

Part Three *Norms, Self-Consciousness, and Recognition*

Lecture 11

The Allegory of Mastery: Pragmatic and Semantic Lessons

I. Introduction

In my third lecture, I presented an analytic apparatus for thinking about the distinctive constellations of normative attitudes that are taken to institute normative statuses in the Kantian autonomy model and the Hegelian reciprocal recognition model. These configurations relate statuses of authority and responsibility and attitudes of attributing such statuses to others and acknowledging or claiming them for oneself. I use these terms to model what Hegel talks about under the headings of practical “independence” and “dependence”, on the side of normative statuses or what consciousness is *in* itself, and what practical consciousness is for *another* consciousness and what it is for *itself*, on the side of normative attitudes or what practical consciousness is *for* consciousness.

Hegel agrees with Kant that we are both creators and creatures of our *commitments*. What is most fundamental to us, as the essentially normative creatures we are, is our capacity to commit ourselves. This is the authority to undertake responsibilities. It is the authority to make ourselves responsible by taking ourselves to be responsible. In this way, we institute statuses by our attitudes. I was particularly concerned to highlight how Hegel’s *social* recognitive model develops out of Kant’s *individual* autonomy model by making explicit what can be seen to be implicit in Kant’s invocation of the other-regarding duty to *respect* beings that are autonomous in the sense of having the authority to make themselves responsible, that is, to commit themselves. *Respecting* autonomous others in this sense is the core of Hegel’s practical attitude of

recognizing them. It is *attributing* the authority to institute normative statuses by one's normative attitudes, *making* oneself responsible by *taking* oneself to be responsible. The principal difference is that Hegel sees such recognition as an essential component in *instituting* the distinctive authority in question, not merely as an attitude normatively required as a *consequence* of the antecedently intelligible possession by another of that kind of authority.

The story he actually *tells* in the *Self-Consciousness* chapter is not about this small intramural difference between individual autonomy and reciprocal recognition. What we get in that text is rather a speculative retrospective rational reconstruction of the advent of the traditional practical structure in which normativity and normative selfhood first shows up and is understood historically: the structure of subordination and obedience. This model divides and relates authority and responsibility very differently than its modern successors.

The first index episode in the allegory Hegel presents in the *Self-Consciousness* chapter, the “Kampf auf Leben und Tod,” the life-and-death struggle, illuminates this transition from the organic space of living beings to the normative space of responsible selves. This transition relates the structure where the distinction between independence and dependence shows up in the form of the at most protonormative distinction between *desiring* animal and what is *desired* to the structure where the distinction between independence and dependence shows up in the form of the genuinely normative, because recognitively articulated distinction between authority and responsibility. This is the contrast Hegel invokes in describing the confrontation of two desiring animals:

Each is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other, and therefore its own self-certainty still has no truth...according to the Notion of recognition this is possible only when each is for the other what the other is for it, only when each in its own self through its own action, and again through the action of the other, achieves this pure abstraction of being-for-self. [186]

These orietic and recognitive structures correspond to two forms that the distinction between what things are *for* consciousness and what things are *in* themselves—on the normative side, that is the distinction between *attitudes* and *statuses*—can take.

My concern here is to look closely at the role the life-and-death struggle plays allegorically in Hegel's speculative retrospective rational reconstruction (*Erinnerung*) of the advent of the subordination-obedience structure of recognition. In the allegory, what emerges from the life-and-death struggle is a distinctive constellation of recognitive relations between superior and subordinate, personified as Master and Servant [*Herr und Knecht*]. Each party practically understands himself and the other according to the categories of Mastery. This is a practical normative conception that understands the Master as a locus of *pure independence*, authority without responsibility, and the Servant as a locus of *pure dependence*, responsibility without authority. Hegel thinks a practical recognitive conception embodying this social division of normative role is implicit in any practices exhibiting the asymmetric superior-subordinate structure.

Further, he argues that this practical recognitive conception is radically defective—and so, accordingly, are the self-conscious normative selves or subjects it shapes. At base, what is wrong with the subordination-obedience model is that it systematically mistakes *power* for *authority*. This is, to be sure, a fundamental mistake about the metaphysics of normativity. But the mistake is not merely theoretical. It is practical, as well. It leads to deformed social institutions and deformed self-conscious individual selves. Those institutions are deformed in fact, not just in their self-understandings. This mistaking of power for authority has a relatively intricate fine-structure, according to Hegel. That is what he is teaching us about with the allegory of Mastery. The basic task of the *Self-Consciousness* chapter is to diagnose the distinctive recognitive pathologies of the practical normative self-conception of Mastery, and trace them through various characteristic forms they take.

II. Identification

One key feature of the life-and-death struggle is precisely that it *is* a matter of life and death. We already saw that an essential element of the transition from being a living organism, belonging to the realm of Nature, to being a denizen of the realm of Spirit is willingness to risk one's biological life.

It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as vanishing moments, that it is only pure being-for-self. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. [§187]

I argued in my first lecture that the new element that is introduced here is the idea that in risking one's life one *identifies* with what one risks one's life *for*, rather than identifying oneself with the biological existence that one risks. By being willing to risk one's life for something, one makes it the case that the life one risks is *not* an *essential* element of the self one is thereby constituting, while that for which one risks it is. What mattered for the transition from Natur to Geist were the cases where what one was willing to risk one's natural life for was a *commitment*, something *normative*: a normative status or attitude. This is risking something *actual* for something *ideal*.

Being willing to risk one's life for something is adopting a distinctive kind of practical attitude toward it. I have suggested thinking of that attitude as *identifying with* what one is willing to risk and if need be sacrifice one's life for. The claim is that adopting that attitude has a particular effect. It changes one's status, making what one risks or sacrifices *for* an *essential* element of what one really is. That is to say that identification is a kind of *taking* oneself to be something that is also a *making* of oneself to be something. In the case of identification, what one is *for* oneself affects what one is *in* oneself. It is an attitude that is *self-constitutive*. The self that is constituted by what I will call "existential identification" (we'll see that there are other varieties) is an *essentially self-conscious* self, in the sense that its attitudes—at least its existentially identificatory attitudes—are an essential component of what it is in itself. Those attitudes institute a special kind of normative status.

Self-consciousness can be thought of to begin with as consciousness of one's self—a matter of being *for* oneself what one is *in* oneself. In the idiom I have been recommending, this is to have one's normative *statuses* appropriately reflected in one's normative *attitudes*. It is to acknowledge the responsibility and authority one actually has. We might think of this as

theoretical self-consciousness. The self-constitutive achievement of existential identification makes visible a complementary dimension of *practical* self-consciousness. For in this case, statuses reflect attitudes, rather than the other way around. It is by practically *taking* oneself to be a certain kind of self, identifying with one rather than another element of one's statuses and attitudes, that one *makes* oneself into a different kind of self, alters one's status. What one is *in* oneself is *responsible to* (in Hegel's terms, dependent on) what one is *for* oneself, one's practical attitude of identification. Each of the theoretical and the practical dimensions of self-consciousness yield something that the self is *in and for itself*.

III. The Practical Conception of Pure Independence

It is practical self-consciousness in this sense, beginning with existential identification, that makes one *essentially* self-conscious, makes what one is *for* oneself an essential element of what one is *in* oneself. This achievement of self-constitution through existential identification—being willing to risk one's life, and so everything one already actually is *in* oneself for something one is to begin with only ideally, *for* oneself—is the beginning of human history. Through this practical attitude of identification, a living being *makes* itself more than merely a desiring animal simply by *taking* itself to be more, in its practical willingness to risk its animal existence.

Hegel claims that this identification with a normative attitude (and hence with the virtual status that is its object, the responsibility one acknowledges or the authority one claims) happens in a particular context, and for that reason has a particular effect. That context is the *social* context of a life-and-death struggle with another self-consciousness. Risking one's life for something else (a normative status or attitude) is one crucial element in the life-and-death struggle, but it is not *all* there is to that phenomenon. The surplus beyond existential identification through risk of life that the social practical context of the life-and-death struggle supplies is the result of the particular practical attitude for which each party risks its life in the

life-and-death struggle. It is when subjects of this attitude collide, as Hegel puts it, “they *must* engage in this struggle.”¹

The combatants are living, and so desiring beings. Implicit in desire, by its nature, is a second-order desire: the desire that things should be *in* themselves, just what they are *for* the desirer. That is the desire that one’s desires be satisfied, just because they *are* one’s desires. To see that such a second-order desire is implicit in what it is to be a (first-order) desire it suffices to reflect that it is as correct to say that all particular *desires* are united in their common aim at *satisfaction* as it is to say that all particular *beliefs* are united in their common aim at *truth*. Hegel says in discussing the antecedents of the struggle “life is the natural setting of consciousness, independence without absolute negativity” [188]. Independence is the sought-for natural authority of desire. The absence of negativity is the implicit ideal of lack of resistance to that authority by a recalcitrant world. That ideal of pure independence implicit in desire as such is the orectic origin of the normative self-conception of Mastery.

For this implicit ideal is a practical conception of oneself as an *immediately, transparently constitutive taker*. To be a constitutive taker is to be such that *taking* things to have a certain practical significance succeeds in *making* them have that significance. This is things being in themselves what they are for the sovereign desirer. This constitution is taken to be *immediate* in that it does not depend on being suitably complemented by any other attitudes, in particular, by anyone else’s attitudes. The constitutive power or authority one takes one’s desires to have is taken to be *transparent* in that the virtual status that is object of one’s desire and the actual status achieved are taken to coincide: one succeeds in doing just what one was trying to do.

Practical consciousness that understands itself as purely independent consciousness, then, insists on the *sovereignty* of its takings. Descartes formulated and developed an old tradition that finds the boundaries of the self by tracing the extent of cognitive and practical sovereignty. For him, the mind consists of that which we cannot mis-take. Cognitive mental activity (cognition) is

¹ [187], emphasis added.

that which is whatever it is for the mind i.e. whatever it seems or is taken to be. Practical mental activity (volition) is that over which we have total dominion, where no means are necessary to satisfy one's desires. As there is no gap between seeming and being in our cognitive sovereignty over our mental states (seemings or takings), there is no gap between trying and succeeding in our practical sovereignty over our volitions (minimal tryings). (Hegel explicitly argues against the practical part of this theory in his discussion of action in the *Reason* section.) In this context the independent consciousness can be seen as extending sovereignty over self to sovereignty over everything, to be expanding in its self-conception the boundaries of itself until they are all-inclusive.

IV. The Struggle

The struggle that transforms the second-order desire implicit in desire as such into a *commitment* the Master existentially identifies with inevitably results when two such desirers confront one another. Desiring that *everything* be in itself what it is for oneself is desiring that *everyone* be in itself what it is for one. Subjects cannot show up as other subjects from the point of view of this desire, because what things are for them cannot make any difference to what things are in themselves. A kind of orectic solipsism is enforced: each sovereign subject confronts a world consisting of what for it are only objects, not other subjects.

In the account in my first lecture of the tripartite structure of desire, that structure was epitomized by the relations between hunger, food, and eating: a desire, an activity motivated by that desire, and a practical significance things could have with respect to the desire. The desire then provides a standard of assessment of the success of the activity it motivates, accordingly as the desire is or is not satisfied. For that induces a distinction with respect to the practical significance, between what has that significance *for* the desirer (is treated as food by being eaten) and what *really* has that significance, *in* itself (is in fact food in that it satisfies the hunger that motivated the eating). This orectic structure accordingly makes possible the sort of *experience of*

error that the *Introduction* identifies as underlying the representational character of consciousness.

This analysis encourages us to inquire into the *activity* that corresponds to the second-order desire that everything be *in* itself just whatever it is *for* the desirer. What stands to *that* desire as eating stands to hunger? I think the answer Hegel offers is that that activity is engaging in a life-and-death struggle with any and every other subject of that same desire. That is struggling to make it be *in* itself what it is *for* the sovereign desirer: an object for whom and in whom only the sovereign desirer's desires are efficacious.

What makes the second-order desire for immediate constitutive power the motive for the struggle? It becomes so when it confronts, and so conflicts with *another* such desire: the second-order desire of *another* desirer. Here there are two questions: why does confrontation with another such desirer lead inevitably to conflict, and why does such conflict matter more than any other conflict of desires of two desirers?

The independence of consciousness construing itself as purely independent is not compatible with the existence of other beings that are independent in the same sense. The insistence on being a *constitutive* subject (a sovereign taker) precludes the recognition of others as being subjects in the sense one is oneself. This is imperial rather than pluralistic independence, where everything else must depend upon the sovereign subject. This ultimately unworkable demand follows inexorably from the self-concept by which purely independent consciousness understands and defines itself (unto death). If purely independent consciousness took itself to be just a taker rather than a constitutive taker, something things are *for* without the addition that things are *in themselves* just whatever they are *for* that taker, then that consciousness could be what it takes itself to be compatibly with others taking, and correctly taking, themselves to be subjects of the same kind, and with objects retaining some independence in the form of resistance to desire. But for a consciousness conceiving itself as constitutive this is not possible

What is new about the life-and-death struggle is not that two desirers come into conflict. Two predators might covet the same carcass, and so fight over it, without victory instituting a Master/Servant relationship. What is distinctive about the case in Hegel's allegory is that the parties to the struggle each practically *existentially identifies with* the second-order desire that everything be in itself just whatever it is for the desirer. *This* desire cannot be satisfied by wresting a carcass from a rival and feasting on it. It requires the subjection of the rival. Second, it matters that what they are struggling and risking their lives over is a kind of *self-conception*: that provided by the second-order desire that one's desires be immediately satisfied, that is, that everything be, in itself, what it is for oneself. Finally, the particular second-order desire to be an immediately, transparently constitutive desirer is unlike other, first-order desires, in that *de jure*, necessarily, in principle, and universally, as opposed to *de facto*, contingently, in practice, and in particular cases, second-order desires of *this* particular kind are incompatible with and opposed to one another. That is why the parties *must* struggle.

V. The Significance of Victory

The first phase of Hegel's allegorical story is the life-and-death struggle. Hegel says the result of the struggle is

two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness
whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness
whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is master,
the other is servant. [189]

The second phase is the normative relationship of subordination and obedience that obtains between the victor and the vanquished in that struggle. This is the relationship between Master and Servant. In this structure, the master shows up as purely independent, that is, authoritative, and the servant as purely dependent, that is, responsible. And what the master is *for* himself is his essential nature, part of what he is *in* himself. He has made himself in that sense essentially self-conscious.

The first point to understand in reading this phase of the story, in order to understand the self-conception of Mastery, is that the victor takes it that his victory indicates *success* in satisfying the desire that motivated the struggle in the first place. That second-order desire was the desire that one's desires be immediately and transparently constitutive. It is the desire that one have the power (being transformed, as we will see, into the normative shape of authority) to make things so by taking them to be so. This is the desire to have a certain kind of status. Engaging in the activity motivated by the desire, in this case, engaging in the struggle, is taking or treating oneself as having that status: the practical significance induced by this distinctive sort of desire. Besides motivating its characteristic sort of activity and defining its characteristic sort of practical significance, according to its tripartite structure desires also provide a practical standard for assessing the *success* of the activity. To succeed, by satisfying the desire, is to establish that what had the significance corresponding to the desire and the activity *for* the desiring subject also *actually* has that significance, *in* itself—that it really is as it was taken to be. In the paradigmatic case, what a hungry animal practically treats as food by eating it counts as *really* being food, being food *in* itself, and not just *for* the animal, in case it actually satisfies the hunger that motivated eating it.

In this more complicated case, the victor takes it that by *taking* himself to be an immediately and transparently constitutive taker in the way he has, that is by existentially identifying with his claiming that status, and by having come through the life-and-death struggle victorious, he has immediately and transparently *made* himself be such a taker, and so has successfully instituted that status. That is what the master is *for* himself, and he takes his victory to have successfully transformed that status from being the merely *virtual* object of his attitude (the original second-order desire) to being *actualized* as the status that is what he is *in* himself. Here it is important clearly to distinguish three different descriptions of the status of the victor in the life-and-death struggle: the status the victor takes himself to have achieved, the genuine achievement that prompts him to conceive himself so, and the defective normative status that is actually instituted thereby. These are the three essential dimensions of Mastery.

The first is what I have just been addressing. The life-and-death struggle was motivated by the desire, implicit in the nature of desire itself, to be an immediately, transparently, *constitutive*

desirer—to have everything be in itself just what it for the desirer, that is, just as it is desired to be. The victor in the life-and-death struggle takes it that the struggle, the activity motivated by that desire, has been successful, has resulted in the satisfaction of that desire, that is, in his having the status he desired. Now, he is wrong about that. He has not in fact achieved that status. It is what he is *for* himself, but not what he is *in* himself. His practical self-consciousness is defective—indeed, massively, structurally defective. For that reason the kind of self, the normative subject, the self-defining status that he has in fact instituted, is deformed in a characteristic way. Selves conceiving themselves according to the categories of Mastery cannot be what they take themselves to be, and in important ways have made themselves the opposite of what they take themselves to be: dependent where they see pure independence. That is the third dimension catalogued above. Diagnosing the pathologies of this sort of practical self-conception is the principal achievement of the *Self-Consciousness* chapter.

Though he is wrong about what he has achieved, the victor in the life-and-death struggle is not *simply* deluded. He *has* substantially transformed himself by staking his life, by existentially identifying with his practical self-conception. In so doing he raised himself above being in himself simply a desiring living being. For he succeeded in making himself essentially self-conscious, someone such that what he is *for* himself is an essential component of what he is *in* himself. As such, he is subject to a distinctive new kind of self-development. For changing what he is *for* himself changes what he is *in* himself. As an essentially self-conscious being, he is now an essentially *historical* being. The act of practical self-identification, he performed was *constitutive*. It was a self-taking that was a self-making. In this sense, the master is right to think of himself as a constitutive taker.

Furthermore, and crucially, his existential identification with his practical self-conception as an immediately, transparently constitutive taker was not only constitutive, it was in a sense *immediately* constitutive. For its effect of making him into an essentially self-conscious creature—a distinctive kind of self-creation as a self-creator—did not depend on his self-recognitive attitude being suitably complemented (hence mediated) by the attitudes of others. It is something he did, a status he achieved, all on his own, independently, as an exercise of his power (on its way to being his authority). By his practical identificatory attitude alone, by his

being willing to risk and if need be sacrifice his life rather than relinquish his desire that his desires be constitutively sovereign, he pulled himself up by his own bootstraps from the swamp of merely biological being into a nobler status.

But his self-constitutive attitude was not *transparently* constitutive. For the status he actually achieved, being essentially self-conscious, is *not* the virtual status that was the object of his desire. What he desired to be was not essentially self-conscious, but immediately, transparently constitutive: for what things actually are, in themselves, to be just whatever they are for him, what he desires them to be: to have the status he desires them to have, simply *because* he so desires, simply *because* of his attitudes. In making himself essentially conscious he has *not* made himself into such a transparently constitutive taker—one who can *make* things so simply by *taking* them to be so. Though he succeeded in doing *something*, making himself essentially self-conscious, the master is wrong to think that his victory succeeded in satisfying the desire with which he identified, the desire that motivated the struggle in which he risked his life.

In effect, in understanding the significance of his victory in terms of Mastery, the victor in the life-and-death struggle has misunderstood what he has actually succeeded in doing. He has overgeneralized his genuine achievement, which was making himself essentially self-conscious *in* himself by his practical attitude of existentially identifying with what he is *for* himself. What he successfully made himself be in himself—the status his attitudes instituted—is not all of, but only a part of, what he was for himself. He *has* immediately instituted a status by adopting an attitude. But that status falls far short of the sort of sovereignty he desired his attitudes to have. In misunderstanding his achievement, the master misunderstands himself.

VI. The Master-Servant Relationship

The master's self-misunderstanding, the sense and extent to which he is opaque to himself, emerges even more pointedly if we consider his actual achievement from a different point of

view. For through his practical attitude of identification with the desire that his desires be sovereign over objectivity, through risking his life and emerging victorious from the life-and-death struggle, the master has succeeded in transforming his original desire into constellation of genuinely *normative* statuses and attitudes. For Mastery is a *normative* self-conception, a form of self-consciousness, however fundamentally mistaken it might be. The victor in the struggle has transmuted his second-order desire to be a sovereign desirer into subordination and obedience as a form of normative attitude, whose virtual object is a normative status construed according to the categories of Mastery. Indeed, the first large lesson we are to learn by properly reading Hegel's allegory of Mastery is how normativity as traditionally structured by subordination and obedience is an immediate translation of the basic structure of desire, epitomized in the implicit second-order desire to have one's desires immediately satisfied, into the recognitive medium of Geist.

The master's self-conception, which he will not relinquish short of death, requires that he recognize no others but himself (that is, take no one else to be a taker or subject) and that he cancel in actuality the independence of objects which he has already cancelled in his conception of himself and them. For no-one else can be *for* the consciousness understanding itself as sovereign in the sense of being a constitutive taker, what that consciousness is for itself: namely a *constitutive* taker. Recognizing someone in this sense would be relinquishing the authority the master insists on (unto death): that things, including oneself and others, are *in themselves* whatever *he* takes them to be, what they are for *him*, *not* what anyone else (any other candidate constitutive taker) takes them to be.

The servitude of the servant is meant to be a single solution to the challenge of the master's constitutiveness, both on the side of recalcitrant subjects and of recalcitrant objects, permitting the master to realize his self-conception and be in himself what he is for himself, namely a constitutive taker who makes everything (himself included) be in itself whatever it is for him. The problem of the other as subject is solved by turning him into an object. The problem of the recalcitrance of objects is solved by using obedient servants as objects to subdue objects which are less immediately obedient than the servant (whose will is his master's though his work is his own and only for the master). These may be other objects, or they may be human beings not yet

subdued.²

The servant becomes an object for himself and for the master by recognizing the master under the same concept under which the master recognizes himself, namely as constitutive taker. Since the master takes the servant to be an object (without the willingness to risk life required for humanity) and the servant takes the master's takings as constitutive of what things are in themselves, the servant can conceive of himself only as object, not as subject. To be even potentially a normative subject, one must at least conceive of oneself as a subject, so that one may acquire the courage to risk one's life for that conception. What things are for the servant is not determined by the servant's desires, but by the master's. So what they are for the servant is whatever they are for the master. The servant is not a separate taker, either of self or of other things. For himself, he is what he is for the master, an object. Both he and the master take this to be what the servant is in himself as well, though they are both wrong.

VII. The Metaphysical Irony at the Heart of Mastery

Here is the irony of Mastery: the master has not only made himself essentially self-conscious, he has achieved a genuinely *normative* status—crossing the boundary between the merely living and the genuinely normative. The master-servant relation is a genuinely normative structure of subordination and obedience. And it is so *because* it *is* what the master denies it is: a *recognitive* relation, in which (asymmetric) recognitive attitudes are suitably complemented (albeit asymmetrically), so as to institute genuine (if defective) normative statuses. The master

² The lord is the consciousness that exists for itself, but no longer merely the Notion of such a consciousness. Rather, it is a consciousness existing for itself which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e. through a consciousness whose nature it is to be bound up with an existence that is independent, or thinghood in general. The lord puts himself into relation with both of these moments, to a thing as such, the object of desire, and to the consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic. [190]

and the servant agree on what each one is. That is the suitable complementation. They are both wrong, about each other and about themselves. That is the defect.

In fact the master is the master only insofar as he is recognized *as* the master by the servant. The servant exercises recognitive authority over the master, who is normatively dependent upon, responsible to, the servant for his status—which is a *normative* status just because and insofar as it is instituted by recognition. But the master does not recognize the recognitive authority of the servant. His self-conception is one of pure independence, in which all authority is vested in him. The servant is practically conceived as purely dependent, merely responsible. A basic point of Hegel’s allegory is to contrast this asymmetric constellation of normative attitudes and statuses, in which *for* both the master and the servant the social division of normative labor locates authority solely in one of the parties and responsibility solely in the other, on the one hand, with the symmetric constellation of normative attitudes and statuses of subjects who reciprocally recognize each other, each both exercising recognitive authority over the other and being recognitively responsible for his normative status to the attitudes of the other, whose authority he acknowledges, on the other hand. We are here introduced to the lesson that will be explored throughout the rest of the *Phenomenology*: how the traditional subordination-obedience structure of normativity institutes defective normative statuses and normative subjects. That asymmetric social normative structure, whose implicit practical ideology is Mastery—the glittering but spurious ideal of pure independence, authority without corresponding responsibility—persists into modernity even in its most developed reflection in the Kantian model of autonomy as the constellation of normative attitudes that institutes normative statuses. The allegory of the normative relation of master and servant emerging from the primal power relations between victor and vanquished in a life-and-death struggle presents this normative structure in its rudest, rawest form.

A vivid example of the pathology at work in the form of self-consciousness that consists in practically conceiving of oneself according to the categories of Mastery is a kind of psychological distress that is a common affliction of celebrities, for instance in entertainment or politics. It is compounded of these elements. First, such subjects revel in the feeling of superiority over ordinary, non-celebrated people that they take their status to establish and

consist in. Their celebrity status is understood both as epistemically witnessing or testifying to that superiority and as ontologically constituting or instituting it. Second, they identify with that status. They take that superior, distinguished status to be essential to what and who they really are, in themselves. It is the basis of their self-esteem, articulating what they are for themselves. Third, they despise the mass of inferior, undistinguished, talentless ordinary people, by contrast to whose lesser status their own is defined. An integral part of the status the celebrity identifies with is the right to look down on those of lesser status.

Even slightly self-reflective celebrities adopting these attitudes towards the status they identify with are liable to detect the tension those attitudes stand in with the fact that it is precisely the attitudes of those despised, inferior masses that *make* them celebrities in the first place. That status is conferred precisely by the masses' admiration or trust, their *recognition*, their *celebration* of the celebrated ones. It is instituted by their practical attitudes of buying tickets, devoting leisure hours to reading about and appreciating, voting for, the celebrities in question. So one is made what one is by being so-taken by people one has no respect for, whose judgment one dismisses, whose *authority* one in no sense acknowledges. In short, one is made what one is by being thought wonderful by people one doesn't believe can tell what is wonderful, people to whose opinions one attributes no weight, people one takes to have no *right* to assess such things.

What happens to the Master is the metaphysical version of what happens psychologically to someone who aspires to celebrity, acquiring along the way a contempt for the mass of admirers whose acknowledgement constitutes that celebrity. Self-respect is difficult to achieve by regarding oneself as reflected in a mirror of morons. The Master is who he is insofar as he is recognized as Master by those whom the Master is committed to regarding only with contempt. He is no more than they can make him. His low opinion of them is in fact a low opinion of himself.

We can contrast this situation with one in which Hegel would think *nondefective* normative statuses can be instituted by normative attitudes. Consider the status of being a good chess player. Achieving that status is not something I can do simply by coming subjectively to

adopt a certain attitude toward myself. It is, in a certain sense, up to me whom I regard as good chess-players: whether I count any woodpusher who can play a legal game, only formidable club players, Masters, or Grand Masters. That is, it is up to me whom I recognize as good chess-players, in the sense in which I aspire to be one. But it is not then in the same sense up to me whether I qualify as one of them. To earn their recognition in turn, I must be able to play up to their standards. To *be*, say, a formidable club player, I must be recognized as such by those I recognize as such. My recognitive attitudes can define a virtual community, but only the reciprocal recognition by those I recognize can make me actually a member of it, accord me the status for which I have implicitly petitioned by recognizing them. My attitudes exercise recognitive authority in determining whose recognitive attitudes I am responsible to for my actual normative status.

I can make things hard on myself or easy on myself. I can make it very easy to earn the recognition (in this respect) of those I recognize as good chess players, if I am prepared to set my standards low enough. If I count as a good chess player anyone who can play a legal game, I won't have to learn much in order to earn the recognition of those who can play a legal game of my capacity to play a legal game. The cost is, of course, that what I achieve is only to be entitled to classify myself as a member of this not at all exclusive community. On the other hand, if I want to be entitled to look up to myself, I can exercise my independence and set my standards high, recognizing only Grandmasters as good chess players. To be entitled to class oneself with them, be aware of oneself as exhibiting the property they give concrete determinate content to, would be an accomplishment indeed. But it is not easy to earn their recognition as a good chess player. The difference in the determinate contents of these self-conceptions, and of the chances of realizing them and becoming in oneself what one is for oneself, illustrates one dimension along which are arrayed different constellations of self-consciousness that is determinately independent as recognizing, and determinately dependent as recognized.

The Master is in the position of aiming to be entitled to regard himself as a good chess player at the level of Grand Master on the basis of his recognition as a good chess player by players who struggle to play legal games. His self-consciousness is defective, and so is the self he becomes in himself by having that self-consciousness as what he is for himself. The less

worthy those are whom one recognizes, the less worth does their recognition in turn establish. It is combining this simple feature of mediated self-recognition with the peculiar structure of domination and submission that is metaphysically ironic, turning both the dominating and the submissive consciousness in themselves into the opposite of what they are for themselves. What is metaphysically required to constitute a *non-defective* self-consciousness is to be recognized (respected, admired) by those one recognizes (respects, admires).

VIII. From Subjects to Objects

The central idea in play here is what I called the “metaphysical irony” of Mastery. Conceiving of himself, unto death, as purely independent, as exercising immediate, transparently constitutive authority without any correlative responsibility, the one who has existentially constituted himself as superior *makes* himself wholly dependent, for who he really is, on the one he has constituted as subordinate. He is recognitively responsible to the recognitive authority of that subordinate. In an earlier discussion (in the fragment on the “Spirit of Christianity”), Hegel discusses a precursor reversal like this under the heading of the “Wirkung des Schicksals”: the efficacy or causality of fate.³ It is the revenge of the normative ideal on defective actuality. It is what determines that the Master cannot get what he wants, cannot be who he aspires to be and takes himself in fact to be.

The institution of self-conscious normative subjects who are for themselves what they are in themselves requires that recognitive authority and recognitive responsibility be co-ordinate and commensurate. It requires two such normative subjects exercising reciprocal recognitive authority over each other and holding each other recognitively responsible. Asymmetric claims of authority without corresponding responsibility institutes only virtual statuses, statuses actual only as the objects of those attitudes, not genuine normative statuses. And claims of authority unaccompanied by grants of authority to hold one responsible for the exercise of that authority

³ “The Spirit of Christianity” in T.M. Knox (trans.) *Friedrich Hegel on Christianity: Early Theological Writings* [Harper Torchbooks, 1961], pp. 224-252.

are asymmetric in that sense. A principal symptom of the defect inherent in exercises of Mastery, claims of pure independence, is the structural failure of self-consciousness that consists in what the Master is in himself, his actual normative statuses, being massively divergent from what he is for himself, the virtual statuses that are the objects of his attitudes. And it is not just that what the Master is for gets wrong what he is in himself. Being that for himself *deforms* what he is in himself, precisely because of what his act of essential identification has made him: an essentially self-conscious self—a self such that what it is for itself is an essential structure defining what he is in himself. This metaphysical irony is the efficacy of fate.

The defect in the institution of normative statuses by normative attitudes that Hegel is diagnosing allegorically in the structure of subordination and obedience afflicts the subordinate no less than the superior. But the ironic reversal of fates works to the advantage of the coerced subordinate. It manifests principally in the asymmetry of their relations to objects of desire.

Mastery essentially practically understands itself as consisting of attitudes that are immediately and transparently constitutive of the statuses that are the virtual objects of those attitudes. To actualize the virtual objects of attitudes of desire is to satisfy those desires. To do so immediately is to have those desires immediately gratified. The Servant is construed as the instrument of such gratification. In the allegory, it is his job to overcome the stubborn resistance of objective reality to the Master's desires: to fetch the inconveniently distant foodstuff, to coax it from inedibility to palatability, and to serve it as and when desired. The Servant is responsible for seeing to it that the objective sources of recalcitrance to the Master's desires remain invisible to the Master. Of course it is part of the irony that the supposed immediacy of gratification of the Master's desires is achieved precisely by the mediating labor of the Servant.

What the Master is spared is *labor*: the concrete practical overcoming of the stubbornness of objective reality that consists in its recalcitrance to desire: the object's not being in itself just whatever it is for the desiring consciousness. The Servant expends the effort to transform the merely virtual status of being the object of an attitude of desire into the actual status of a satisfier of that desire. The Master's relationship to his desire is if anything even more immediate than that of nonsapient desiring animals, who do at least confront the recalcitrance to desire that is

objectivity. The Servant's relationship to desire is abstract, mediated by his social relation to the desiring Master. For the Servant acts on desires he does not feel, since they are not his desires but the Master's. They show up to the Servant in the *normative* form of commands, obligations, exercises of authority, to which he is responsible. That is why it is the Servants who become the true normative subjects of subsequent human history, leaving the Masters behind as evolutionary dead ends. It is a further dimension of the metaphysical irony of Mastery that normative subjectivity, having been initiated by the Master's existential identification with his practical conception of himself as Master, as purely independent, is continued and brought to fruition only by the Servants whose labor the Master compels. By obliging him by force to work, the Master lifts up the Servant to a new form of normative subjectivity.

Two narrative paths are opened up by the ironic reversal of fortunes occasioned by the in this sense normatively emancipatory labor forced upon the Servant by the Master. One is consideration of the practical dimension of self-consciousness represented by work. This is "reason as purposive action"⁴, addressed in the subsequent *Reason* chapter. The other is the subtler, more conceptually articulated forms of the ideology of Mastery that become available to the subordinates in traditional recognitively asymmetric constellations of power and normativity. Hegel discusses these in the second half of the *Self-Consciousness* chapter, under the headings of Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness.

IX. Recognition and Cognition

The key to understanding these is the realization that the labor the Servant is obliged to do is the practical version of what showed up for us already in the *Introduction* as the *experience of error*. That process, in which the disparity between what things are for consciousness (appearance) and what they are in themselves (reality) is the motor of change of attitude, was identified there as the locus of the *representational* dimension of conceptual content, the objective purport (their directedness at what things are in themselves) of commitments

⁴ [22].

expressing what things are for consciousness. The experience of error is the normative, conceptually articulated, hence *geistig*, development of orectic proto-consciousness. For we saw how the tripartite structure of desire allows that merely natural state not only to institute practical significances (e.g. things treated as food by being responded to by eating) expressing what things are *for* the desiring animal, but to provide standards of correctness and error regarding what things are *in* themselves, accordingly as eating what is taken as food does or does not satisfy the motivating hunger. The distinction between appearance and reality that shows up naturally, concretely, and immediately in that setting is transformed into something normative, abstract, and mediated where the desire that motivates the Servant's activities and assesses the correctness or error of their results is something only the Master feels. In this sense, the Master mediates the Servant's relation to the objects, issuing commands and assessing obedience, that is, exercising authority and holding responsible.

This process is the one that at once *institutes* and *determines* conceptual contents, in the sense of making them more determinate. Conceptual contents are articulated by relations of incompatibility and consequence (determinate negation and mediation) that they stand in to other such contents. Each experience of error, of the disparity of what things are for an acting subject and what they turn out to be in themselves, incorporates into the practical classifications the agent is making some of the objective relations of incompatibility (and hence consequence) that articulate the properties of the objects being acted on. In this way the concrete aspects of the stubbornness of the objective world are incorporated into the contents of subjectively deployed concepts. An agent might have a concept of oak tree that identifies a certain leaf-shape as sufficient circumstances of application and includes among the consequences of application that boiling animal skins in water together with the bark of that tree will soften, tan, and preserve them. Experience might then teach that the consequences of application actually follow only if the tree with leaves of that shape whose bark is used is a certain minimum age or height. Experience is an exercise in vulnerability to how things actually are. In altering its conception of oaks in the course of such an experience of error, the agent acknowledges the authority of how things are in themselves, and the responsibility of how things are for the agent to that actuality.

We are now in a position to see that there is a *recognitive* version of this sort of experience on the side of *self*-consciousness that exhibits a generic structure of authority and responsibility corresponding to the specific *cognitive* experience of error characteristic of *consciousness*. It is a basic Kantian insight that the notion of representational purport is a normative one. To understand something as a *representing* is to take it to be *responsible* for its correctness to what counts as *represented* just insofar as it is understood as exercising that sort of *authority*. The same normative structure that governs the relation between *representings* and *represented*s on the cognitive side of relations to objects governs the relation between normative attitudes and normative statuses on the recognitive side of relations to other subjects. If whatever seems right to me is right, if there is no room for error, for a distinction between how I take them to be and how they really are, then there is no way I am taking things to actually to be, in themselves. And if I and others have whatever statuses I take them to have, if my attitudes immediately institute those statuses, if the notion of claiming authority or responsibility I don't have or attributing authority or responsibility another doesn't have goes missing, then there are no statuses of authority and responsibility that are the objects of my attitudes—not even virtual ones. Absent the normative structure that makes intelligible the possibility of error, *representings* are not intelligible *as* *representings*, which must have distinct *represented*s as their objects, and normative attitudes are not intelligible *as* attitudes, which must have distinct statuses as their objects. Mastery's ideology of pure independence corresponds, on the recognitive side of self-consciousness, to a form of cognitive consciousness that takes whatever *seems* right to it to *be* right, and so fails to adopt determinately contentful attitudes.

In recognizing other subjects, that is, in attributing recognitive authority to them, I make myself vulnerable, in the sense that my actual status depends not only on my attitudes, but also on the attitudes of those I recognize. Just so, in representing something, in attributing to it the representational authority constitutive of being represented, I make myself vulnerable to error, in the sense that the correctness of my representing depends not only on how I represent things, but on how it actually is with what only thereby counts as represented. This vulnerability to the other, whether on the side of subjects or of objects, this acknowledging one's responsibility to and the authority of the other, opens up the possibility of *discordance* between one's commitments. On the recognitive side, the discordance is incompatibility between the virtual

statuses one acknowledges or claims and those that are attributed by those one recognizes. On the cognitive side, the discordance is between the contents of one's own attitudes. What a subject must *do* in order to count as registering such discordance is practically acknowledge the normative obligation to *repair* it, by changing some of the discordant attitudes. Such normative discordance and its practical repair are familiar as two stages of the experience of error, from our discussion of Hegel's *Introduction* [in Chapters 1 through 3].

When a cognitive consciousness responds to repair discordant commitments by taking the semi-submerged stick to *be* straight (in itself), and only to *look* bent (for consciousness), what it is doing is a version of what a self-constituting *self*-consciousness does in *identifying with* some of its attitudes and *sacrificing* others. It was pointed out earlier that not all self-constitutive identification need be *existential* identification, where what is risked or sacrificed is the actual existence of the self in question. What is risked and if need be sacrificed in identifying with one attitude (and so with the virtual status that is its object) can be other substantial statuses, such as an office, a job, or some other respect in which one is recognized. ("I could not love thee so, my dear, loved I not honor more.") In sacrificing one commitment for another, one is identifying with the one rather than the other. And that process, so crucial for the recognitive constitution of self-consciousness, is exactly what happens in the experience of cognitive error.

Consciousness is always self-consciousness because cognitive commitments are *commitments*, that is normative statuses recognitively instituted by the attitudes not only of the knowing subject but of those other normative selves recognized by and recognizing that one: those playing suitable roles in the constellation of statuses of reciprocal authority and responsibility that constitute a recognitive community. The metaphysical irony afflicting Mastery shows that even self-constitutive identification, whether existential or not, turns out indirectly to depend on recognition by others, because the *content* of the commitment one identifies with is not entirely up to the one identifying with it. One is not in general committed to exactly whatever one *takes* oneself to be committed to. This distinction between status (what one normatively is in oneself) and attitude (what one normatively is for oneself) is recognitively constituted by the whole community, because it is that community that administers the determinate conceptual contents of those statuses and attitudes. It is up to each cognitive subject

whether or not to be committed to the coin's being copper. But it is not in the same way up to that individual subject what commitment to its being copper entails or is incompatible with. It is up to each individual normative subject whether or not to identify existentially (so, to the death) with commitment to the samurai code of Bushido. But the content of that code is not subject to being cut and trimmed by the attitudes of each individual samurai who commits to it. It is not the case that whatever seems to them to accord with the code really does. The *content* of the status their attitudes have given normative *force* to for them swings free of the individual attitudes that brought that content to bear (made it normatively binding) on those subjects.

Already in the discussion of Hegel's *Introduction*, where the experience of error is introduced, we saw that the notion of conceptual content, thought of as functionally determined by relations of material incompatibility and (so) consequence (Hegel's "determinate negation" and "mediation"), is Janus-faced. On the side of the objects of cognitive processes and practices, incompatibility and consequence are alethic modal notions: a matter of objective *compossibility* and *necessitation* of the sort driving the unfolding of the implicit aristotelian object/property structure of facts in the *Perception* chapter. On the side of the normative statuses that are the objects of normative attitudes in recognitive processes and practices, incompatibility and consequence are deontic normative notions: a matter of the subject's *entitlements* and *obligations* to adopt various attitudes. The *Self-Consciousness* chapter gives us the (meta)conceptual raw materials needed to see these as two sides of one coin, two aspects of one notion of conceptual content. It does that by introducing the *recognitive* framework on the side of *self-consciousness* within which normative attitudes and the statuses that are their objects are intelligible as having *deontically* articulated conceptual contents that on the *cognitive* side of *consciousness* are representationally responsible to the *alethic modally* articulated objective world they are intelligible as representing just in virtue of the subject's normative acknowledgement of that authority. The assembling of those raw materials into a finished story limning the fine-structure of the relations between representings and representeds on the side of consciousness and normative attitudes and statuses on the side of self-consciousness will not be completed until the discussion of the final, fully adequate form of reciprocal recognition, confession and forgiveness, late in the *Spirit* chapter. That will fulfill the promise, proffered already in the *Introduction*, of explaining how prospective and retrospective perspectives on the process of experience of

cognitive error and recognitive disparity make intelligible the successful institution by those processes of both determinate conceptual contents and determinate discursive self-consciousnesses.

X. Conclusion

I cannot here follow out how Hegel pursues the critique of Mastery in the second half of the *Self-Consciousness* chapter, entitled “The Freedom of Self-Consciousness.” But the general strategy pursued there confirms the diagnosis of the ills of the ideology of Mastery offered here. His allegorical Stoic and Sceptic understand themselves as purely independent in the sense of Mastery, but their mastery is taken to be exercised over the objects of thought rather than over its subjects. They both mistake the freedom of thought for a sort of constitutive authority over things, in virtue of which the thinker is wholly independent and the things are wholly dependent upon it.

Stoicism and Scepticism ignore both of the paired dimensions along which otherness determines conceptual content by being incorporated in it. They try to conceive of determinately contentful thought in abstraction from the cognitive *process of experiencing error* that engenders and informs it. And they ignore the *social* perspectival recognitive distinction between the point of view of a performer who is being assessed and that from which the performance is assessed, which the *Reason* chapter will show to be essential to the concept of determinate commitment, of being bound by a determinately contentful norm. There is no content without constraint along these two dimensions. The Stoic idea is that since consciousness has sovereign authority over what things are *for* it, the distinction between that and what things are *in* themselves can be enforced by experience only insofar as consciousness permits it to do so. But not allowing itself to be normatively compelled by incompatibilities in acknowledging error is fatal to the institution of determinate conceptual content. The Sceptical self-consciousness practically expresses its conception of itself as purely independent by refusing to endorse or commit itself to anything, refusing to authorize or take responsibility for any claim. Its independence consists in

its refusal to allow its consent to be compelled. Error is impossible in the absence of commitment—but by the same token, experience infusing concepts with determinate content becomes unintelligible.

Hegel's allegory of Mastery addresses conceptions of subjectivity as pure independence, as constitutive authority to make things so by taking them to be so. Hegel sees this practical conception to be the animating soul of the traditional subordination-obedience model of normativity. And he sees that conception as still active in its modern successor models, including Kantian autonomy. Reading his allegory, we see him diagnosing this practical conception as resulting from an intelligible, though mistaken, one-sided emphasis and overgeneralization of a kind of authority genuinely exercised by essentially self-conscious normative subjects, who actually can change what they are in themselves by changing what they are for themselves. Selves understanding themselves according to the categories of Mastery, and the norms they institute by their practical attitudes, are fundamentally structurally defective. Metaphysical irony, the "efficacy of fate" ensures not only that they themselves and the norms they practically institute, even the contents of their own thoughts and commands, are opaque to them, but that they turn themselves by their own attitudes into the opposite of what they take themselves to be. Pure independence is revealed as concealing abject dependence, in its relation both to other subjects and to objects. The co-ordination of authority and responsibility in reciprocal recognition required to institute nondefective norms and self-conscious normative selves has its revenge on the asymmetric normative model in which all authority is understood to be exercised by superiors and all responsibility to fall on their subordinates. The reality is the opposite of the appearance. Mastery is Servitude. As Rousseau says in the second sentence of his *Social Contract*: "One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater servant than they."