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No Evaluative Authority Is beyond Evaluation: Common Ground between Hegel and Wittgenstein

Abstract Correlations between Hegel and Wittgenstein are not easily established. This chapter starts with an attempt to define some common ground. Both Hegel and Wittgenstein often approach philosophical problems not head on, but by discussing (and criticising) established cognitive attitudes. I take their responses to the popular understanding of measurement as a case in point. Hegel's treatment of "a measure" is shown to deviate from an ordinary understanding of the term insofar as it provides a criterion which is itself sensitive to the object of measurement. A similar point can be observed in Wittgenstein's work: for example, his memorable remark that one might use a table in order to check the measuring rod rather than the other way around. Triangulating Hegel and Wittgenstein vis-à-vis a non-partisan account of measurement reveals an interesting common concern, namely a shared alertness to a concealed side of standards. It is against this background affinity that some of the differences between them appear in sharper contrast.

Question: "Why does Henry call his mother long-distance?" Answer: "Because that is her name." This joke draws on the occasionally surprising ambivalence of words or phrases. Relating philosophical issues by means of decontextualised terms ("Freedom", "Logic", "Hegel", "Wittgenstein", etc.) is at times prone to similar equivocations. An initial concern when discussing Hegel and Wittgenstein is, therefore, to provide a framework which ensures a basic methodological and semantic similarity between these philosophers. Once such a framework is in place, the next step is to delineate their contributions to a given subject matter and, subsequently, to relate them to each other in terms of the common matrix introduced in the first step. Intersections and discrepancies can then be identified determined within this common frame of reference.

Triangulation

In view of the pervasive stylistic and systematic differences between them, a comparison of Hegel and Wittgenstein seems to lack a sound methodological

basis. One, admittedly highly abstract point should be noted all the same. Philosophy, for Hegel and the early Wittgenstein, is systematically closed. The concluding vista of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is clear on this. "Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit" (PS 1977: §808) has been established as "the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne" (ibid.). The boat is full, to put it disrespectfully.¹ This sounds somewhat like Wittgenstein's apodictic pronouncement: "the truth of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems." (TLP: p.4) One could, in a Hegelian vein, regard this claim as a comprehensive mediation between open questions and their appropriate solutions.

There is little overlap between the matters explicitly discussed by Hegel and Wittgenstein, and even less common ground between their methodological approaches, but one structural similarity can be observed: they do not address items from the philosophical canon in a piecemeal way. Their strategy is, rather, to draw up a holistic panorama of interlocking arguments. Both construe their stage in a *confrontation between forms of knowledge*. The point of Hegel's PS is to incrementally trace increasingly sophisticated stages in the development of "how knowledge makes its appearance" (*des erscheinenden Wissens*) (PS 1977: §76). This procedure takes its cue from the Socratic *elenchos* (GP I: pp.456 ff.), presupposing that the philosopher's interlocutors will find their way to truth on their own, with minimal outside prompting. "Since our object is phenomenal knowledge, its determinations too will at first be taken directly as they present themselves" (PS 1977: §82) and, as we will discuss in a later section, a philosopher's task is to "simply look on" as this presentation unfolds (cf. PS 1977: §85). The later Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy is, on the face of it, reminiscent of Hegel's (supposed) theoretical non-invasiveness.

The initial setting of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* places a philosopher vis-à-vis another philosopher's view of an *everyday* phenomenon. Wittgenstein considers Augustine's understanding of a child's initial acquisition of language. His criticism of Augustine's view is in accordance with Hegel's guidelines. He points out that Augustine does not "simply look on" and implies that philosophy should refrain from narrowing down the multiplicity of the phenomenal world. "Augustine does not mention any difference between kinds of word."

¹ However, a note of discord occurs in this synthesis, namely Hegel's mention of "the Calvary of absolute Spirit" (*Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes*), referring to the cemetery of its previous manifestations, albeit merely recollected (*erinnert*). There is, one could argue, a certain awareness that philosophy's triumphant apex comes at a price: the utter appropriation of its entire history.

(PI 2009: §1) Later in the PI, Wittgenstein remarks that the person who finds the phenomenon of a proposition “very remarkable” “is unable simply to look and see how propositions work” (PI 2009: §93). This is an intriguing correspondence which, I submit, can reveal a significant similarity between Hegel’s and Wittgenstein’s approaches towards philosophy. The insights they strive for must, according to Hegel, be gleaned from “how knowledge makes its appearance” (PS 1977: §76). Employing a Hegelian twist, one could describe the later Wittgenstein’s recourse to ordinary language as philosophical attentiveness to forms of knowledge uncoerced by a (Kantian) critical apparatus of methodological asceticism.

Within this general outline, the present chapter will focus on the topic of *measurement standards*, which can be discussed in isolation from the rest of the respective systems with relative ease but nonetheless proves to be of considerable theoretical weight. Two kinds of pertinent discussions can be found in Hegel and Wittgenstein: logico-semantic remarks on the one hand and observations of a more general, pragmatic nature on the other. The claim that I am defending here is that both philosophers share a characteristic concern with the analysis of measures. It might be labelled “alertness to a concealed side of standards”. *Prima facie*, a benchmark or rule prescribes a certain matrix applied to a medium or recipient. This is how the phenomenon initially presents itself. Hegel and Wittgenstein, in spite of their “phenomenological” pronouncements, both find this account incomplete and undertake a more thoroughgoing investigation into the character of measurement processes, and both arrive at insights that are seemingly counterintuitive from the point of view of “what is ordinarily understood by experience” (PS 1977: §87). They concur in demonstrating that the prescriptive outward appearance of standards conceals important features of their operation.

Flexible criteria

Hegel’s systematic account of measurement standards can be found in section 3 of his *Science of Logic*, vol. I: *The Objective Logic*.² His remarks are embedded within a dialectical argument that makes use of concepts introduced earlier in the work: Being, Something, Quantity, Quality. Hegel’s extraordinarily dense argument has been carefully reconstructed by Stephen Houlgate³ and will not be

² SL 2010: pp.282ff. For general introductions to Hegel’s arguments see Tabak (2017), Rosen (2014), Burbidge (2006), Hibben (2012), Harris (1983).

³ Houlgate (2014). See also Arndt and Kruck (2016), Kruck (2014), Stekeler-Weithofer (2002).

repeated here. I will just give an outline of the main ideas. The tone is set by a motto: “Whatever is, has a measure.” (SL 2010: p.288) Rather than starting with observations about the common use of measuring devices, Hegel flatly affirms this time-honoured ethico-metaphysical principle.⁴ His claim is not that everything can be subjected to a metric procedure, but rather that exhibiting a specific balance between a qualitative core and quantitative parameters belongs to the essence of an entity. One of his examples is the proportions of the human body. Something can, presumably, not *be* a human body unless it conforms to a set of quantitatively defined ratios (SL 2010: p.287). A straightforward illustration (not to be found in Hegel) would be the colour blue, which *has to have* a frequency range of 450–482 nm.

It is against this background that Hegel discusses the more pedestrian phenomenon of a ruler. Starting from a “measure”, which he defines as “the simple self-reference of quantum, its own determinateness in itself” (SL 2010: p.288), he proceeds to explore the application of this kind of self-sustained entity to another entity. “*First*, this measure is a rule, a measure external to the mere quantum.” (SL 2010: p.291) This “rule, or the standard” (ibid.) is used to determine a certain quantity (manifestly exhibited by the measure) of a “mere quantum”, i.e. to quantify some object of measurement according to the standard’s synthesis of quality and quantity (its measure).⁵ It is at this point that Hegel draws on common usage, namely the use of a measuring rod, which clearly offers “a specific quantity determining the external quantum” (ibid.). Measurement, in everyday use, is commonly conceived as the employment of some standardised device to quantify the amount of a measurement. According to Hegel this falls short of a philosopher’s requirements. “This comparison is an *external act*” (ibid.). There is no profound connection between systems of measurement units and ontological specifications of something captured by quantitative measurement.

The crucial expression is “external”. I have indicated that “the measure” everything has is not an accidental feature. Hegel elaborates on his motto: “Every existence has a magnitude, and this magnitude belongs to the very nature of a something.” (SL 2010: p.288) External measurements do not suffice to fulfil this ambitious dictum, so Hegel triggers one of his usual tripartite dialectical arguments to demonstrate the *internal* relationship between a standard and the “quantum” it is applied to. The details are convoluted, but the general idea

⁴ Cf. Tengelyi (2003), Marx (1983).

⁵ The German original has “Maßstab” (W 5: p.399) for “standard”, a term associated with measurement by scale, reminiscent of a prominent Latin meaning of *regula*, in the sense of “linear ruler”.

can be illustrated by an example offered by Hegel himself, namely the impact of environmental change upon an object.

Inasmuch as a something has an internal measure, an alteration of the magnitude of its quality comes to it from outside, and the something does not take on the arithmetical aggregate of the alteration. Its measure reacts against it, behaves towards the aggregate as an intensive measure and assimilates it in a way typically its own; it alters the externally imposed alteration, makes something else out of this quantum and demonstrates through this specifying function that in this externality it is for-itself. (SL 2010: p.292)

In plain English: an object's inherent temperature does not generally correspond to its ambient temperature due to its specific material composition. This is, of course, the parlance of contemporary popular science, whereas Hegel uses the scenario to conjure up an anthropomorphic drama, pitting an inanimate entity against extraneous alterations ("does not take", "assimilate", "demonstrate").⁶ The idiom of reflexivity, omnipresent in Hegel's *Logic*, is introduced to enrich the discussion of standards. Subjecting an object to measurement establishes a conceptual interdependency. Hegel's attempts to flesh this out in speculative dialectics is a testament to the proficiency of German idealism, but probably not the best starting point to show its lasting importance. Taking a look at the introduction to his PS is a better choice in this respect.

The passages quoted from the SL show Hegel reconstructing developing the conceptual minutiae of the measuring process. The introduction to the PS offers a broad outline of the general impact of his intuition.⁷ Within the framework of one form of knowledge (philosophy) exploring another ("ordinary" knowledge), the issue of appropriate judgements arises. How do we (the interrogating party to this arrangement) *know* what to make of self-proclaimed "common knowledge"? We seem to need a standard to ascertain its validity. But, Hegel argues, this is to disregard a basic feature of philosophers' involvement in forms of knowledge. Their "discoveries" must not surprise them, since their engagement in ordinary forms of *knowledge* is, in principle, matched to their own understanding. There cannot occur an elemental cognitive disconnect within this correlation, because that would amount to an incommensurability between the inquiring and the revealing party. In other words, since both sides share consciousness, their forms of knowledge are a common disposition that does not need outside scrutiny.

⁶ But notice that locutions like "its own measure" might be inconspicuous in contexts that do not also stipulate that such objects are "for-itself".

⁷ For an overall discussion of the PS, see Siep (2014).

Philosophy cannot, in an attempt to start from an entirely clean slate, bracket its cognitive capacity in order to be properly receptive to cognitive capacities as they emerge. The formal structure of this reflexive move is validated by inter-conscious exchange. “The essence or criterion” (PS 1977: §83) determining Consciousness⁸ can therefore not lie solely within the investigative part.

Consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself; for the distinction made above falls within it. [...] Consequently, we do not need to import criteria, or to make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry. (PS 1977: §84)

The right way to think of a standard, according to this passage, is to regard it as an interactive measure which adapts to its target object. This adaptation is, as Hegel points out, nothing other than *experience* (cf. PS 1977: §86), inasmuch as it amounts to an auto-correction of preconceptions in the light of information made accessible by these very preconceptions.⁹ This view of standards runs counter to objectivism conceived as rigid determination of some matter of interest, according to an external scale or matrix. Such an account, Hegel maintains, fails to capture the deep grammar of standards.

Intentional directedness

The early Wittgenstein’s ontological imagery makes prominent use of terms drawn from measurement practices. “A proposition is a standard to which facts behave.” (NB: p.95) “Proposition and situation are related to one another like a yardstick and the length to be measured.” (NB: p.32) On a superficial reading this could be taken as an external relation, like garments that are related to a clothed body without determining its natural shape. But Wittgenstein’s metaphor is more sophisticated. Proceeding from a basic stipulation—“We picture facts to ourselves.” (TLP: 2.1)—he regards pictures as models of reality (TLP: 2.12) insofar as their internal structure enables them to represent its ontological composition. This isomorphism has been widely noted (though see Proops 2000), yet its use within the TLP’s picture theory depends on a crucial, less prominent, feature: the role played by measurement. Notice that a picture may *fail to represent anything* and that isomorphism does not account for this eventuality. It is introduced as correspondence between two predefined domains of

⁸ I use a capital “C” throughout to refer to Hegel’s specific notion of consciousness.

⁹ On the notion of experience in the PS cf. Emundts (2012), Stern (2002), Imhoff (1973).

discourse. (The photocopy of one page does not represent another such copy.) What's missing for Wittgenstein's purposes is the role of a standard imposing its normative claim onto its relatum. "That is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it. It is laid against reality like a measure." (TLP: 2.1511f) The implication is that reality either does or does not *conform* to this standard. Measurement introduces logical truth and falsity into Wittgenstein's picture theory.

There is a cognitive tension between the use of the picture and measure metaphors here. While pictures do not have to conform to real life, a measure does not tell us anything about the specific composition of its target object. Wittgenstein tries to bridge the gap by introducing an additional metaphor. The "end points of the graduating lines" of a measure "*touch* the object that is to be measured" (TLP: 2.15121). This touching is, however, an external contact. It cannot *represent* a state of affairs, so Wittgenstein supplements his metaphor with an extra feature: "These correlations are, as it were, the feelers of the picture's elements, with which the picture touches reality." (TLP: 2.1515) The pictorial relationship thus conceived is a hybrid between corresponding structures and the application of standards.¹⁰ It fulfils the double function of subjecting sentences to judgments (in propositional logic) *and* endowing them with an internal structure (in predicate logic). Wittgenstein does not accord equal status to these components, though. The term "*Maßstab*" occurs but once in the TLP, whereas the pictorial relationship is extensively discussed. "A picture can depict any reality whose form it has." (TLP: 2.171) This explanation suggests that the representational capacity of pictures is entirely a matter of form. The complementary requirement is much less conspicuous:

A picture represents its subject from a position outside it. (Its standpoint is its representational form.) That is why a picture *represents its subject correctly or incorrectly*. (TLP: 2.173; emphasis mine)

Correctness is not simply a matter of pictorial form, which can only show *possible* configurations of objects (TLP: 2.151). In spite of being indispensable, the role of standards is only hinted at in Wittgenstein's book.

Wittgenstein's dictum, quoted above, has a distinctive syntactical feature. "We picture facts to ourselves." (TLP: 2.1; emphasis mine) The active role of an epistemological subject is not usually highlighted in the TLP, which largely presents his picture theory as an apersonal affair between sentences and situations.

¹⁰ For Tractarian semantics, see Morris (2008), Frascaola (2007), Friedlander (2001), Carruthers (1989).

It is, however, obvious that a measuring rod, insofar as it serves to ensure the correctness of a picture, is not just another machine-like tool. A standard is *applied* by a cognisant being in order to achieve conformity with certain aims, an issue that exceeds the scope of the TLP. Wittgenstein takes up this point in a 1930 manuscript. His slightly awkward metaphor of correlation as “feelers of the picture’s elements” (TLP: 2.1515) is replaced by an analysis of prospective rules guiding the employment of a *Maßstab*. “This is how this machine ought to work” (MS 109: p.263, translation mine¹¹) is a prescriptive expression *directed towards* a desired fit between a standard and a standardised process. The operative rules are no longer feelers but intentions. “The intention sets a standard which enables one to judge the fact.” (ibid.) Our picturing-of-facts is thus construed as a normative activity relating a *Maßstab* to a situation via intentions. “The intention is nothing but a yardstick applied by us to events and used by us to describe them.” (MS 109: p.268.) By introducing intentions into his account of our interactions with the world, Wittgenstein prepares the ground for one of the most consequential discussions to be found in his later work, namely his discussion of rule-following.

Pictures cannot automatically describe reality correctly. Introducing intentions to mediate the epistemological rapport adds a new twist to Wittgenstein’s account. The “feelers” have been replaced by a propositional attitude, i.e. a person’s conscious approach towards a state of affairs via some symbolic representation. This change of view raises a problem largely suppressed in the TLP. “Only the intentional picture reaches reality like a measure. Regarded from the outside it just stands there, dead and isolated.” (MS 114: p.207) Wittgenstein has hit here on the perennial difficulty of reconciling a material substratum and an operative meaning within a signifying practice. Remember that according to the TLP the end point of a measure touches the object to be measured (TLP: 2.15121). This literal sense of touching obviously does not aid our understanding of the intentional character of measurements. Intentions are supposed to somehow *reach* reality in their own right, so it is questionable how helpful bridging metaphors are here. The problem is, of course, that intentional meaning is to be distinguished from physical prompts (“dead and isolated”) while, at the same time, the tangible presence of material signifiers is presupposed. Such is the semiotic conundrum, which (we might say) is analogous to someone recognising an elephant on the basis of sense-data reports describing its trunk, legs and tail by three blind people.

11 All translations of quotations from Wittgenstein’s manuscripts are my own.

The phenomenon of a measure serves as a comparatively simple model for a discussion of rule-governed behaviour within the conceptual framework that I have outlined. A closer look at this topic is beyond the scope of the present chapter, which also has to omit a discussion of Wittgenstein's most famous measuring device, the Paris standard metre.¹² Given these restrictions, one basic feature of rule-following is, however, thrown into sharp relief. The purpose of a rule in ordinary use is closely related to the application of a measure. The rule is regarded as a particular, predetermined specification guiding a domain of human conduct, appropriately specified. The wording of a rule is, under these assumptions, regarded as a functional equivalent to a measure's physical implementation. There are two points to note here: (1) Measures and rules are, in one sense, crucially different, and (2) familiar rule-following concerns result directly from disregarding this difference. Notice, on the one hand, that a measuring rod is by definition a thing with a purpose. It is characterised by its prospective use in measurement. As it happens, the rod, regarded as a "bare object", shares the quality of possessing a particular length with the objects measured.¹³ The measurement standard, because of its embodiment, fulfils the desired condition of its target objects. On the other hand, however, this does not hold for words. Even though both a yardstick and a concatenation of letters are "dead and isolated", these are different kinds of separation.

The point of blurring the distinction becomes apparent now. Regarding a rule as a kind of measure suggests that one merely has to look at how it is articulated/expressed to know how to use it. Wittgenstein touches on this point in a remark on the seductive simile of railway tracks.

Whence the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity? Well, we might imagine rails instead of a rule. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited application of a rule. (PI 2009: §218)

It makes no sense to even imagine a measuring rod of infinite length, whereas a rule, being a conceptual entity, lacks spatial coordinates.¹⁴ In order to demystify the idea of an unerring, perpetual command, Wittgenstein conjures up limitless rails as ostensibly unswerving support for correct rule-following. His point is that one should not, in this case, put one's trust in a yardstick-like procedure. Rules are immaterial constructs and do not afford direct, tangible guidance as rulers

¹² For further discussion of measures, see Jacquette (2010).

¹³ Loosely expressed, we could say that the paradigm rod can also be regarded as a token of the length it determines.

¹⁴ See Crispin Wright (2001) for an extensive discussion.

do. This is, however, not the whole story. The shortcomings of the TLP's treatment of measures, as discussed above, led Wittgenstein to realise the essential role played by intentions in the measuring process. A number of his *Nachlass* remarks address this issue. They also contain ideas strongly reminiscent of Hegel's views on measures.

Common ground

Standard contemporary theories of measurement systems describe a structural interdependence between manifest events and observers. The system takes an input from given processes and delivers an output for the monitor. "The purpose of the measurement system is to link the observer to the process".¹⁵ In operational terms this can be done by an "information variable". "The input to the measurement system is the *true value* of the variable, the system output is the measured value of the variable." (Bentley 1995: p.5) The values are identical in a perfect measurement device.¹⁶ Both Hegel and Wittgenstein emphasised, against this formalisation, the inseparable interdependence of a "measurement system's" physical implementation and its quantitative output. The rule, according to Hegel, is "a magnitude which is determinate in itself" and serves to measure "a quantum with a concrete existence which is other than the something of the rule" (SL 2010: p.291). A crucial point in Hegel's ensuing dialectical treatment is that the two quanta involved are interacting with one another. There is no unilateral "true variable" to be gleaned from the target object of a measurement. The very notion of truth has to be reallocated with regard to the entire process, including effects exerted by the chosen instruments.

Hegel's treatment of "measures" is an inconspicuous part of his SL, but the underlying motivation is forcefully expressed in the introduction to the earlier PS, in which he broadens the outlook to cover his entire philosophical enterprise. In view of the more deductive considerations found in the later book, Hegel's programmatic claims gain additional weight. Returning to the passage discussed in the second section of this chapter, this is how Hegel describes *his* version of a measurement system, that is to say the methodological super-construct of Consciousness:

¹⁵ Bentley (1995: p.5). Cf. Allen and Yen (2002).

¹⁶ For more on this point see Hrachovec (2013).

For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. (PS 1977: §85)

The intuition, generalised from the simple activity of measuring with a ruler, is that it is impossible to extract some “objective truth” from the pervasive process of the ongoing personal experience typical of a self-conscious being. This intuition might strike one as excessively speculative, and none of this grandstanding is found in Wittgenstein. Yet the latter’s remarks on measurement standards share Hegel’s concern with the peculiarity of reflexive systems.

Hegelian reflexivity is a universal moving force throughout his comprehensive system. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, is led to some of its features in the course of investigating selected phenomena. One incisive remark on the issue is built around the notion of rulers. Wittgenstein starts with an observation on temporality and verification. “The stream of life, or the stream of the world, flows on and our propositions are so to speak verified only at instants.” (PR: V, §48) This outlook is comparable to Hegel’s epistemological setting in the PS insofar as it pits the contingency of individual truth claims against the aspiration of objective, matter-of-fact truth. “If the world of data is timeless, how can we speak of it at all?” (ibid.) Wittgenstein’s answer is a reflective move. To put it in Kantian terms: if sentences *are* thus verified it is because they *can* be used for this purpose. In Wittgenstein’s unassuming phrasing: “So they must be so constructed that they *can be verified* by it.” (ibid.; emphasis mine) And here Wittgenstein’s recourse to enabling conditions takes a decidedly non-idealist turn.

Wittgenstein compares the spatiotemporal character of sentences to a ruler. We have seen that a ruler’s particular nature consists in its being a hybrid device, its physical presence being inseparable from its normative employment. One cannot claim that length, an immaterial concept, can be determined *in spite of* a ruler’s physicality.

No, if a body has length, there can be no length without a body and although I realize that in a certain sense only the ruler’s length measures, what I put in my pocket still remains the ruler, the body, and isn’t the length. (ibid.)

Measuring systems are of necessity put into practice, and one has to take into account (“reflect upon”) features of this implementation to get a comprehensive view of their nature. Even though words and sentences are, as I have argued, categorically distinct from rulers, Wittgenstein’s simile makes an important point. Propositions, like yardsticks, operate on the basis of (in a manner of speaking) a body-mind synthesis. The finitude of spatiotemporal life has to be squared with

concerns of a non-physical nature. Hegel and Wittgenstein, as it turns out, both pointed to examples of measuring practices to illustrate this insight.

For Hegel, consciousness is, as we have seen, directed towards objects and—simultaneously—towards itself. It is because of this peculiar structure that it can switch roles between examination of an external object and of its own examining status. Dialectical knowledge consists in mediating between the way things present themselves and how they are comprehended. Compare the following notable deliberation by Wittgenstein: “How does it express itself in measurement whether I measure the measure or the table? I also sometimes check whether the measure is correct by using it to measure the table.” (MS 118: p.90) Occasionally one checks the sun’s position to determine whether a watch is working. This is, admittedly, not standard usage, but it cannot be dismissed as an irrelevant anomaly either. We have, on the contrary, hit upon a crucial feature of measures, the “concealed side of standards” I alluded to at the beginning. It is by virtue of the very nature of the devices discussed that this option is available. Wittgenstein is to the point: one cannot claim that measurement by a ruler functions *in spite* of its “corporality”. A constitutive asymmetry has to be conceded. Not every stick is a measure; yardsticks are picked out by the abstract notion of a length. Yet length is, in this usage, itself an embodied concept. No evaluative authority is beyond evaluation.

Wittgenstein’s remark about using the table to check the measure is a paradigmatic example of a more general structure. Hegel puts the point in terms of the development of Consciousness. Objects as they are in-themselves are not what they are for Consciousness, which has to adapt to its objects. But, Hegel argues, the object does not remain unaffected, since its nature is only accessible via conscious apprehension. The object is initially supposed to be the measure of correct recognition but, in a striking passage, Hegel argues that this measure itself is altered by corrections on the apprehensive end:

Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test; in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test [...]. (PS: §85)

This runs entirely counter to the conventional way of looking at things. The object of measurement should ordinarily not have a say in determining the correctness of the ruler’s application.¹⁷ According to this objection, Hegel is advocating shifting the goalposts in the middle of the game. Wittgenstein’s role reversal between measure and table looks harmless compared with Hegel’s general propo-

¹⁷ Favouritism is, after all, a matter of bending rules for a select clientele.

sition that seems to willfully subvert the very concept of a measure. But the systematic impact of these considerations is equally important. Hegel continues the passage quoted above: “and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is.” (ibid.) Subtract the story about Consciousness and you get the Wittgensteinian idea of a role reversal in testing procedures.

Wittgenstein does in fact discuss a hypothetical everyday case that precisely exemplifies what Hegel generalises as auto-correction of Consciousness on the basis of feedback. Imagine the scenario of an elastic ruler:

How would we come into conflict with truth if our rulers [*Zollstäbe*] consisted of soft rubber instead of wood or steel? Well, we would not get to know the correct measure of the table. (MS 117: pp.9f.)

Wittgenstein’s answer to this obvious reply is, in a nutshell, that the underlying correctness is *defined* by using the rigid measure. If someone employs a non-standard procedure she is thereby entitled to her own type of measurement. Her interlocutor protests: “But then, this is no measurement at all.” Wittgenstein’s reply: “Certainly, it is not what we call ‘to measure’, but it may, depending on circumstances, also fulfil practical purposes.” (ibid.) The term is used in a different, albeit related, sense. It is, in fact, not difficult to imagine circumstances that call for a change of established techniques of measurement, when we are faced with unforeseen situations.¹⁸ Hegel and Wittgenstein have both been accused, on the basis of such considerations, of disregard for objective truth. This complaint, voiced by practitioners of common measuring techniques, brings us back to the matter of interference between forms of knowledge that I raised at the beginning of this paper.

Substantive comparisons, as distinct from associative impressions, demand a *tertium comparationis*. The present case calls for Hegel’s and Wittgenstein’s ideas about measures to be triangulated with their reader’s understanding of the subject matter of their remarks. In the initial section, I indicated a discursive setting shared by both philosophers, namely their exploration of forms of knowledge. Taking up this thread, the question then becomes what concept of measure their addressees assume when they attempt to compare the given statements. At this point it becomes clear that the implied reader for these philosophers is the self-assured user of a particular evaluative regime. I hope to have shown that

¹⁸ A variation on the idea of rubber rules is rules that expand under heat (MS 117: p.10). And it is well known that modern physics has – in its domain – vindicated Hegel’s and Wittgenstein’s “reflective” approach.

both Hegel and Wittgenstein took up the task of challenging one-sided views on standards by analysing the logical infrastructure underlying their application. This finding should, however, be qualified with an important caveat stemming from a decisive difference between the discursive settings that the two authors chose. In Hegel, a philosopher meets ordinary opinions head on, whereas Wittgenstein shifts the roles involved. His philosophy confronts *traditional philosophy* (cf. Augustine) *on behalf of* ordinary language.¹⁹ The ensuing differences are just as striking as the point of contact we have been exploring.

Hegel's PG rests on the confident assumption that philosophy, in dealing with our common notions of cognition, psychology, history and culture, is able to transform these inputs into a consistent system, resolving contentious issues along the way. The price to pay is a heavy deployment of dialectics, which is not only an all-pervasive methodology, but also, in the end, an instrument for achieving universal cognitive closure. While Wittgenstein is basically silent on Hegel, it is obvious that his recourse to ordinary language is directed against the very attempts at system-building of which his earlier self represents a prime example. I have downplayed this manifest discrepancy in order to emphasise a common concern, yet throughout this chapter I have made clear my scepticism towards Hegelian dialectics. It is, therefore, ironic that Wittgenstein's remarks on measures fall on the side of the Hegelian attempt to—*sit venia verbo*—deconstruct unwarranted assumptions about the working of standards. He is (along with Hegel, who at best pays lip service to common sense) no ordinary "ordinary language philosopher" after all.

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¹⁹ This relationship is discussed in more detail in Hrachovec (2011).

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