"Hegel's Philosophy of Action"
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There are a number of questions, the answers to which define specific theoretical approaches to Hegel's philosophy of action. To begin with, does Hegel attempt to give a theory of free will that responds to the naturalistic skepticism so prevalent in the history of modern philosophy? Though some scholars hold that he is interested in providing such a theory, perhaps the majority view is that Hegel instead socializes his conception of the will such that the traditional naturalistic worries are no longer germane.[1] A second question is: does Hegel have a theory of action as such that competes with those found in the history of modern philosophy and more particularly in the Anglophone literature from the mid-20th century onwards? Though perhaps the majority view is that Hegel does have such a theory of action, it is commonly held to be independent of any commitments to a conception of free will, and to take a form radically different from the other offerings in the literature in virtue of introducing and essentially retrospective rather than prospective relation between the agent and her action.[2]

On the one hand, the majority view emphasizes features of Hegel's theory of action that must be essential parts of a complete presentation of it: the social aspect, which makes the recognition of action by others an essential feature of action itself; Hegel's distinctive formulation of freedom as "being at home with oneself in the other"; and his denial that the category of causation can plumb the depths of intentional activity. On the other hand, Hegel thinks that there are objective structures of recognition, and these reintroduce many of the themes of the traditional free will debate; his technical formulations of the problem actually produce a plurality of models of agency that have yet to be acknowledged in the literature; and among those models are versions of both the belief-desire and teleological accounts that dominate the contemporary literature.

I. The Unavoidable Problem of the Explicability of Free Action

To take up this first point here – the existence of objective structures of recognition – is to ask what categories seem to be essential for our attribution of actions to free agents. We can set out some of these by attending to the terms in which one scholar, Alan Patten, argues for the legitimacy of seeing Hegel's social (rather than naturalistic) conception of freedom as a *bona fide* conception of free will. As Patten argues, Hegel's freedom is opposed to authority, rather than traditional free will, which is opposed to desires placed in the agent by her history or biology:

Two parallel features of the cases suggest that Hegel's argument should be taken seriously. First, in each case, the agent allows the determination of some external agency or mechanism to be a sufficient reason or justification for his action. In the first case, the agent passively allows the instruction of the authority to stand as a justification of his final decision to act; in the second case, he passively allows the social and natural processes that determine what desires he experiences to count as a sufficient guide to what he should do. Secondly, in both cases, the agent *could* subject the problem of what to do to his own thought and reason.[3]

Here action that we do not recognize as fully attributable to the agent is understood in terms of the way in which it allows a *mechanistic cause* with respect to which the agent is *passive* to serve as an *external* explanation for action. By contrast, free action that is recognized as so attributable is explicitly understood as involving *alternate possibilities* (the agent could have used reason, but did not), and implicitly as involving an *internal* explanation in which the agent is *active* with respect to her own *goals*. The key then, is to provide an explanation of how we could produce actions in this second way, and that is largely a conceptual problem rather than either a scientific/naturalistic or social problem. We come to the same point by thinking through the second dominant aspect of contemporary presentations of Hegel's theory of agency, namely their emphasis of the retrospective identification of the intention of the agent subsequent to the action. The basis of such identification cannot be restricted to the agent's rational endorsement, since I can endorse many things that I do not do, such as others' actions or involuntary behaviors of my own such as digestion. Rather, that retrospective endorsement must go hand in hand with some productive relation between the agent and her action, and that puts pressure on the categories we have for such relations (i.e., the italicized notions above).[4]

In Hegel, those categories are largely discussed in his *Science of Logic*. Here I want to pick up on just one form of this discussion, namely the discussion of the modalities (actuality, necessity and possibility). A usual way of thinking about alternate possibilities is in terms of free choice (i.e., '*Willkür*' in German). On this conception, there is a range of opportunities that the world makes possible quite independent of the agent's activity, and that activity is limited to picking from among the given possibilities. On this conception there are a variety of different future paths extending from past conditions, and the agent chooses to walk one rather than the others. Hegel thinks that such a notion has a limited (though not unimportant) sphere of application, and as a metaphysical category he calls this "real modality." The deeper conception ("absolute modality") is one in which the very continuum of possibilities is established by the action itself, and comes to serve as the context for retrospective interpretation precisely because it is first discriminated as relevant by the action to be interpreted. On this conception there is only one necessary path from the past condition to the future, and yet that path with its distinctive past condition and future state is only one possible path from among others that connected different past conditions and different states. All of

these paths lie along a continuum and the contrasts provide the resources for interpretation by generating the contrasting fact that the agent took one path rather than another. It is not that nothing is given to the agent in this second conception, but the ratio of the given to the created (or constituted) shifts dramatically in the direction of the latter. Hopefully, the briefest of examples may help: consider agents assisting a child in need. On the model of real modality, we take the need as a given and then interpret agents' different responses to it as choices between options for response to that condition (e.g., does the agent help, or turn away, or call for someone else to help). But on the model of absolute modality, we take the need itself to be partially constituted by the response of the agent. One can see this in contrasting parenting styles: what counts as a need with respect to one style counts as an opportunity for the child to practice self-reliance with respect to another. Each choice of parenting style generates a matrix of possibilities for evaluation, for example the different kinds of bonds that might be formed through attachment parenting.

In what follows we will first set out in the most general way the given field of possibilities for agency by taking up Hegel's understanding of the three sub-projects of agency that combine to constitute free action (Section II). Then we will take up different ways of doing those three things at once (Section III), and these will be instances of absolute modality that define the continuum of alternate possibilities for action by prioritizing one of the three sub-projects.

II. Three projects of the will

Buried in the middle of the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* are correlated lists of three different kinds of subjectivity and three different kinds of objectivity that Hegel takes to be relevant for understanding the basic project of willing. That latter project is the attempt to make subjectivity objective in such a way that the former can remain at home and recognizable in the latter (PR§§25-7). Each of these three correlations then characterizes a different aspect of that attempt, or defines a different constituent project of self-determination. Free action qua successful self-determination in general requires (at least partial) success at each of these constituent projects in particular.

The first correlation is between subjectivity as self-awareness and objectivity as the vocation and concept of the will. As a constituent project of self-determination this is *self-appropriation* – we belong to ourselves in virtue of knowing our actions to be fitting for a being of a certain kind and that means by doing those kinds of things. In Hegel's conceptual terms, this is the *universal* drive of the will, and so is naturally associated with a certain abstraction. At the limit of generality, we know ourselves as rational, planning agents and so we own our actions as the kind of things that such creatures do.

The second correlation is between free choice (*Willkür*) and desire as forms of subjectivity, and objectivity as immersion in the particular features of one's

experience. As a constituent project of self-determination this is *specification of content* – we need to distinguish the signal from the noise of our lives. The most basic way that we do this is by pursuing and enjoying the objects of our desires in the face of obstacles to such satisfaction. In life this must be done at a relatively fine-grained level, and so it is not surprising that in Hegel's conceptual terms this is the *particular* drive of the will and is thus associated with a continuum of often minute or idiosyncratic differences in taste, habits, resources, etc.

The third correlation is between subjective, unaccomplished ends and objective, accomplished ends. As a constituent project of self-determination this is *effectiveness* – the need to see oneself as an agent rather than a patient, to see the world as embodying one of my purposes precisely because I have made it so. In Hegel's conceptual terms this is the *individual* drive of the will, and is associated with strategies for taking the measure of that continuum of particular desires and histories by reference to the general or universal character of willing beings. That is, effectiveness requires planning and planning requires a grip on the essential features of situations. It is the *individual* project both in the intuitive sense that here the agent makes her mark on the world and stands out in contrast to other agents, and in the technical Hegelian logical sense that it involves the relation of universality and particularity.

In sum, the basic picture arising from these sections in the *Philosophy of Right* is that in willing we are trying simultaneously to take possession of ourselves, to distinguish between what is central and what is peripheral in the events of our lives, and to make happen what we want to happen in those events. All action is an attempt to do these three things at once, but doing almost any three things at once is very difficult for most human beings. In many areas of our life in which we try to do multiple things at once (for example, musical performance), there are explicit training strategies designed to separate the requisite skills and train them individually before combining them. But no one has ever been taught first to take possession of themselves, then to distinguish the central from the peripheral, third to translate those central ideas to the world, and finally to put them all together in a complete performance of agency. It takes Hegel until the 1820s even to get clear on a theoretical description of the three skills of agency, and one shudders to think of the sort of practical training plan he might have devised for us. That said, at the same time that he is getting clear on these three skills he seems to discover in the world of lived experience three general strategies for solving this problem implicit in the active lives of his contemporaries. He calls these three different forms of agency or accountability (*Zurechnungsfähigkeit*), each of which represents a conceptual distillation of common ways of life that are themselves attempts to manage this complexity on the ground, as it were.[5] And it will turn out that one of them is an (admittedly heterodox) version of the belief-desire accounts common in the Anglophone philosophy of action literature, and another a version of a teleological account. All three are forms of absolute modality in the sense that they are ways that an agent can herself set the context of alternate possibilities relevant for the interpretation of her actions.

III. Three forms of accountability

Hegel labels each of the forms of accountability by a different right of subjectivity: the rights of knowledge, intention, and insight into the good. These rights are each semi-autonomous conditions for the possibility of recognition of individual agents, i.e., they are different models for such recognition and thus organize different ways of life. So, for example, an agent exercises the first form of accountability when they legitimately expect to be held responsible for those and only "those aspects of its *deed* which it knew to be presupposed within its end, and which were present in its *purpose*" (PR§117). But there is also an aspect of the forms of accountability which is more difficult to grasp: each of the forms is equally a bait-and-switch routine in which the agent achieves something slightly different from what they mean to achieve. This bait-and-switch is not a contingent feature of some particular interpersonal interactions (e.g., being conned by a salesman) but something essential to agency: we only act at all insofar as we mistake our goal for something that it isn't quite. Hegel seems to take this to be a conceptual fact about the project of finite willing as such. To take just a mundane example, I have seen the most experienced do-it-yourselfers motivate themselves for a new project on the basis of time and cost projections that they would not beforehand admit to be as unrealistic as they obviously are, and yet afterwards would never actually judge their performance on the basis of those initial projections.

Hegel's terminology for this second aspect of action is "the ought [*Sollen*]," since the standards for what we mean to do and the standards for what we actually do are not precisely the same and thus the latter have the form of an external requirement on the former. It is not just that we miss a given target; rather, we shoot at the target in one guise but hit it in another. It is not that we inevitably fall short of a high moral standard because of our human weakness; rather, we are bound to misunderstand or misperceive the standard we apply to ourselves. In this sense, the subjective rights are equally the conditions of possibility of *mis*recognition. Understanding Hegel's philosophy of action thus requires seeing how and in what respect each of the forms of accountability is a relative success and a relative failure at the general project of making subjectivity at home in objectivity. That is, understanding Hegel's philosophy of action requires understanding it as a philosophy of finitude.

We might therefore take some direction from Hegel's discussion of this paradoxical project in the *Logic*:

> The finitude of this activity [of willing] is thus the *contradiction* that, in the self-contradicting determinations of the objective world, the *purpose of the good* is both carried out and not carried out, and that it is posited as something inessential just as much as something essential, as something actual and at the same time as merely possible. This contradiction presents itself as the *endless progression* in the actualization of the good, that is therein established merely as an *ought*. (Here those contradictions come to the fore

in which one stumbles around on the standpoint of morality – *Zusatz.*)
Formally, however, this contradiction disappears in that the activity
supersedes the subjectivity of the purpose and thereby the objectivity, the
opposition through which both are finite, and not only the one-sidedness of
this subjectivity but subjectivity in general; *another* such subjectivity, that is
to say, a *new* generation of this opposition, is not distinct from what was
supposed to be an earlier one. This return into itself is at the same time the
recollection of the *content* into itself, which is the *good* and the identity in
itself of both sides, - the recollection of the presupposition of the theoretical
stance (§224), that the object is what is substantial in itself and true. (The
unsatisfied striving disappears if we know that the final purpose of the world
has been brought about and to the same degree eternally brings itself about.
This is generally the posture of the adult man, while the youth believes that
the whole world is in a bad way and out of it a completely different world
must be made….This correspondence of is and ought…is not a frozen and
inert correspondence; for the good, the final purpose of the world, *is* only in
that it produces itself again and again… - *Zusatz*) (EL§234,Z).

There is a lot going on here, but at a first pass we can say that satisfied action ("the
posture of the adult") as much as the philosophical understanding of action require
a kind of stereoscopic vision to see how the tensions within agency that appear to be
crippling contradictions from one perspective could be the very way of going on
from another. The key here is the substitution of one subjectivity for another:
successful action (1) translates subjectivity into objectivity only for (2) a new
opposition between subjectivity and objectivity to arise, and the phenomenon holds
together only because (3) this new subjectivity can somehow be identified with the
first subjectivity. But then this latter identification appears to be just as much
objective as subjective, since through that identification we take up again the
theoretical stance that sees the truth primarily in the object rather than the subject.

Let us take a basic case as an example: an agent (1) satisfies her hunger by eating up
a bit of the objective world; (2) hunger returns; and (3) she recognizes this new
situation of being hungry as the same as the first, perhaps as part of a bit of practical
planning. The agent may say to herself, 'I'm always hungry at 9:30am so I should
remember to bring a bagel with me to work;' or, more perspicuously (if slightly
pedantically), 'I'm the kind of person who is hungry at 9:30 every morning so
bringing a bagel to work is fitting for me.' In this way the agent treats herself as an
object of a certain kind that has a feature (hunger at 9:30) that is independent of her
subjective stance in the moment of her regarding herself as having that feature, even
though the relevant feature is itself a subjective stance in the moment of her
regarding the bagel as an object to satisfy her hunger. If hunger registers the
difference or otherness between subjective desire and objective conditions, and
connecting episodes of hunger by means of a typology that supports effective
planning is a way of owning that otherness without eliminating it, then what we
have here is an example of being at home with oneself in the other, i.e., of Hegelian
freedom.

So far, so good. The example we just gave uses biological need to generate the renewed opposition between subject and object (i.e., hunger), just to try to bring the structure of the phenomenon into relief. One might think, then, that for more distinctively rational or abstract ends, such as justice or the good, the agent could transcend this cycle of renewed opposition and come to a final resting place. But as the passage above from the *Encyclopedia Logic* already suggests, such repose is not the destiny of agency of any kind. So we need to dig a little deeper to discover the more fundamental reason for this continual renewal of the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity.

To get at this reason, we need to back up a bit and say something about the general context of Hegel's most detailed discussion of action, which is in the Morality section of the *Philosophy of Right.*   Hegel introduces morality as a way to prevent the generation of cycles of revenge in response to conflicting rights claims. The problem with revenge, he thinks, is not its content but its form. That is, it is in principle appropriate for someone to stand up for their rights by retaliating against another who has infringed them, but the personal nature of that retaliation makes it almost impossible for that other agent to accept it as appropriate to what they have done. The personal nature of revenge makes it difficult for the original perpetrator to own it as a fitting experience for them to undergo as the particular free agent that they are, since it is natural to see it as another injury that treats them as a thing rather than their own original action being reflected back upon them as just punishment under principles that they should otherwise endorse as protecting their own rights as well. In terms of the constituent projects of self-determination, revenge succeeds at specification of content, but fails at self-appropriation (PR§102). This is important for our purposes only because it means that self-appropriation is the main problem of Morality and thus dominates and even deforms specification of content and effectiveness. And this deformation has consequences that are just as much objective as subjective, thus generating the contrast in standards that makes morality a "mere" requirement. It is this deformation and its consequences that ensure the continual renewal of the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity at the same time that it makes possible the renewal of their satisfactory identity.

This is the tale Hegel tries to tell in the prefatory sections of Morality (esp. PR§§ 108-113), though it must be said that his narrative technique leaves much to be desired. What is crucial though not at all obvious is that these sections represent a modification of the three forms of subjectivity and objectivity from the Introduction. To begin with, PR§109 presents the orientation of specification of content and effectiveness by self-appropriation, and then PR§§111 traces the deformation of specification of content required by that orientation. This deformation is the heart of the first form of accountability.

A. The Right of Knowledge: "Relishing the Enjoyment of Pleasure"

In PR§111 Hegel says that regardless of provenance of the particular conditions and desires of the will, we must consider that content "as the content of the will *reflected*

into itself in its determinacy, and hence of the self-identical and universal will." We have seen this reflection into self already in our consideration of the *Logic*'s discussion of willing, in which a self-reflecting agent makes a kind of double identification. First, the agent identifies one desire with another (in our example, the two instances of hunger). Part and parcel of this first identification is the characterization of the agent as a certain type or kind of thing (in our rudimentary example, the kind of a person who is hungry in the morning). But, put another way, this is a second identification of the subject with an object of that kind (and thus the way in which it involves taking up the theoretical stance). This second identification comes out as an entailment of the self-reflection of the will: as a result, the will has "the inner determination of being in conformity with the will which has being in itself, or of possessing the *objectivity of the concept*."

Hegel means all of this rather literally: we reflect on ourselves and modify our subjective stances by means of seeing ourselves as a certain kind of object in the world. "[T]he will which has being in itself" clearly refers to the agent regarded from the theoretical perspective as an object having its own truth that can be known, but it is slightly more difficult to say why it should have the "*objectivity of the concept*." The key here is that the agent is known to be a certain type or kind of object, which introduces generality or universality into the agent's self-relation. The key point here is that this generality is initially introduced into the project of specification of content because of the way in which this project is now colored by the project of self-appropriation. That is, in order for the content to be *my* content, it has to have a form consistent with the form of mineness as such—a form that qualifies it as an object that may be appropriated by an agent who can in principle then see themselves in the particular positions of another (even if that other is just themselves at a different time). Hegel spells this out nicely in his lectures: "Now the content must be mine as it is accomplished, and as will it contains the determination of the universality of the will, for the will which has being for itself is the infinite form, the infinite activity, and therefore the form which is at home with itself [*beisichseinde*], identical with itself, i.e., the universal" (VPR III, 344). The infinity of the form is connected with the "posture of the adult" in which precisely the repeated generation of opposition is seen as appropriate to the nature of the subject. It is infinite in the quite technical sense that such agent knows that she will find herself on the other side of that continually reappearing limit, so that there is a helical or cyclical shape to the process rather than a linear progression.

The types or kinds that mediate this self-relation are not unrelated to the particular content of desires and conditions; rather, the two sides arise out of one process, as Hegel is trying to make clear in the passage from the lesser *Logic* that we quoted at length above. In the greater *Logic* Hegel characterizes this process as a double reflection or *Doppelschein* through which the universal and the particular come to have the distinctive content and significance that they do only in relation to each other (SL 12.35/533). So, in the example above, the self-identification as someone hungry in the mornings picks out certain motivational stances as particular desires that contrast with other desires and feelings experienced at the same time. The

agent is a hungry person rather than a grumpy person, as the instances of hunger are picked out as the particular signal of the agent's life whereas the instances of snapping at co-workers are explained as derivative on the failure to satisfy that hunger and thus as noise. There is, of course, ample opportunity for self-deception here, but that is just the way agency is. To take up the notion of absolute modality again, the hungry person frames the action along one continuum of alternate possibilities whereas the grumpy person frames the action along another. For the former, the action contrasts with possible actions such as remembering to bring a snack or having forgotten breakfast entirely. For the latter, it contrasts with possible actions such as holding one's tongue or producing a more complete denunciation.

To briefly take stock, what we have so far is the orientation of specification of content by self-appropriation, and not yet any sense of deformation (the possibility of self-deception aside). That is, we have the way in which this particular relation of the projects of self-determination is a condition of the possibility of recognition, not yet of misrecognition. This is the positive side of what Hegel calls the "right of knowledge," which consists in recognizing as my own in the content of my action those actual features of its public shape that give form to what I wanted to do (i.e., to my purpose (*Vorsatz*)) (PR§117-8). On the one hand, this is a common position in modern philosophy that defines accountable action by reference to the (causal) effectiveness of the agent's beliefs and desires. On the other hand, Hegel has a quite specific take on the way in which beliefs (i.e., the theoretical perspective) and desires (i.e., the practical perspective) are related to each other. This take is centered on the way in which beliefs specifically about the self are related to the self's active, practical stances towards the world (i.e., to desires). Hegel also has an interesting take on the way such desires are related to beliefs in general and in particular to perceptual awareness of the external world. Let us first of all pick up on the positive aspect of this second element of Hegel's take before turning to the way in which both aspects generate the possibility of misrecognition.

The positive side of this second element can be found in Hegel's attribution of wholehearted enjoyment to this form of agency. In a revealing early manuscript when discussing the way of life of someone embodying this first form of agency (here, a farmer), he claims that it is characteristic of this figure that he "relishes the enjoyment of pleasure [*den Genuß des Vergnügens genießt*]" in contrast to the craftsman who primarily appreciates the fact that he has made himself what he is and the merchant who is beyond any capacity for enjoyment (*Jenaer Realphilosophie* (GW VIII, 269)). And, adding more detail to this difference, Hegel says in his later lectures that "This indifference [of craftsmen and merchants] to time and place, to the determinate, is alien [to the agricultural estate] . . . [T]he insatiability of profit is alien to it" (VPR IV, 516). We will put aside Hegel's social typology here; what is important for our purposes is his attempt to provide a conceptually robust defense of the value of basic desire satisfaction as a form of agency. Such satisfaction – i.e., the accurate perception of the change in the objective world in accord with subjective desire, and the belief in the goodness of the conditions in which one finds

oneself immersed – is a mode of being at home with oneself in the other and thus at least minimally solving each of the constituent projects of self-determination.[6] By perceiving self and world as in this relation, the agent has made at least part of the world her own and in so doing has come to a kind of self-affirmation that is worthy of respect.

These two positive sides then give us the way in which this first form of agency constitutes a condition for the possibility of recognition. Self-identification as being of a certain type gives us a conception of what it is to be at home *with oneself*, and the enjoyment of the satisfaction of desire gives us a sense of how this is done *in the other*. But even in his initial formulations of the nature of morality, Hegel raises the possibility of misrecognition. More specifically, he raises the possibility of a mismatch between the particular, subjective content of the will and the objective truth of the will, and this possibility is what makes the correspondence between the two "only a *requirement*" (PR§111). Here we get to the deformation of the project of specification of content by that of form, specifically the form that arises from the project of self-appropriation. Thus we come to the deeper reason for the recurrence of the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity as it concerns this first form of agency. Unsurprisingly, we can see this deformation manifesting itself along the same two dimensions, i.e., in both the relation to the self and the relation to the world.

Recall from the previous section that Hegel initially thinks of the project of specification of content as the attempt, by means of free choice, to translate one's needs and desires into an immersive experience of the world. And we have just seen the way in which enjoyment is a kind of affective sign of that immersion. But we also saw the way in which the influence of self-appropriation on content interposed a type or general kind within the agent's relation to their particular desires. To put it structurally, a second kind of objectivity (formal or conceptual rather than perceptual objectivity) intrudes itself into the formerly intimate relation between desire and its satisfaction.[7] As Hegel thinks of it, the bait-and-switch here is that I aim at perceptible pleasure but what I achieve actually (or at least in addition) is a formal or conceptual status of counting as a certain type of person. To put it in the logical terms we used earlier, instead of a direct relation between particulars (i.e., between subjective desire and objective satisfaction in specific conditions), we get a relation between a particular and the whole conceptual process of the reflection of universal and particular (i.e., between a specific desire and the *Doppelschein* of particular desires and general type). But it is very difficult to know exactly what kind of relation the latter could be, and certainly it is very different from the relation at which the agent aimed and which served as the initial (if implicit) standard for success of the action.

The interpretive problem gets even worse. Hegel thinks through this conceptual problem by means of a technical, structural modification of the second form of objectivity – i.e., the objectivity constitutive of the project of specification of content – but for that very reason his idea here has remained opaque to most readers,

particularly those who think that he introduces the three forms of subjectivity and objectivity in the Introduction only to immediately reject two of them as irrelevant. Here is what is actually going on: In his first description of objective content in the Introduction as lacking the form of self-consciousness, there is no specific reference to *sensible* externality (PR§26(β)). Indeed, this initial conception of immersion in particular conditions included ethical norms and customs. But under the influence of the importance of self-appropriation within Morality there is a move to understand those particular conditions as lacking the form of self-consciousness *because* they are sensible givens (PR§108). In Kantian terms, the initial confident immersion in the customary pattern of one's life is now being construed as heteronomy rather than autonomy. In the *Phenomenology*, the same thing happens in the struggle between faith and the Enlightenment: the latter re-characterizes the traditional content and devotional investments of faith as a merely sensible, perceptible externality (PhG 425–26/¶576). In the actual practice of agency, this creates the possibility of misrecognition because it generates a need for justification and defense of certain actions where that need was not previously felt. Any agent caught in the midst of such a shift is bound to be defensive and somewhat flat-footed in the face of these new expectations.

So the interpretive problem follows a conceptual problem that is a real problem for agents, in Hegel's view. This is a reminder that we must take seriously Hegel's admonition not to indulge a "tenderness for worldly things" (EL§48R): they are as full of tensions and problems and contradictions as thought itself. A good philosophy of action may need to replicate those tensions if it is to be descriptively adequate, rather than attempting to paper over them with a contrived solution. And yet the philosopher is not the first agent to face this problem – real agents in their own socio-historical circumstances have faced the problems and cobbled together some partial solutions, so it is to Hegel's understanding of these that we now turn in an attempt to understand how these possibilities of recognition and misrecognition hold together as an integral practice of agency.

As Hegel understands agents embroiled in this historical mess, a common strategy is to re-describe that immersion as a tradition, and specific expectations as commands or promises.[8] Since this re-description characterizes immersion and expectations retroactively as specific kinds of laws or norms, new laws or norms can then be assimilated under the same rubrics. We can then complete our structural story as a conceptual analysis of these common strategies. For a more tenderhearted philosopher, one might expect the advocacy of a return to that earlier form of objectivity as immersion, or a restriction to it as the controlling form in the light of these tensions. But Hegel is nothing if not a post-Kantian in this respect, so rather than argue for an immediate return to the value of immersion, a *second* move is made to replace those sensible givens with the viewpoints of other self-conscious persons (PR§§112–13). He thus moves to thinking of the objectivity corresponding to the subjectivity of the agent's *Willkür* or contingent choice as now the wills of others. This external subjectivity is then a way in which subjectivity is at home in objectivity: "The external existence is the will, which becomes external as subject, a

subject in general is generated, [and] I receive my subjectivity therein as object"
(VPR III, 346).

In our initial formulation of the problem of agency drawn from the lesser *Logic*,
above, this is (3), i.e., the moment of identification of the recurring instances of
subjectivity with each other. But now we see this identification in a more radical
sense than in the case of hunger, in which only instances of the same agent's
intentional stances were identified. On the one hand, this move suggests a new
other in which I can find myself at home, namely in the opinions and attitudes of
fellow members of my society. On the other hand, this external subjectivity both
highlights and challenges my own subjective *particularity*, which is the logical axis of
specification of content: the opinions and desires of others are particular
subjectivity, but subjectivity *external* to my own. Thus we also have a more radical
sense in which the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity is necessarily
rather than merely contingently recurrent.

If the first move of the shift – i.e., the characterization of immersive objectivity as
merely perceived – opened up a gulf between that *for which* we are accountable (the
specific perceptible features of our effective actions) and that *to which* we are
accountable (the concept of the will as such), the second shift (i.e., the introduction
of the opinions and desires of others) attempts to cover some of the distance
between these two senses of accountability. In this conception, that *for which* we are
accountable are changes in the views of others:

> In the moral sphere, activity necessarily relates itself to the wills of others;
> these are in general the world in relation to which one is active . . . In
> morality I generate changes also, there is an external material on hand, [but]
> it is not a matter of the alteration of the material, corporeal world; rather, the
> world in relation to which my subjectivity stands under the consideration of
> morality, is the subjectivity of others (VPR IV, 307–08).

Furthermore, Hegel ambivalently describes the relevant external subjectivity both
as the wills of others and as universal subjectivity, so the wills of others becomes a
partial image of that *to which* we are accountable as well. We have a closing of the
gap—the sense in which that *for which* and that *to which* we are accountable now
have a more similar if not precisely identical form. If there is a single point in the
Philosophy of Right at which one can locate Hegel's social re-interpretation of the
problem of free agency, this is it; but he has buried it so well that it is easy to miss
the extensive tensions within which it is embedded.

As we noted earlier, it is very difficult to know exactly what kind of relation that
between particular desires and the whole conceptual process of the reflection of
universal and particular could be. And that problem presented the first form of
agency as a bait-and-switch in which we achieved a conceptual status when we
aimed at pleasure. We now have Hegel's answer to the question of the nature of this
relation: it is the expressive and interpretive relation between particular desire and

the whole public world of opinion and evaluation. He then moves on to asking, what does agency look like that explicitly aims at such a conceptual status in the first place?

B. The Right of Intention

There are two particular features of this second form of agency that go directly to the question of the relation between the particular choice and the public world. The first is purposiveness, and the second is universality. Together these features define the right of intention (*Absicht*), which is the subjective right at the heart of this second form.

We can begin with purposiveness, which connects Hegel's view to the distinction we noted in the introduction to this chapter between causal and teleological theories of agency. We just learned that we have to aim at something, and one might think that the notion of aiming just is a notion of purposiveness. However one thinks of the conceptual proximity of these two notions, Hegel wants to draw some extensive consequences from the latter. In particular, this new (or newly explicit) characterization of the relation between subjectivity and objectivity introduces a distinction between ends and means into the nature of action:

> The intention [*Absicht*] is that which is mine in the action in a further determination [*in weiterer Bestimmung*] as the purpose [*Vorsatz*]. In terms of its content, the intention is something other than the mere purpose. The value that the action has for me, the intention, is a content, [and] this content is first of all the end [*Zweck*] of an action, and the action is the means for the end. This end [is] the content of my intention . . . (VPR III, 352).

Whereas the notion of purpose (*Vorsatz*) from the first form of agency emphasizes the temporal relation of priority between subjectivity and objectivity (both of which are objects of perception), the notion of intention (*Absicht*) emphasizes the priority of the goal over the conditions and resources for achieving that goal. So, on the one hand, this notion of purposiveness appears to be merely making explicit something that was implicit in the first form of agency. There are, of course, goals within that first form; but they are essentially taken as given ineluctably by circumstances (whether biological or social) rather than as produced by the process of agency and thus as something for which the agent can be held responsible. On the other hand, the notion of purposiveness appears to narrow the scope of agency or at least to reconceive its expressive center as being an end that animates the rest of the action as a means, rather than being a specifically mental stance than animates some succeeding physical realization.

Second, Hegel wants to emphasize the new universality of this second form of agency, and this he does in his very first presentation of it: "the truth of the *individual* is the *universal*, and the determinate character of the action for itself is not an isolated content confined to one external unit, but a *universal* content

containing within itself all its various connections" (PR§119). To speak in terms of Hegel's logical theory, we might say that precisely because it is a *conceptual* status at which the agent aims, that status gathers together some particulars into a contrastive relation both internally and externally. Here this second feature (universality) contrasts with the first (purposiveness). Whereas the first seemed to restrict the scope of that for which the agent was accountable, the second seems to expand it.

Together, these two features help to specify this second form of agency as a form of absolute modality as we have characterized it. Specifically, the goal establishes a continuum of alternate possibilities in two senses: first, the goal contrasts with other related goals that might have been chosen; and second, the goal establishes a network of means that might be employed and resulting forms of achieving the goal.

In fact, these first two features are linked in the determinate negation of the first form of agency: "The transition from purpose to intention, is from the individuality of the immediate modification [of actuality] to the universality of action, to the interiority of the universality of the action" (VPR III, 364). The "immediate modification" would be an external, perceptible change, whereas "the interiority of the universality of the action" would be the inherent teleological connections between that modification and other features of the extended context. It is important to see that the tension between these two features – the first contracting and the second expanding the scope of accountability – is essential to this form of agency and definitional of its integrity.

The easiest way to see this is in terms of the third feature. This form of agency aims not at just any conceptual status, but at the conceptual status of independence. Precisely by distinguishing between end and means and adopting a purposive relation with respect to the network of circumstances and processes that form the context of action, the agent claims to be an independent originator of action in the world: "By acting, the human being is reflected into himself, the action comes out of him, he is the beginner of the action. In this movement, which he performs, is a content" (VPR III, 375). The universal conception of the end makes this possible, but also threatens it in the absence of a definite distinction between end and means. In moral theory, one can think of the doctrine of the double effect as a way in which this first feature is brought in to tame the second: At first I appear to be responsible for all of the manifold and extended consequences of my action in virtue of the fact that they obtain as part of the necessary and enabling relation that the specific circumstances of the world have to my purpose. But the mere fact that I foresaw some consequence does not make it a part of my *end* – i.e., it does not make it a part of the content of my intention – and so that fact is insufficient to define such a consequence as one for which I am accountable. This third feature, then, gives a general schema for all of the different forms of absolute modality that might be embodied by agents where one feature of the goal that defines the continuum of alternate possibilities is that its achievement establishes the independence of the agent.

Now we can return to our formulation of the problem of finite agency according to which such agency (1) translates subjectivity into objectivity only for (2) a new opposition between subjectivity and objectivity to arise, and the phenomenon holds together only because (3) this new subjectivity can somehow be identified with the first subjectivity. What we have so far is (1) for this second form of agency: someone exercising it translates a goal which is a universal end into objectivity by means of the whole network of conditions and resources in which they are embedded. The conception of the end as universal articulates one of the lessons learned from the first form of agency, which was the need to close the gap between that *for which* we are accountable and that *to which* we are accountable, but without erasing the particular subjective stance of the agent in contrast to their surroundings. Here that subjective stance is represented as the end or goal, "the interiority of the universality of the action," but because of that form it is inherently connected to the network of means, prominent among which are other agents and the productive resources developed cooperatively between them. Nonetheless the tension between these two features is supposed to be productive, to make the third possible – the conceptual status of independence as an object of recognition.

But this is Hegel, so recognition and misrecognition go hand in hand. This is (2)– i.e., the way in which this second form is also a bait-and-switch routine, or a way in which we aim at something under one guise but hit it under another with the result that our initial goal and our final achievement appear mismatched. And here we might divide the two forms of misrecognition into the theoretical and the practical (though this is not a label Hegel himself uses). What I mean by this is just that the first form of misrecognition concerns primarily the agent's understanding of the sources of their own motivation, and the second concerns the actual failure of agents to be embedded in objective systems of necessary resources for agency.

To get at the theoretical form of misrecognition, we have to come back to our three constituent projects of self-determination (self-appropriation, specification of content, and effectiveness). This form of misrecognition is driven by the idea that this new kind of inner effectiveness and this new model of the goal-directed self in terms of which agents appropriate their actions to themselves create deep problems for specifying the content of the subjective ends themselves:

> For the content of these ends, all that presents itself here is (α) formal activity itself, inasmuch as the subject *actively* commits itself to whatever it is to regard and promote as its end . . . (β) But the as yet abstract and formal freedom of subjectivity has a more determinate content only in its *natural subjective existence*—its needs, inclinations, passions, opinions, fancies, etc. (PR§123)

That is, the characterization of self-appropriation as the mere formal ownership of effectiveness (α) imposes a kind of cost on the specification of content, namely that this content is now to be understood as naturally determined. Here is how Hegel puts the point in the Griesheim lectures:

> Here is first the found content, here is not yet the will which is in conformity with its concept; the concept only is the animating, that which generates content out of itself . . . The content is here thus first something found. It still belongs to the natural subject, but it must at the same time be internal, it is formally that which is mine, but not the content of my freedom, of my concept; the positing of my freedom therein is just positing in general (VPR IV, 331).

So I do not fully recognize myself – I am not in conformity with my concept – when I act in this second way. Even worse, this looks to replicate a problem we already saw in the first form of agency in which the content of purposes turned out to be a source of heteronomy rather than autonomy.

Here is why the problem recurs: in order to tame the potentially disastrous expansion of the scope of accountability introduced by the universality of the ends and contexts of agents, this form of agency insists on a formal feature of teleological processes, namely the distinction between ends and means. So it is by means of such a formal self-conception that agents appropriate actions to themselves, but the formality of the model of the goal-directed or end-setting self has a perverse and unexpected effect on the moral psychology in which it is taken to be of paramount significance. Specifically, it structurally highlights not the desired pure activity of the rational agent, but rather the particular, given contents of the subjective will. This widens the Kantian gap between the two aspects of the will in such a way that suggests that at best agents merely add their "oomph" to goals that are already given to them by the teleological nexus in which they are embedded. To put the point in Kantian terms, this formal self-appropriation raises the specter that all practical reasoning is hypothetical rather than categorical, and thus the possibility that there is no autonomy at all. To put it in other terms, I aim at a conceptual status of independence but achieve a conceptual status of dependence on the sources of my goals, and this means that I achieve a status that is just as much achieved for me as by me: "the positing of my freedom therein is just positing in general."

But as we saw with respect to the first form of agency, there is a version of (3) here as well – i.e., a way in which this reoccurrence of the divide between subjectivity and objectivity can be identified with the first in a conception of the agent as an object. In this second form of agency this is done by way of the value of welfare, which is understood first as the satisfaction of the totality of the individual agent's needs and desires but then more broadly as the satisfaction of the totality of all agents' needs and desires. The broader, universal conception of welfare raises it to a distinctively *moral* value, on Hegel's way of thinking, and so articulates a way in which even this conceptual status of dependence is a dignified position worthy of respect. In this way, the formal rationality of the goal-directed (end-setting) self holds together the different instances of need not only across time in an individual agent but across the experiences of different agents, and so holds together the conceptual statuses of dependence and independence. In Hegel's dialectic, however, this mitigating feature introduces another distinctive possibility of *practical* misrecognition.

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In just the same way that Hegel ambivalently described the new form of objectivity arising in the first form of agency sometimes as universal subjectivity and sometimes as the choices and opinions of others, he ambivalently describes the value of welfare as both universal and as merely involving "*many other* particular beings in general" (PR§125) or even "the particular welfare of the individual" (PR§126R). In both cases part of Hegel's point is to introduce contingency into the relation between the individual aiming at such a form of objectivity and that objectivity itself by showing that we aim at it under one guise but hit it under another. In this form of agency we have two guises of welfare – one formal and one material – and though Hegel has argued that in principle the two can be identified we must nonetheless pick one and hope that by hitting it we hit both targets. The identity here is partial – it is like the overlap of two spheres in a Venn diagram. One could imagine an agent with color blindness who knew of this overlap, but couldn't visually make it out clearly because of its coloration. Such an agent would aim at the part they could see clearly and hope that by doing so they hit the overlap. Hegel thinks that some of us have a moral vision in which the particular needs that constitute the content of welfare stand out in relief, and some of us have a moral vision in which the formal self-ownership of the goal-directed self (i.e., abstract property right) stands out in relief. Both groups try to hit the overlap between right and welfare, but the limitations of their perceptions make it the case that at least some of the time they fail to hit their target.

Hegel describes both kinds of misses, both kinds of practical misrecognition. In both cases, an initial form of subjectivity (either right or welfare) is successfully translated into objectivity only for the other form of subjectivity to immediately crop up as in opposition to the objectivity so transformed. His discussion of the first – aiming at the identity under the guise of welfare but missing its overlap with right – comes in PR§126. Hegel's example here is stealing leather to make shoes for the poor: welfare is made objective but then the subjective claim to property right is legitimately raised against this new objective situation. However, he is more concerned about the second – aiming at the identity under the guise of abstract property right but missing its overlap with welfare. This form of misrecognition comes about when someone's abstract freedoms of ownership and contract are respected, but they are nonetheless deprived of the material basis of the satisfaction of their needs. So subjectivity in the form of abstract property right is translated into objectivity only for the subjective claim of welfare to be raised in opposition to this new objective situation.

In his lectures, Hegel is quite clear about why he is more concerned about this second form: he takes a fundamental feature of his world to be the close proximity of the struggle for survival by the poor and the luxury secured by legitimate property claims of the rich (see VPR III, 397–98 & VPR IV, 339). And so in the published text of the *Philosophy of Right*, he has rather little to say about mitigating structures for the first form of practical misrecognition, but more to say about mitigating structures for the second.

This mitigating structure goes under the name "the right of necessity." As Hegel initially presents it, it is the right of the person who is facing the catastrophic loss of their life itself to take what they need to survive:

> The starving human being has the absolute right to violate the property of another. He violates the property of another only with respect to a limited content; it is inherent in the right of necessity, however, that he does not violate the right of the other as right. The interest is posited only in this little piece of bread; he does not treat the other rightlessly [*er behandelt den Anderen night rechtlos*] (VPR IV, 341).

In order to see how this is a version of (3) – i.e., a way in which reoccurring gap between subjectivity and objectivity can be partially bridged – we must attend to the logical structure of Hegel's understanding here. It involves an explicit re-identification of welfare and right at their extremes, seemingly far removed from their overlap or partial identity. In his lectures he says "Yes, the human being has a right to this unrightful action. For life is the totality of particularity, the entirety [*Gesamtheit*] of particularity reduced to its simple form . . . Particularity has risen to the unity of the I" (VPR III, 401). That is, any particular need of the agent would be insufficient to override a rights claim or provide the basis for a rights claim contrary to that of the property owner, but the totality of those needs shares the kind of formal selfhood had by the personality at the basis of the property claim, and so provides a competing rights claim. In this way, the new assertion of subjective opposition in the form of welfare can be partially identified with the original assertion of subjective opposition in the form of right.

But Hegel does not restrict this right of necessity to the immediate situation of the starving person; rather, he draws wide-ranging consequences from it:

> From the right of necessity arises the benefit of competence, whereby a debtor is permitted to retain his tools, agricultural implements clothes, and in general as much of his resources – i.e., of the property of his creditors – as is deemed necessary to support him, even according to his estate [*sogar standesgemäß*] (PR§127R).

This consequence brings the partial identity of welfare and right introduced by the extreme case of the right of necessity back to the center, back to common structures of life and the ordinary practice of moral judgment. It suggests, then, a third form of agency that would explicitly aim to make just these kinds of judgments about what kinds of needs are centrally related to the effectiveness of agency, and which are peripheral.

C. The Right of Insight into the Good

This third form of accountability is simpler, in a way, but only because its object has become so complex that the resources of morality as such are only barely sufficient to characterize it even in outline. As we have already noted, this third form

aims at objectivity in the form of the good, which means that it aims at an objective consistency of right and welfare. But in the previous discussion of practical recognition, right and welfare showed up as essentially subjective claims (i.e., in the technical terms of the three projects of self-determination, as the subjectivity of self-appropriation and the subjectivity of content, respectively). How is it that they now show up on the objective side of the equation? The threefold pattern we have been following from the *Logic* gives us the key: this third form of agency has taken up precisely that theoretical stance that identifies the two reoccurring forms of subjectivity with each other by identifying them as shared features of a certain kind of object, and it does so as part of a practical process of planning. This third form of agency aims at an objective form of existence in which these two kinds of claims are in some sort of harmony with each other – this is its subjective plan that it attempts to realize in the actual world.

That is the bait, but there is a switch as well: "Every relationship (*Verhältnis*) contains an ought (*Sollen*) and even the good does not get beyond the ought. The abstract idea of the good should be realized. Freedom has the vocation (*Bestimmung*) of the good; freedom that is particularized in its own self—this should be realized" (VPR IV, 349). With mention of the "ought," we have moved on to (2) – misrecognition or the way in which the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity recurs. The obvious way that this happens here is in the *Philosophy of Right*'s version of Hegel's so-called "empty formalism objection" to Kantian ethics. Here is Hegel's presentation from the Hotho lectures:

> Duty here is thus completely without content, genus but without further determination to species [*Gattung noch ohne Fortbestimmung zur Art*]. But there should be action [*Aber es soll gehandlet werden*], and so the question arises: where does the determining principle [*das Bestimmende*] fall? In duty, with respect to the objective we have nothing but this abstraction of the good. This is that which is without determination, so the determining falls on the subjective side (VPR III, 424).

We have a conception of the objective good that ought to be able to serve as the only needed aim or end of a form of agency, but is unable to do so. To put it in the Kantian terms suggested by the previous comparison, we have no mediating terms between the abstract formality of the law and the particular satisfactions that compose welfare. This lack of mediating terms undermines the goal of this form of agency, which is to make the kinds of judgments suggested by the benefit of competence – i.e., to make judgments about the partial identity of right and welfare

The question then becomes, how do we get to (3) – i.e., how does this form of agency hang together despite these difficulties. There can be no real hope of improvement on the subjective side – Hegel does not think that if we just think hard enough about the nature of teleology or the drive to achieve goals in general we will find any specific guidance here. The improvement has to be in the form we expect from (3), i.e., by taking the theoretical attitude to the objective side and identifying these

competing sides (right and welfare) by means of a mediating kind. But in searching for those mediating kinds the resources of morality as such give out and we are forced, Hegel thinks, to look at the ways that these forms of moral agency are embodied at the intersections of different institutions and different ways of life. These institutions are the ones Hegel discusses in Ethical Life: family, civil society (i.e., all voluntary associations), and the state. The ways of life are described by Hegel as the *Stände* or the estates, some of which we have seen already. Each of these ways of life is a form of absolute modality, but Hegel's interesting point is that aiming at other ways of life as objects is itself a distinctive way of life and thus its own form of absolute modality.

IV. Conclusion

Though Hegel has a strikingly pluralistic philosophy of action, we have seen that he intends that philosophy to make good on a range of traditional commitments running from the necessity of alternate possibilities through the value of desire satisfaction to the centrality of goal-directedness. It is of course true that many of those possibilities, desires and goals are essentially social and even collective, and that determining their nature is a public and often retrospective interpretive act. But that determination must also take its cue from the interpretive direction proposed with the act by the agent herself, and the notion of absolute modality is Hegel's way of seeing that cue as consisting in the suggestion of a context of interpretation by way of marking out the contrast of the action with a certain range of other possible actions. There is a hermeneutic circle here, and one of Hegel's most unique contributions to the philosophy of action is his development of the public or social arc of that circle. This should not, however, lead us to overlook the extent to which he developed versions of the categories involved in the more traditional arc of that circle, such as modalities, desires and goals.

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[1] See, e.g., Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 15–16., Stekeler-Weithofer, *Philosophie des Selbstbewußtseins*, 355–7, and Westphal, "'The Basic Context and Structure of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'," 245. A related though sometimes distinct interpretive position is to see Hegel as a compatibilist.

[2] See, e.g., Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action*, 120–38, Speight, *Hegel, Literature*, 4–5 and 44, and Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*.

[3] Patten, *Hegel's Idea*, 70.

[4] Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection*, sec. 1.1.

[5] These forms of accountability also have legal connotations – Michael Quante translates '*Zurechnungsfähigkeit*' as 'sanity' – but this aspect is outside the scope of this chapter.

[6] See also PhG ¶362, where Hegel is clear that all successful action involves some kind of self-confirmation, even when that success is measured by "the enjoyment of pleasure."

[7] See VPR IV, 306 for a particularly clear statement of this.

[8] Yeomans, *Expansion of Autonomy*, chap. 5.