Part Four **Hegel's Expressive Metaphysics of Agency**
Handout for Lecture 13

Agency, Intention, and the Expressive Determination of Content

Contrast two kinds of account of the relations between *unity* and *disparity* that action essentially involves: *local*, *contingent,* and *disjunctive* (LCD) and *global*, *necessary*, and *conjunctive* (GNC).

LCD accounts take for granted a notion of *determinate content*, which can be exhibited indifferently by intentions and the performances to which they give rise.

Hegel's overall claim is that that notion of *determinate* conceptual contents is ultimately intelligible only in terms of the *process* of determin*ing* such contents—making them *more* determinate—by seeking the objective fulfillment of subjective practical commitments.

   If we are to understand the sense in which subjective commitments and the objective states of affairs they are fallibly responsible to or authoritative over are determinately contentful, we must understand how the processes and practices that are the exercise of intentional agency are intelligible *both*

- as the mere expression, revelation, and translation from subjective to objective form of already fully determinate contents, *and* simultaneously
- as the means by which initially *less* determinate contents *become more* determinate: the process of *determining* conceptual contents.

The difference between an approach that presupposes a notion of determinate content without deploying the resources to make intelligible its nature, origin, or accessibility to finite knowers and agents, on the one hand, and one that concerns itself precisely with explaining determinateness of conceptual content in terms of the processes and practices by which such contents arise, develop, and are deployed by knowers and agents, on the other hand is just the difference between the standpoint of *Verstand* and that of *Vernunft*, as those Hegelian metametaconcepts have been brought into view here.

In the *Reason* chapter Hegel enriches the conception of *Erfahrung* as the experience of error, which he introduced in the *Introduction*. Here we consider the "cycle" of cognition and action: a Test-Operate-Test-Exit (TOTE) "cycle" of cognition and action that develops content through the experience of practical failure as well as cognitive error.

The historical, normative, inferential structure linking unrepeatable demonstrative tokenings and repeatable anaphorically dependent tokenings on the cognitive or *theoretical* side of a subject's activity provides conceptual raw materials that are helpful also for thinking about the maturation of a prior general purpose into a later concrete doing on the *practical* side of a subject's activity. In this case, what matters is the sense in which an earlier description of what is to be done can be thought of as inheriting some of its content from the later demonstrative specification of what it is done, on which it is understood to be anaphorically dependent. In the case of successful actions, the demonstratively specifiable performance that fulfills the purpose or intention can be thought of as what was aimed at all along: "I meant to do *that*," or "*That* is what I intended to do."

The content of the action can be specified either *de dicto* ('that'), in terms of the purpose that authorized it, or *de re* ('of'), in terms of what was thereby in fact authorized. Understanding the concept of action requires understanding actions as unities that necessarily involve this distinction of perspective, and understanding those perspectives as perspectives on one content. The content of the intention, in Hegel's use of 'Absicht', is the *content* of the action. The purpose and the accomplished deed are then two perspectives on that content, two *forms* that content can take. This is the agentive correlate of the cognitive hylomorphism that appeared already in Hegel's *Introduction*.

The development of an intention by the alteration of a plan involves *sacrificing* some commitments—to the rejected plan, perhaps to some of the sub-goals it endorsed—and thereby *identifying* with others. We saw that the process by which self-conscious individual selves constitute themselves (in a recognitive community) is a process of relinquishing or altering, in general sacrificing some commitments in favor of other, incompatible ones, which one thereby counts as identifying with. We are now in a position to see that intentional action is a process that has just this *self*-constituting structure. The process of carrying through an intention is a process of *self determination* or self-*constitution*: making oneself into a (more) determinately contentful self by identifying with some commitments and rejecting others. That is why "what the subject *is*, *is the series of its actions*," [*RP* §124] "individuality is the cycle of its action," [*PG* §308] and "an individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action." [*PG* §401] The very same process that is the exercise of intentional agency is at the same time the expression of self-conscious individuality. "[T]he essential nature of the work... is to be a self-expression of... individuality."[*PG* §403]

"The activity of individuality, all that it does, is in its own self an End…the present, real existence of the process of individuality." [*PG* §393]

Self consciousness is "reality in the form of an individuality that directly expresses itself, an individuality which no longer encounters resistance from an actual world, and whose aim and object are only this expressing of itself." [*PG* §359]

The element in which individuality sets forth its shape has the significance solely of putting on the shape of individuality; it is the daylight in which consciousness wants to display itself. [*PG* §396]

From this point of view, objective actuality just is the medium of self-expression. In practical agency, expression is actualization. What one is implicitly *for* oneself becomes explicit as something actual, something with a nature *in* itself, available in that form *for* others, as well as for oneself in this new form.

To see our authority as agents as *opposed, resisted, frustrated* by recalcitrant actuality is to commit to a model of *pure independence* (Mastery): authority is not real unless it is *total*. We need to make the move from *independence* to *freedom* (*Verstand* to *Vernunft*), to understanding *genuine* authority as *always* and *necessarily* coming with correlative *responsibility*, for only so can it be *determinately contentful*. This is the structure of authority and responsibility of reciprocal recognition, here articulated both socially and historically.

Explicating this idiom of expression through actualization by the exercise of intentional agency is to complete the three-stage metaconceptual progression in ways of conceiving how things stand between the subjective idiom of certainty and the objective idiom of truth. It comprises these successive claims:

- *Conceptual realism*: the ontological homogeneity of content between what things are *in* themselves and what they are *for* consciousness. Both are conceptually structured, that is, articulated by incompatibilities and consequences (mediation and determinate exclusive negation). Those relations are alethic in the objective form of conceptual content, and deontic-normative in the subjective form of conceptual content.
- *Objective idealism*: the reciprocal sense-dependence of the concepts by which we characterize objective relations of incompatibility and consequence, on the one hand, and subjective processes of resolving incompatibilities and drawing inferences, on the other.
- *Conceptual idealism*: the second-order *relations* between what things objectively are *in* themselves and the experiential *processes* in which they show up as something *for* consciousness are to be understood in the first instance in terms of those subject-constitutive empirical-practical processes: *Erfahrung*, now understood as the cycle of action-and-cognition.

The relations between what things are for consciousness and what they are in themselves are the relations between *phenomena* and *noumena*, *appearance* and *reality*, *sense* and *referent,* as Hegel construes them.

Hegel's understanding of what corresponds to the Fregean notion of <u>sense</u> is in crucial ways quite different from Frege's.
- Hegel is a *holist* about the conceptual contents we grasp in thought and express in speech and action. As we have seen, for Hegel conceptual contents are identified and individuated by their place in a network articulated by relations of material incompatibility and (so) material inference (determinate negation and mediation). By contrast, however it might be with Frege himself, many contemporary neo-Fregean theories are thoroughly atomistic about senses.
- For Frege, senses and referents are different *kinds* of things. For Hegel, though, the way things are *for* consciousness can be just the same as the way they are *in* themselves. Noumena are a kind of phenomena. They are categoreally *homo*geneous: the same kind of thing. For the basic tenet of Hegel's conceptual realism is that both are *conceptually* articulated, that is, stand in relations of material incompatibility and material inference.
- Fregean senses are required to determine classes of referents whose boundaries are *sharp*, *fixed*, and *complete*. This is Fregean determinateness, or determinateness in the Fregean sense.

What one must *do* in order thereby to be taking it that one is talking or thinking *about* something is to perform a <u>*Erinnerung* of</u> the development of one's views. For constructing that sort of expressively progressive genealogy is exhibiting the sequential experiential transformations of what things are for one as governed, guided, and controlled by how things all along were in themselves. Distinguishing in this way between expressively progressive transformations and those alterations in how one applies those very same concepts that were not expressively progressive is treating *all* the prior applications of those concepts as subject to assessment according to the normative standard set by how things have been revealed (so far) really to be: the actual objective facts and intentions, and the material incompatibilities and consequential relations that really articulated their properties and relations. This *is* treating them all as appearances of that one reality, all phenomena presenting one noumenal situation.

On this Hegelian account, the link between sense and reference is in the first instance an *expressive* one: the senses express the reference, making (some aspects of) it explicit. It is a relation established *retrospectively*, by turning a past into a history, an expressive genealogy. It is in terms of this retrospectively discerned expressive

relation that the *representational* dimension of concept use is explained. Expressive genealogies rationally reconstruct experiential processes into traditions.

We must reconstrue the concept <u>determinate</u>, so as to think of it in the first instance as a feature of the whole process of *determining* conceptual contents, and only derivatively of the snapshot stages of that process, rather than the other way around. We must distinguish d<u>eterminate</u>_{Verstand} from <u>determinate</u>_{Vernunft}.

<u>Determinate</u>_{Verstand} is what you get if you take *one* of the perspectives—the retrospective, Whiggish one, and understand the relation between the whole process, *including* the prospective shift to a *new* Whiggish story, on the model of how things look from *within* just one of those stories. This is one-sidedly mistaking one *aspect* of the process, one perspective on it, for the whole thing.

The model for the retrospective discernment of the implicit unity of a course of experience—the development of what things are for consciousness in the direction of what they are in themselves—is to be found on the practical side of intentional action. While the initially endorsed purpose, in virtue of which a process counts as intentional (and hence an action, something done) at all, embodies a *de dicto* specification of the intention (and hence at least in a speaker's referring way, the deed), it is only retrospectively, from the point of view of the accomplished deed that a *de re* specification of that intention is available. Retrospectively, we learn something about what we in fact intended. So we can see that very intention as being further *expressed*. Prospectively, since the consequence is not foreseeable (it hadn't happened yet), this same process appears as further *determination* of it.

Telling the right kind of retrospective story is giving the process of development that issues in the final sense (and so determines the referent) the shape of a *plan*.

Doing the *prospective* work of coming up with a new revision and doing the *retrospective* work of coming up with a new recollection that exhibits it as the culmination of an expressively progressive process in which what was implicit is made gradually but cumulatively more explicit are two ways of describing *one* task.

The process by which what Hegel calls "the Concept" develops, as constellations of conceptual contents-and-commitments are found wanting and replaced or revised—which is the same process by which individual self-consciousnesses develop—must be thought of as both a process of ever greater *determination* of conceptual contents and of ever greater *expression* of them**.** Regarded *pro*spectively, the conceptual contents are being *made more determinate*, as features of how things really are in themselves are incorporated into how they are for consciousness by crucial experiential episodes. Regarded *retro*spectively, the conceptual contents are being gradually but inexorably (with retrospective necessity) revealed and expressed: what was all along implicit made more and more explicit.

The key to the Hegelian semantic vision is that talk of the process of sequentially and progressively *determining* (making more determinate) disparate *senses*, and talk of the process of sequentially and progressively *expressing* (making more explicit) *referents* are two ways of talking about the *same* process.