian circularity, my remarks will begin with the idea of generation, proceed through the ideas of production and creation and then return to generation: but not as a cosmogony (Hegel has none to tell). The distinctive feature of Hegel's thought, *categoreal genesis*, is, if you like, a-cosmic; it is also non-metaphysical and anti-epistemological. What is it then? In one word, it is "logical." It is the basic aim of all my remarks to throw some light on the project of Hegel's *Logic*, the theory of categoreal genesis.

I. Three Ideas of Cosmogony: Generation, Production and Creation (Myth, Metaphysics and Dogmatic Faith).

By "generation" I mean the essentially pagan myth of "creation" (in a non-Hegelian "weak" sense) that has a paradigm in the relation of paternity, the relation of father to child. The critical feature of this mode of cosmogonic thinking is not sexual reproduction, however. It is that the source of the generation, e.g., the father, is "of the same nature"[1] as the generated, e.g. the child. We are most familiar with this myth from Hesiod's *Theogony* (esp. 116–210) but the same mythic structure is exhibited in the oral and written tradition of countless peoples. For example, the Boshongo, a Central Bantu tribe of the Lunda Cluster, tell that the god Bumba generated the sun, the world, the moon and the stars by retching them up while in a state of great pain. Among the most charming of these generative cosmogonies is the story (gathered together with other myths at the beginning of the eighth

[1] I take this expression, and much else as well, from M.B. Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (I.)," *Mind*, 1935, p. 444.

century A.D.) of two Japanese creator-deities, Izanagi, the Male-Who-Invites, and his sister, Izanami, the Female-Who-Invites. Here is how they created the islands of Japan and a number of other deities such as fire.

> The two Deities having descended on Ono-goro-jima erected there an eight fathom house with an august central pillar. Then Izanagi addressed Izanami, saying: 'How is thy body formed?' Izanami replied, 'My body is completely formed except one part which is incomplete.' Then Izanagi said, 'My body is completely formed and there is one part which is superfluous. Suppose that we supplement that which is incomplete in thee with that which is superfluous in me, and thereby procreate lands!' Izanami replied, 'It is well.' Then Izanagi said, 'Let me and thee go round the heavenly august pillar, and having met at the other side, let us become united in wedlock.' This being agreed to, he said, 'Do thou go round from the left, and I will go round from the right.' When they had gone round, Izanami spoke and exclaimed, 'How delightful! I have met a lovely youth.' Izanagi then said, 'How delightful! I have met a lovely maiden.' Afterwards he said, 'It was unlucky for the woman to speak first.' (Nihongi, translated by W.G. Aston, London, 1924, p. 13).

Let us proceed immediately to consider illustrative passages for the other two cosmogonies I have mentioned. I believe that they too will speak more directly than any gloss I might attempt.

The second cosmogony I have called 'Production.' It might equally have been called 'manufacture' or 'technology,' if we were prepared to focus steadily on the Latin and Greek roots of which they are composed (the fate of many philosophical neologisms suggests that this is rarely possible). The emergence of this productive cosmogony marked, I believe, a revolution in how we think about the world. Its chief spokesman was Plato. Listen to what he has Timaeus say about the world-producing Demiurgos:

> The maker and father[2] of this universe it is a hard task to find, and having found him it would be impossible to declare him to all mankind. Be that as it may, we must go back to this question about the world: After which of the two models did its BUILDER frame it—after that which is always in the same unchanging state, or after that which has come to be? Now if this world is good and its maker is good, clearly he looked to the eternal; on the contrary supposition (which cannot be spoken without blasphemy), to that which has come to be. Everyone, then, must see that he looked to the eternal; for the world is the best of things that have become, and he is the best of causes. Having come to be, then, in this way, the world has been FASHIONED on the model of that which is comprehensible by rational discourse and understanding and is always in the same state. (Plato, *Timaeus*, 28c–29a, translated by F.M. Cornford).

In ordinary English we spontaneously distinguish between "the labor of our body and the work of our hands." This contrast, as formulated by John Locke and developed by Hannah Arendt,[3] provides us with ready analogues for a comprehension of the procreational and technically productive cosmogonies. We immediately see that a productive craftsman shapes and fashions his artefact in accordance with an idea, an object of reason, and does not merely, like a parent, pass on to his

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2 Note that Plato, like the author of *Genesis*, occasionally slips back into the terminology of a more primitive cosmogony.

3 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, 1958, *passim*.

offspring a structure of which it is an embodiment. With this new orientation in thought about the world, the formal dimension came to be thinkable in its own right; thinking men were given a cosmogonic "model of that which is comprehensible by rational discourse"—in short, a *philosophical* cosmogony was born. The world came to be thought of as the product not merely of an act but of a rational act. Hence the great metaphysical distinction between form and matter in terms of which man could think the world as "the information of a pre-existent matter" or, equally, as "the embodiment of a pre-existent form."[4] Hence too the Western tradition of using technological models to render things intelligible, the tradition of metaphysical thinking and acting that Nietzsche and Heidegger attacked with such violence.

As revolutionary as this new tradition was, however, two further conceptual revolutions were to follow: the Christian and the Hegelian. First the Christian, which, especially since its release from a theological guise, has become a tradition which still tends to govern our modes of thought in philosophy, science and ordinary language (there is no Hegelian tradition). Its preeminent spokesman is, I believe, St. Thomas Aquinas.

> Now, the act of being is the first effect, and this is evident by reason of the universal presence of this act. It follows that the proper cause of the act of being is the first and universal agent, namely, God. Other agents, indeed, are not the cause of the act of being as such, but of being *this*—of being a man or being white, for example. On the contrary, the act of being, as such, is caused by creation, which presupposes nothing; because nothing can pre-exist that is outside being as such. By makings other than creation, *this* being or *such* being is produced; for out of pre-existent being is made this being or such a being. It remains that creation is the proper action of God. (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 21, 4, translation by James F. Anderson).

If the shift from pagan cosmogonies of generation to the philosophical cosmogony of production constituted a revolution in the way we think, the millenia of Jewish and Christian meditation which St. Thomas here epitomizes constitutes a revolution of no smaller magnitude. But because we, as worldly philosophers of the twentieth century, tend to be less acquainted with the significance of the creationist turn than we are with the demiurgic turn, I will devote the whole of my next section to it. Or, to paraphrase, creativity is well known and familiar; but precisely because it is so well known it tends to remain unknown (PhG, p. 28).

II. The Origin Creation and Two Dogmas of Empiricism.

In this section I would like to pose two questions. They took shape in my mind many years ago, thanks to the great catholic scholar Etienne Gilson and the troubled protestant genius, Michael Foster.[5]

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4 M.B. Foster, *ibid.*, p. 446.

5 E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Gifford Lectures, 1931–32) and M.B. Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science," *Mind*, 1934, pp. 446–68.

(1) Is the idea of creation intelligible?
(2) How did philosophers and natural scientists come to believe in the idea of empirical evidence?

The first question I derived from Gilson, the second from Foster. They both give the same answer to their respective questions: divine revelation. I shall return to Foster's question later. Gilson argues that the idea of creation was not invented by man or discovered through a consideration of things. It was revealed by God and we can, he insists, see that it must have been revealed by God. For it is, he maintains, a case of an idea, "in itself rational," which "escapes the grasp of reason because it lacks the aid of revelation."[6] The more I thought about this the more I was struck by it. For in the case of the two earlier cosmogonies, the generative and the productive, we do—as I have pointed out—have ready analogies to render them intelligible: bodily functions such as vomiting or sexual reproduction in the case of generation and craftsmanlike activities like pottering and cobbling in the case of production. We seem well provided with adequate clues to the "creative" acts of the pagan gods and the gods of the philosophers. Is there any parallel clue to the creative will of the God of Abraham and Moses and Isaac? Or is it, finally, a mystery? Some years later, while considering Bruno Snell's *The Discovery of the Mind*,[7] I was struck by the idea that the Greeks had no word for *will* and that they apparently also lacked the concept of this notion, to us so familiar that we must take special pains not to read it into Plato and Aristotle.[8] Did the notion of the will, which Kant even took to be the starting point of an analytic (i.e., non-synthetic) argument,[9] itself derive from divine revelation? The hypothesis seemed too large, too mystical.

I cannot claim to have solved this problem; nor am I aware of any solution adequate to the historical and philological, as well as the philosophical, complexities which it poses. One analogue, parallel to the sexual and technical models for generation and production, has nevertheless suggested itself: the speech-act. (Hegel's remarks, e.g. on Philo, are helpful. See WW 19, p. 24.) Here we have another notion that was not conceptually isolated by the classical Greek philosophers.[10] For example, in the passage I cited from the *Timaeus*, the divine craftsman was said to fashion "on the model of that which is comprehensible by rational discourse." The word translated here as "rational discourse," i.e., λόγος, was indifferent to the distinction between thought and speech. One critical factor that separates St. Thomas' meditations on creation, on the one hand, and classical Greek philosophy, on the other, is the linguistic theory of the Stoics. Unfortunately, the texts in question are fragmentary and the

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6 Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 446 n. 6.

7 B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, Cambridge, 1953, esp. p. 182. Professor Snell, in his acceptance speech as the first winner of the Hegel-Preis (a speech unaccountably missing from the proceedings of the Stuttgarter Hegel-Tage 1970), acknowledged that his insight was occasioned by reading Hegel on the Greeks. He spelled this out further in a subsequent personal conversation that was brief and to the point.

8 Years of probing colleagues and books have produced no disconfirmation of Snell and Hegel on the Greeks' lack of the concept of will.

9 See Kant, *Grundlegung*, ch. I.

10 For possible exceptions see Max Heinze, *Die Lehre vom Logos*, 1872 and, e.g., Plato, *Sophist*, 263, Aristotle, *An. Post.* 76b24.

evidence is scattered. As reconstructed by Max Pohlenz, however, a plausible story may be told.[11] The major document we have for this story is Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* (VIII, 275).

With barely concealed contempt, Sextus tells of how the Stoics, to whom he refers as "the Dogmatists," attempted to confront the skeptical challenge of the late Academy to produce what we might call "a distinctively human semiotic." As unimpressed by the Stoic argument as Nelson Goodman by Chomsky's, Sextus nevertheless does allow us to catch a few critical phrases from the generative grammarians on the Stoa.

> But the Dogmatists remain muzzled as regards each of these objections, and by way of establishing the opposite they assert that Man does not differ in respect of uttered reason (προφορικῷ λόγῳ) from the irrational animals (for crows and parrots and jays utter articulate sounds), but in respect of internal reason (ἐνδιαθέτῳ).

Sextus, taking his turn against Stoic linguistics, says, a few pages later (287):

> Besides, there is a plausible argument to show that the irrational animals are not unwise. For if they possess "uttered reason" (προφορικὸς λόγος), they must necessarily possess also "internal reason" (ἐνδιάθετον); for apart from this latter the uttered reason (ὁ προφορικός) is non-existent.

As we can readily see from his objection, Sextus' mind was thoroughly shaped by the technical model of Greek metaphysics, the model of explanation by type/token relations. But perhaps Sextus also enables us to consider how another mode of genetic explanation came to take shape. In any case we know that, in addition to Philo, many of the early church fathers were tempted by the (gnostic) idea of using a "speech-act theory" to make plausible what many educated contemporaries took to be an offense against reason: the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. We also know that this theory was explicitly rejected in 351 A.D. at the Council of Sirmium and given a thorough critique in St. Augustine's *De Trinitate* (see esp. XV). But perhaps the Stoic theory of the "speech act," whereby an infinite range of phenomenal sentences (the λόγος προφορικός) are creatively generated through an internal reason (the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), was more than a device for making the doctrine of creation plausible. We know that there is no creationalist metaphysics in the Bible itself, that it came to the status of doctrine only in the late Hellenistic period. Perhaps the *theory* of divine creation, which is, to be sure, implicit in a monotheistic religion, was actually invented, as a doctrinal theory, thanks to Stoic linguistics. Perhaps the Stoic bifurcation of the *logos* enabled the early Christians to articulate a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* because speech had been, from the outset, the implicit paradigm and human analogue for God the creator, just as sexual reproduction was the analogue for God the progenitor and technical production was the analogue for God as Demiurge. Perhaps the linguistic theory which Sextus rejected in the name of (implicitly technological and metaphysical) reason and which the early Christian Church rejected in the name of faith and divine revelation was unacceptable to a skeptical Greek as well as a believing Christian precisely because it constituted a mediating link between them. (A possible comparison to my hypothesis might be found in Levi-Strauss' theory of the incest taboo as the mediating link between nature and culture. See his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.) But whatever answer

[11] See Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa*, Göttingen, 1959.

Hellenistic scholars (of which I am not one) may find to the question I have extracted from Gilson, the rational (non-mystical) answer suggested by my historical reflections on Stoic linguistics might at least count as "a likely story."

If the origin of the idea of creation is shrouded in fideistic dogma and fragmentary evidence, the aftermath of this idea is no less difficult to grasp. Here the problem is that we know too much—or rather, that what we know is too well known, and thus perhaps unknown.

More forcefully than anyone else I have read, Michael Foster makes us think about the *radical novelty* of our modern notion of empirical evidence. Just as Bruno Snell points out the absence of any notion of will among the Greeks, Foster shows that their conception of demonstrative argument allowed only an *illustrative* significance for sensuous intuition (not for intuition per se but, I repeat, for *sensuous* intuition). Today we tend to accord it the significance of *evidence*. Indeed, modern empiricism has come round to the view that sensible evidence is the only kind with any claim to legitimacy. This is the dogma that Professor Quine has called "*reductionism*: the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience."[12] When combined with the dogmatic dichotomy of all truth into analytic and synthetic propositions, and when all analytic propositions are held to be tautologies, we see that modern empiricism has totalized, far more than any medieval theologian, an embrace of dogmatic irrationalism that a classical Greek philosopher would have found much more repugnant than Philo's or St. Thomas' ideas concerning God the creator.

Of course modern empiricism does not present itself as dogmatic. Instead the emphasis is laid upon resigning the conceits of reason. We are told, as we have been told for centuries now, that there is no getting beyond sensible appearance, alas. But this apparent modesty is only one side of the coin, albeit the side that is usually up. The other side is a "positive philosophical position," namely, "that the sensible is more than merely appearance," more than merely "a defect of knowing."[13]

How did this reversal come about? All philosophers distinguish between *illustration* and *evidence*. How did it happen that what the Greeks regarded as illustration, modern empiricists regard as evidence and that what Plato, for example, regarded as evidence—"that which is comprehensible by rational discourse"[14]—empiricism now regards as "a logical construct" to *illustrate* the "real" evidence (which Plato surely would have found a "blasphemy").

Five years before Ayer's celebration of empirical evidence in *Language, Truth and Logic*, Foster wrote that "these assertions [of empiricism] are not themselves the data of any sense" (it is now an open secret that the verification principle of logical empiricism is metaphysical in the sense spelled out by Foster), they are rather

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12 W.v.O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, 1961, p. 20.
13 See M.B. Foster, "The Opposition Between Hegel and the Philosophy of Empiricism," p. 81.
14 Plato, *Timaeus*, 29a.

> deliverances of that 'common sense' to which every modern Empiricist has been forced in the long run to appeal. It is this which at once justified the Empirical denials, and makes Empiricism more than mere denial.

And Foster continues:

> This positive element, by which modern differs from ancient empiricism, is derived from that revelation which had revolutionized the world in the interval between the ancient and the modern eras, the source of almost all that we regard as specifically 'modern': the Christian religion.[15]

To be appealing, dogmas are often common sensical. And "common sense" is nearly always a horizon of experience become second nature, imbued with centuries of tradition. In the case of the two dogmas of empiricism, this tradition stretches over "fifteen centuries of Christian teaching."[16]

To make plausible how the Christian idea of creation might have played such a momentous role in grounding the dogma of empiricism, let us consider for a moment two dogmas of rationalism (I shall assume here that Greek philosophy, for all its variety, was identical with rationalism). The first dogma was that only *form* is intelligible (whether the form was conceived as immanent or transcendent is indifferent to the point at issue). The second dogma was that the act of demonstratively knowing the intelligible form is an act that excludes any element of sensation. In other words, sense has no significance as evidence; it is but illustrative.

With Michael Foster, we can reconstruct the critical point of inversion, the point of transition from dogmatic rationalism to dogmatic empiricism, by reference to the transition from a cosmogony of production to a cosmogony of creation:

> The two characteristics which differentiate the activity of a Demiurge from that of a Creator are (1) that it is purposive; (2) that it is informative; i.e. (1) that it is determined by an end conceived antecedently to the execution; (2) that it extends only to the formation of a given matter not to the making of matter *ex nihilo*.
>
> The two principles of Rationalism follow inevitably from these differentiae. (1) *Because* the essence was conceived by the Demiurge antecedently to its embodiment it can be object of science in distinction from its embodiment; while the matter, not being derived from any activity of the Demiurge cannot be the object of any knowledge at all. (2) As form alone is knowable, reason alone can be knowledge; and sense, the counterpart in the subject of matter in the object, must constitute a defect of knowledge, as embodiment constitutes a defect of knowability.
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> But as soon as the sensible world is conceived, not as the appearance of an intelligible being but as the product of a creative act, both of these consequences are necessarily called into question.
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> The act of creation extends to the matter; matter is therefore knowable and sensation a way of knowing. The ground of this matter, that which confers existence upon it, is not a form

[15] M.B. Foster, *ibid.*

[16] M.B. Foster, *ibid.*, p. 84.

(which can be conceived antecedently to its execution). Therefore there can be no knowledge of this matter a priori, or by reason from which sensation is excluded.

Created matter, in a word, becomes knowable but remains contingent.[17]

Thus Foster on the origin of Quine's "Two Dogmas." I know of no more elegant argument. It is, of course, essentially a radicalization of Gilson's thesis, just as my argument is a radicalization of Foster's. Both Gilson and Foster accept the doctrine of creation in what they take to be its original form—divine revelation.

III. Hegel's Non-Metaphysical Theory of Categoreal Genesis.

It is a characteristic feature of Western metaphysics to seek a correlation of mind and world. It is our philosophical "second nature" to be preoccupied by this problem. Or, as Hegel put it in the opening line of his *Phenomenology*: "It is a natural idea that, in philosophy, actual knowing must be preceded by an understanding of cognition. . . ." The simplest way of reaching a preliminary understanding of cognition is to assert that mind and world are related immediately, that immediacy is the hallmark of truth. That is the first stand taken by the form of mind (consciousness) investigated in the *Phenomenology*. As a relation, however, immediacy is something more than immediate. Hence the dialectical character of simple consciousness as the ultimate framework of truth.

Hegel's *Phenomenology* presents a recursive analysis of consciousness as the conceptual framework of philosophical truth. It begins with "Sense Certainty," a philosophical position that came to widespread prominence only in the 20th century, and proceeds by allowing consciousness to discover its roots. Its first major discovery is that it is "in the world." (PhG VI) Its penultimate discovery (PhG VII) is that its conception of the world derives from the three cosmogonies we reviewed in the first part of this paper. In other words, conscious *mind*, engaged in self-critical "rational discourse," discovers that its relation to the *world* of truth is essentially mediated by its conception of *God* as progenitor, as artificer and, finally, as creator.

Having uncovered all this, mind is made ready to comprehend that everything in its universe, including, most importantly, the structure of consciousness itself, is contingent; it discovers that there is no Archimedean point from which it might get at the truth. This, I believe, is the truth of "Absolute Knowing" (PhG VIII), the shape of knowing which is known to be the basis of all those shapes which have gone before and which is now, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, known to be nothing. Thus the correlation of "pure knowing," the result of the *Phenomenology*, a knowing that is no knowing at all, and "pure being," the beginning of the *Logic*, a category indistinguishable from nothingness.

In its Thomistic formulation, the Christian cosmogony also begins with what appears to be "pure being." But God the creator is not to be identified with the category of being in Hegel's sense of the word. For God the creator is, like god the progenitor and god the artificer, still conceived as an agent, as an active self, as a positer. In other words, it still involves an element of self and reflection. The point of Hegel's theory of categoreal genesis, on the other hand, is that we must begin by prescinding from all manner of reflection. His profoundest thought is that logic cannot begin with

[17] M.B. Foster, *ibid.*, pp. 86–7.

any determinate idea. Knowing this to be an unprecedented mode of thought and knowing that the perennial task of philosophy—rational discourse—could only be realized by liberating philosophical consciousness from itself, Hegel wrote his first book, the *Phenomenology*, his introduction to the theory of categoreal genesis.

Categoreal genesis is no cosmogony. It does not pertain to the world. It is, in fact, a-cosmic. Neither does it pertain to the other two members of the Western metaphysical trinity: mind and God. It is simply the consideration of the elementary categories of thought, articulated, as they must be, without any constituting reference to a determinate thinker or a determinate object of thought. It proceeds through a consideration of determinacy as such, starting with determinacy as determinate in virtue of its contrastive relation to another determinacy (the *Seinslogik*), continuing with determinacy as determinate because determined (not by any agent, human or divine, but simply *as determined*, the subject matter of the *Wesenslogik*) and concluding with determinacy as determinate because it is an individual (not an individual thing or self, but simply a determinate individual, the subject matter of the *Begriffslogik*).[18]

Obviously I cannot spell all of this out on this occasion—you might well have doubt that I could, had we world enough and time. But I hope I have said enough to indicate why I regard the topic "Hegel and Creativity" to be of central importance for our comprehension of rational discourse today. The Christian idea of creation and its Greek sister idea of *techne* have guided our thought for centuries. They continue to guide our thought and action today. They are not guides to be despised. They have done a great deal to make us and our world what we are and what it is. To say that they are, at bottom, dogmas—and progenitors of scientific dogmas—is not to despise them. But it is the task of philosophy to comprehend—and we are quickened by the thought that the core of our thought is not an enigma. Taken by itself, creativity is an enigma.

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[18] It will be noted that I have said nothing about the specific arguments in Hegel's logical theory of categoreal genesis and that I have also said nothing about the transition from Hegel's logic to his philosophy of nature. These arguments are anything but transparent and do require commentary. Unfortunately, most existing commentaries tend to read these arguments as if they were a secularization of an essentially Christian mode of thought (e.g., Löwith) or a recursion to Greek metaphysical doctrines (this latter is, e.g., Foster's view). I hope that the present paper has at least indicated why these interpretative tendencies are questionable. Perhaps it would be too much to hope that I have also shown a way toward an "immanent reading" of Hegel's two major books: the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*. In any case, that is what I have been attempting to do in my various writings on Hegel over the past few years.