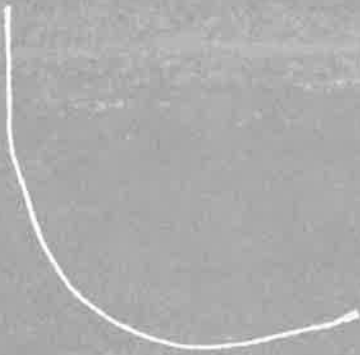


Merry Christmas from Hegel



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It was the year my brother died. I lived up north and had few friends or they all went away. Christmas Day I was sitting in my armchair, reading something about Hegel. You will forgive me if you are someone who knows a lot of Hegel or understands it, I do not and will paraphrase badly, but I understood him to be saying he was fed up with popular criticism of his terrible prose and claiming that conventional grammar, with its clumsy dichotomy of subject and verb, was in conflict with what he called "speculation." Speculation being the proper business of philosophy. Speculation being the effort to grasp reality in its interactive entirety. The function of a sentence like "Reason is Spirit" was not to assert a fact (he said) but to lay Reason side by side with Spirit and allow their meanings to tenderly mingle in speculation. I was overjoyed by this notion of a philosophic space where words drift in gentle mutual redefinition of one another but, at the same time, wretchedly lonely with all my family dead and here it was Christmas Day, so I put on big boots and coat and went out to do some snow standing. Not since childhood! I had forgot how astounding it is. I went to the middle of a woods. Fir trees, the teachers of this, all around. Minus twenty degrees in the wind but inside the trees is no wind. The world subtracts itself in layers. Outer sounds like traffic and shoveling vanish. Inner sounds become audible, cracks, sighs, caresses, twigs, birdbreath, toenails of squirrel. The fir trees move hugely. The white is perfectly curved, stunned with itself. Puffs of ice fog and some gold things float up. Shadows rake their motionlessness across the snow with a vibration of other shadows moving crosswise on them, shadow on shadow, in precise velocities. It is very cold, then that, too, begins to subtract itself, the body chills on its surface but the core is hot and it is possible to disconnect the surface, withdraw to the core, where a ravishing peace flows in, so ravishing I am unembarrassed to use the word *ravishing*, and it is not a peace of separation from the senses but the washing-through peace of looking, listening, feeling, at the very core of snow, at the very core of the care of snow. It has nothing to do with Hegel and he would not admire the clumsily conventional sentences in which I have tried to tell about it but I suspect, if I hadn't been trying on the mood of Hegel's particular

grammatical indignation that Christmas Day, I would never have gone out to stand in the snow, or stayed to speculate with it, or had the patience to sit down and make a record of speculation for myself as if it were a worthy way to spend an afternoon, a plausible way to change the icy horror of holiday into a sort of homecoming. Merry Christmas from Hegel.

