

Knowing and Representing:
Reading (between the lines of) Hegel's *Introduction*

Lecture 2 Handout:

Representation and the Experience of Error:
A Functionalist Approach to the Distinction between Appearance and Reality

1. Hegel begins the *Phenomenology* proper with the claim that the two-stage representational epistemological explanatory strategy leads inexorably to skeptical conclusions *if* it is combined with a particular auxiliary hypothesis concerning the difference between representings and representeds: the idea that only representings (appearances, phenomena) are in conceptual shape, while what is represented by them (reality, noumena) is not.
2. The constructive suggestion Hegel offers as an alternative to this assumption is a radically new, nonpsychological conception of the conceptual. According to this conception, to be conceptually contentful is to stand in relations of material incompatibility ("determinate negation") and material consequence ("mediation") to other such contentful items.
3. Our ordinary, presystematic, nontheoretical thought and talk about thinking and talking distinguishes between what we are thinking or saying, on the one hand, and what we are thinking or talking *about*, on the other.
4. Kant: What distinguishes judgments from the responses of merely natural creatures is that we are in a distinctive way *responsible* for our judgments. They express *commitments* of ours. Judging is a kind of *endorsement*, an exercise of the subject's *authority*. Responsibility, commitment, endorsement, and authority are all *normative* concepts.
5. The integrative task-responsibility to synthesize a unity of apperception has three dimensions: critical, ampliative, and justificatory. These are species of *rational* obligations, for they are articulated by which commitments serve as *reasons* for or against which others.
 - One's *critical* integrative-synthetic task responsibility is to reject commitments that are materially *incompatible* with other commitments one has acknowledged.
 - One's *ampliative* integrative-synthetic task responsibility is to acknowledge commitments that are material consequences of other commitments one has acknowledged.
 - One's *justificatory* integrative-synthetic task responsibility is to be able to provide reasons for the commitments one has acknowledged, by citing other commitments one acknowledges of which they are material consequences.
6. Hegel sees that this account of the *activity* of judging has immediate consequences for the understanding of the *contents* judged: for what one has taken responsibility for, committed oneself to, in judging that *p*. The *rational* articulation of the normative synthetic-integrative task-responsibility Kant identifies as the kind of endorsement distinctive of judging means that we can understand judgeable contents in terms of what we are *doing* in judging. Hegel extracts his conception of conceptual contentfulness from what is required to synthesize a constellation of commitments exhibiting the rational, normative unity distinctive of apperception. This is a broadly *functionalist* idea. For it is the idea of understanding judgeable contents in terms of the role judgments play in the integrative process that is Kantian apperceiving.

7. Hegel sees that Kant envisages a normative approach not only to the expressive-conceptual dimension of intentionality ('that'-intentionality), but also to the representational dimension ('of'-intentionality). The conceptual content of a judgment is what one makes oneself responsible *for* in judging, and its representational content (what is represented by it) is what one makes oneself responsible *to*. What the judgment is *about*, what is represented by it, is what exercises a distinctive kind of *authority* over assessments of its correctness—*as*, we might want to say, a representing of that represented.

8. The logical flow of the last two-thirds of the *Introduction*, as I see it, is:

- The starting-point is Kant's *normative* conception of judgment, which sees judging as endorsing, committing oneself to, taking responsibility for some judgeable content.
- This idea is made more definite by the Kantian account of judging as integrating a new commitment into a constellation of prior commitments, so as to maintain the rational normative unity distinctive of apperception.
- That idea in turn is filled in by understanding the synthetic-integrative activity as having the tripartite substructure of satisfying critical, ampliative, and justificatory task-responsibilities.
- To this idea is conjoined the *functionalist* strategy of understanding judgeable contents as articulated by the relations they must stand in in order to play their role in that activity, as what one is endorsing, committing oneself to, or taking responsibility for.
- In light of the tripartite substructure of synthesizing a constellation of commitments exhibiting the rational unity distinctive of apperception (intentionality), this thought yields a conception of judgeable contents as articulated by rational relations of material incompatibility (appealed to by the critical task-responsibility) and material consequence (appealed to by the ampliative and justificatory task-responsibilities). The result is Hegel's conception of conceptual contentfulness in terms of determinate negation and mediation (which he will develop and motivate in more detail in the *Consciousness* section of the *Phenomenology*).
- The strategy for implementing the conceptualist order of explanation is to treat this account of the expressive-conceptual dimension of intentionality both as providing the raw materials and the model for an account of the representational dimension of intentionality and conceptual content.
- Alongside Kant's normative conception of judgment, a normative conception of representation is discerned. A judgment counts as representing some represented object insofar as it is responsible to that object for its correctness, insofar as that object exercises authority over or serves as a standard for assessments of its correctness.
- The strategy is then to apply the functionalist idea again, to understand representational content in terms of what is required to serve as a normative standard for assessments of the correctness of judgments, as an aspect of the synthetic process of integrating those commitments into constellations of antecedent commitments exhibiting the rational unity distinctive of apperception.

9. Saying what role in the synthetic-integrative process of judging a judgeable content must play in order to count as purporting to represent something is then satisfying what in the first

lecture I called the “mode of presentation” condition (MPC). For it is saying what it is to be or purport to be a mode of presentation of something else: a representing of that represented.

Hegel’s preferred way of talking about what I have called “representings” is “what things are *for* consciousness.”

10. Hegel offers a functionalist account of representational purport and representational content that is modeled on, embedded in, and a development of the functionalist account of propositional content in terms of the activity of judging that he sees as implicit in Kant’s way of proceeding.

11. What we must understand, then, is the sense in which, as Hegel says, which “consciousness provides itself with its own standard,” how “in what consciousness within its own self designates as the *in-itself* or the true, we have the standard by which consciousness itself proposes to measure its knowledge.” [PG §84] How is it that: “the difference between the *in-itself* and the *for-itself* is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all. Something is *to it* the *in-itself*, but the knowledge or the being of the object for consciousness is *to it* still another moment.” [PG §85]

12. What Hegel tells us is something *to* consciousness (using the dative “ihm”) is just the distinction between what things are *for* consciousness and what they are *in* themselves. I take it that what something is *for* consciousness is the content of a judgment: something that is *explicit*. By contrast, what things are *to* consciousness is a functional matter of how they are *implicitly* taken or practically treated by consciousness.

13. Consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what to it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. [PG §85]

14. The normative construal of representation teaches us that the role something must play in practice in order to be functioning as a reality that is represented by or appearing in a judgment is that of a normative *standard* for the assessment of its correctness. What in the first lecture I called the “rational constraint condition” tells us that what serves as a *standard of assessment* of judgeable contents must be able to serve as a *reason* for the assessment.

15. Hegel’s term for the process by which new commitments are integrated into a constellation of old ones is ‘experience’ (Erfahrung).

16. Triangulation: In treating the two shape-commitments as materially incompatible (in the context of the collateral commitments to rigidity and shape-constancy), the subject is implicitly treating them as having a common subject: as being *about* one and the same object. For commitments to stick A being bent and to stick B being straight are *not* incompatible. It is only if it is the *same* stick to which one is attributing those incompatible properties that the resulting judgeable contents are incompatible with one another.

17. The first stage of the process that is the experience of error is *acknowledgment* of the material incompatibility of some commitments the subject has made.

The second, *rectification*, stage of the experience of error consists in doing what at the first stage one acknowledged one’s practical obligation to do: repair the acknowledged incompatibility by revising or rejecting some of the offending commitments. In relinquishing the bent-stick belief and retaining the straight-stick belief, the subject is treating the first as presenting a mere *appearance*, and the second as presenting the corresponding *reality*.

18. The triangulation point ensures that the rejected bent-stick judgment is practically construed not just as an appearance, but as an appearance *of* the reality presented by the retained commitment: What appeared as bent (the stick) has been revealed as really straight.

19. When we look at the role played by various commitments in the experience of error, we see that the mode of presentation condition is satisfied in the sense required by the normative construal of representing.

20. Furthermore, the rational constraint condition is also satisfied by understanding representational purport functionally in terms of the role conceptually articulated judgeable contents play in processes that have the structure of the experience of error. For, in the context of the constellation of collateral commitments in our example, the straight-stick belief provides a *reason* for rejecting the bent-stick belief.

21. On Hegel's model the conceptual content shared by representing and represented, appearance and reality, phenomenon and noumenon, commitment and fact is abstracted from the two different forms that relations of material incompatibility and consequence can take: the subjective form made explicit by deontic normative vocabulary and the objective form made explicit by alethic modal vocabulary. Conceptual content is essentially, and not just accidentally, what can take these two forms. The central metaphysical concept that incorporates and expresses this point is determinate negation. It articulates the sense in which anything (thoughts, facts, properties, conceptual contents) can be *determinate*: by strongly contrasting with, precluding, excluding, other determinates (Spinoza: "Omnis determinatio est negatio.").

22. Hegel regards the subjective articulation of the conceptual content of commitments by deontic normative relations of material incompatibility-and-consequence and the objective articulation of the conceptual content of commitments by alethic modal relations of material incompatibility-and-consequence as two sides of one coin, two aspects of one conception.

23. How are we to understand the conception of conceptual content (articulated by relations of determinate negation and mediation) as *amphibious* between its two forms: subjective-normative and objective-modal? I think it should be understood in terms of two claims.

- a) Deontic normative vocabulary is a *pragmatic metavocabulary* for alethic modal vocabulary.
- b) As a consequence, there is a kind of *sense-dependence* relation between these vocabularies.

24. The claimed dependence of modal properties (via their amphibiously corresponding concepts) on norm-governed activities of accepting and rejecting commitments is of the sense-dependence, rather than the reference-dependence kind.

We are now in a position to understand the relation between propositional commitments (judgments, beliefs) articulated by normative deontic relations of incompatibility, on the subjective side of certainty, what things are for consciousness, and facts and possible states of affairs, articulated by alethic modal relations of incompatibility, on the objective side of truth, what things are in themselves, as itself a *representational* one: a matter of representings and representeds. We can see how our commitments are intelligible as *appearances of* an objective reality. That intelligibility is *functionalist*, and *pragmatist*. Now we know what we must *do* in order thereby implicitly to be practically taking or treating our commitments as appearances *of a* reality—so that the distinction between what things are *for* consciousness and what they are *in* themselves is something *to* consciousness.