

The Structure of Desire and Recognition: Self-Consciousness and Self-Constitution

I. The Historicity of Essentially Self-Conscious Creatures

1. Definition: A creature is “essentially self-conscious” iff what it is *for* itself is an essential element of what it is *in* itself.
2. Essentially self-conscious creatures are capable of a distinctive kind of self-*transformation*: *making* themselves be different by *taking* themselves to be different.
3. Essentially self-conscious beings don’t have *natures*, they have *histories*.

II. Identification, Risk, and Sacrifice

4. For some features of one’s self-conception to *be* essential is for one to *take* or *treat* them *as* essential. Doing that is *identifying* with those aspects of what one is *for* oneself.
5. One identifies with those elements of what one is *for* oneself for which one is willing to *risk* and *sacrifice* elements of what one is *in* oneself.
6. “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.” [PG §187]
7. Hegelian *Erfahrung*, the process of experience, ought to be understood as having this same general shape of identification and sacrifice. Each acknowledged *error* or *failure* calls for an act of self-identification: the endorsement of some of the mutually incompatible commitments one has found oneself with, and the sacrifice of others.

III. Creatures Things Can Be Something For: Desire and the Tripartite Structure of orectic Awareness

8. orectic awareness has a tripartite structure, epitomized by the relations between *hunger*, *eating*, and *food*.
9. The three elements are:
 - a) an *attitude* or desire, e.g. **hunger**,
 - b) a responsive *activity*, e.g. **eating**, and
 - c) a *significance*, e.g. **food**.

The three principal relations are:

- d) The attitude must *motivate* the activity, in the sense of *activating* a (more or less reliable, in a sense determined by the assessments in (f) below) disposition to respond differentially to objects.
- e) Responding to an object by engaging in the activity is taking or treating it in practice *as* having a significance defined by the attitude that motivates the activity. This is the *subjective* significance of the object.
- f) The desiring attitude *assesses* the object, implicitly attributing to it an *objective* significance, accordingly as responding to it by engaging in the activity the attitude motivates does or does not

satisfy the desire. If it does not, if what the object was subjectively or *for* the animal does not coincide with what it was objectively, or *in itself*, that is, if the activity was not *successful* in satisfying the motivating desire, then an *error* has been committed. In that case the desire motivates *changing* the reliable differential responsive disposition to engage in the associated activity when activated by the desire and stimulated by a range of objects.

IV. From Desire to Recognition: Two Interpretive Challenges

10. We should apply the answer we have in hand to the question “What is it for things to be something *for* a creature?” to the more specific case: “What is it for *selves* to be something things can be for a creature?” That is:
 - What would be required for the orectic significance something had for a desiring animal to be not *food* or *predator*, but *self* or *subject*, in the sense of something things can be something *for*?
 - Once we understand what it is to take or treat things as selves or subjects, what must one do to take *oneself* to be a thing of that kind, to take oneself to be a *self*?
11. Two challenges:
 - The *philosophical* challenge is to see what sort of an account of self-consciousness one can produce by applying the tripartite account of orectic awareness to itself.
 - The *interpretive* challenge is see to what extent one can by doing that explain the index features characteristic of Hegel’s distinctive claims about the nature of self-consciousness.
12. Two features of Hegel’s master-concept of recognition [Anerkennung]:
 - Both self-conscious *individual* selves and the communities they inhabit (a kind of *universal* characterizing them) are synthesized by reciprocal recognition among *particular* participants in the practices of such a recognitive community. Self-consciousness is essentially, and not just accidentally, a *social* achievement.
 - Recognition is a *normative* attitude. To recognize someone is to take her to be the subject of normative statuses, that is, of commitments and entitlements, as capable of undertaking responsibilities and exercising authority. This is what it means to say that as reciprocally recognized and recognizing, the creatures in question are *geistig*, spiritual, beings, and no longer merely natural ones.
13. Passages:
 - “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged....The detailed exposition of the Notion of this spiritual unity in its duplication will present us with the process of Recognition.” [PG §178].
 - “A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it. The ‘T’ which is the object of its Notion is in fact not ‘object’; the object of Desire, however, is only independent, for it is the universal indestructible substance, the fluid self-identical essence. A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much ‘T’ as ‘object’. With this, we already have before us the Notion of Spirit. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘T’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘T.’” [PG §177].
 - “But according to the Notion of recognition this [that a self-consciousness’ certainty of itself have truth] 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.” [PG §186].

14. Two issues that arise in understanding the discussion of recognition and self-consciousness:

- How are we to understand the transition from the discussion of the concept of desire to the discussion of the concept of recognition?
- Why should it be the case that *reciprocal* (that is, *symmetric*) recognition is a necessary condition of *reflexive* recognition (that is, self-consciousness, awareness of oneself *as a self*).

15. Fact:

- *If* a relation is both symmetric and transitive, then it is also reflexive, and hence is an equivalence relation.
- That is, if $\forall x, y [xRy \rightarrow yRx]$ and $\forall x, y, z [xRy \& yRz \rightarrow xRz]$, then $\forall x [xRx]$.
- For we can just apply the transitivity condition to the symmetry pairs xRy and yRx to yield xRx .
- So *if* recognition were (for some reason) *de jure* transitive—if it were part of the nature of recognition that one is committed to recognizing anyone recognized by someone one recognizes—*then* achieving *de facto* symmetry of recognition would suffice for achieving *de facto* reflexivity of recognition.

16. In what follows, we'll see how the tripartite account of orectic awareness can be used in a natural way to build a notion of recognition that satisfies these twin philosophical constraints on the interpretation of Hegel's notion of self-consciousness in terms of recognition. Doing so will both clarify the nature of the transition from *desire* to *recognition* and explain why *reciprocal* recognition is the key to *self-consciousness*.

V. Simple Recognition: Being something things can be something *for* being something things can be *for* one

17. To understand *recognition*, the tripartite structure of orectic awareness must be applied *twice*:

- It is the structure of the whole thing: “Self-consciousness is desire.” [§174]; recognition is a form of orectic awareness.
- The *significance* attributed to an object, what it is *for* the organism exhibiting the orectic awareness in question, is to be orectically aware: to be something things can be something *for*. That is, the *significance* attributed by engaging in a responsive *activity* and assessed by the motivating *attitude* must itself exhibit the tripartite structure of orectic awareness.

18. The tripartite structure of orectic awareness (TSOA) tells us that the two big questions that must be answered are these:

- What *activity* is it that institutes this significance (namely, having the TSOA)? That is, what is it that one must *do*, how must one *respond* to something, to count thereby as *taking* or *treating* it as exhibiting the TSOA? What is to the TSOA as *eating* is to *food*?
- What *desire* or other *attitude* is it that motivates that *activity* and *assesses* the *success* of taking something *as* having the orectic significance of being a TSOA, i.e. being something things can be something *for*? What is to the TSOA as *hunger* is to *food*?

19. Two suggestions:

- We may call what I must *do*, the *activity* that I must engage in, in order thereby to be *taking* or *treating* something in practice *as* something things can be something *for*, “recognizing” that other creature. Recognizing others is attributing to them the practical significance of exhibiting the tripartite structure of orectic awareness: taking them to be takers, subjects for whom things can have a practical significance relative to a desire and mediated by an activity.
- The desire or *attitude* that is the third element completing the TSOA whose attitude is recognizing and whose *significance* is exhibiting the TSOA is a *desire for recognition*: the desire

that others take or treat one in practice as a taker, as something things can be something *for*, as one whose *attitudes* (orectic or normative) institute of *significances*.

20. If engaging in the instrumental activity of responding to others by recognizing them yields the result that the desire to be recognized is *satisfied*:

- Then according to the TSOA the subjective significance the recognized ones have *for* the recognition-desirer shows up as being *correct*, as what they objectively are *in themselves*: subjects of significance-instituting attitudes and activities.
- And what is required for that is just that one be recognized (for that is what it takes to satisfy the desire) by those one recognizes (for that, on the line of thought being considered, is what one must *do* in order, if all goes well, to satisfy the desire).
- So it follows from the claim that the desire that completes the higher-order TSOA whose activity is recognition and whose instituted significance is exhibiting the TSOA is a desire for recognition that the recognition-desire can be satisfied only by achieving *reciprocal recognition*.

21. In order to give a reading of these claims in terms of the tripartite structure of orectic awareness, the black-box notion of recognition must be filled in so as to answer the following three questions:

- Recognizing: What, exactly, is it that one must *do* in order to be recognizing someone? That is, what *is* the activity we have labeled ‘recognizing’? How is it that doing that *is* taking or treating someone *as* exhibiting the tripartite structure of orectic awareness? What is the differential responsive disposition that is to be licensed by the instituting attitude?
- Being recognized: Why should the desire to be taken or treated that way oneself, that is, to be recognized, be the one making appropriate that activity, namely, recognizing?
- Self-Consciousness: Why does the reciprocal recognition that results when that desire for recognition is satisfied by recognizing someone else amount to *self-consciousness*, in the sense of applying a (proto-)conception of *selves* to oneself?

The challenge is to give an answer to the first question that will entail plausible answers to the other two questions.

22. General vs. specific recognition:

- a) Specifically recognizing another is attributing the capacity to accord things a specific significance, e.g. as a K. Generally recognizing another is specifically recognizing that one for some value of K or other.
- b) Specifically recognizing another is acknowledging their K-responses as having a certain kind of *authority*:
- c) My taking *your* K-response to have been authorized by a K-desire that serves as a standard for the success of your K-taking, and taking that K-response to have been *correct* or *successful* by that standard is my acknowledging the *authority* of your K-taking in the practical sense of being disposed *myself* to take the thing you took to be a K as a K. Taking it that the kind of fruit you ate really was food, in that it satisfied *your* hunger is being disposed to eat that kind of fruit myself when and if *I* am hungry, i.e. have a *desire* of the same kind. My acknowledging *your* K-desire as *authoritative* consists in my treating it as *authorizing* for my *own* K-takings, should *I* have a K-desire. So specific recognition involves acknowledging another as having some authority concerning how things are (what things are Ks).
- d) Doing that is treating you as one of *us*, in a primitive normative sense of ‘us’ instituted by just such specific cognitive attitudes.

VI: Robust Recognition: Specific Recognition of Another as a Recognizer

23. In treating the attitudes of the recognized other as having authority for those who do not feel them, the simple recognizer implicitly accords them a significance beyond that of mere desires: as *normatively* and not merely *immediately* significant attitudes.
24. What is it to take another not just to be orectically aware, but to be aware of others *as* orectically aware? What is it to recognize another as a simple recognizer, hence as itself the kind of thing for which things can have a specifically *normative* significance? Call that practical attitude *robust* recognition. Robust recognition is a kind of simple recognition: simple recognition of someone things can have a specific kind of orectic significance for, namely the significance of being something things can have orectic significances for.
25. What the robust recognizer must *do* to be taking someone as a simple recognizer is to acknowledge as authoritative whatever ground-level takings the one robustly recognized acknowledges as authoritative. And that is to say that the robust recognizer treats as *transitive* the inheritance of authority of ground-level takings that is what simple recognizing consists in.
26. Since robust recognition is the transitive closure of simple recognition, there is no difference between simple recognition of someone as a robust recognizer, and robust recognition (simple recognition of someone as a simple recognizer) of someone as a robust recognizer.
27. Transitivity: Recognizing as a recognizer is treating that one's recognitions as authoritative for one's own, so recognizing whoever he recognizes. So robust recognition is transitive: for what one is doing to be robust recognizing, it must include commitment to robustly recognize (simply recognize as a simple recognizer) whoever is robustly recognized by those one robustly recognizes.
28. We have now reached our explanatory-interpretive goal. For we wanted to know:
 1. how *recognition* should be understood to arise out of *desire*,
 2. how *normativity* should be understood as an aspect of *recognition*,
 3. how *self-recognition*, that is *reflexive* recognition relations, should be understood to require *reciprocal* recognition, that is to say *symmetric* recognition relations, and
 4. how *self-consciousness* should be understood to consist in the self-recognition achieved by reciprocal recognition.
 - The answer to the first question was supplied by seeing how the tripartite structure of orectic awareness could be applied to itself, so that what something was taken or treated in practice *as* was a desiring, significance-instituting creature.
 - The answer to the second was supplied by seeing how simple recognizing consists in the recognizer's achieving a mediated, distanced, relation to the immediate felt impulse of the recognized one's desire, in the form of its significance, conditional upon the recognizer's own desires, for the recognizer's own practical awareness. In this way the other's desire is practically acknowledged as *authoritative*, and the other's desire shows up for the recognizer in the shape of the recognizer's *commitment* or *responsibility*.
 - The answer to the third question was supplied by showing how (because of the idempotence of transitive closure operations) the social authority structure constitutive of robust recognition is essentially and in principle, hence unavoidably, *transitive*. For it is a basic algebraic fact that wherever a transitive relation happens to hold *symmetrically*, it is also *reflexive*.
 - It remains only to put these answers together to supply a response to the fourth and final question.

VII: Self-Consciousness

29. The connection between robust recognition and *self*-consciousness is as immediate as that between the tripartite structure of orectic awareness and consciousness.
30. To be a self, a subject, a consciousness—for Hegel as for Kant—is to be the subject of *normative* statuses: not just of desires, but of *commitments*. It is to be able to take a normative stand on things, to commit oneself, undertake responsibilities, exercise authority, assess correctness.
31. Recognition of any kind is taking or treating something *as* such a self or subject of normative statuses and attitudes.
32. *Self-consciousness* then consists in applying this practical proto-conception of a self to oneself: recognizing not just others, but oneself. This is *self*-consciousness, or having a self-conception, in a double sense. First, it is a matter of consciousness of something *as* a self: treating it as having that practical significance. Second, it is an application of that conception *to oneself*.
33. The lowest grade of self-conception that exhibits these two dimensions would be simple recognition of oneself: being orectically aware of oneself *as* orectically aware of things. We might call this ‘*simple* self-consciousness’. But the two dimensions are much more tightly bound up with one another if one is aware of oneself *as* able simply to recognize recognizers. In that case, the conception of selves that one applies to oneself is *as* something that has a conception of selves. We might call this ‘*robust* self-consciousness’.
34. Argument:
 - a) Suppose *a* robustly recognizes *b*:
 - b) Robust recognition is a kind of simple recognition: simple recognition as able to take others to be simple recognizers.
 - c) If *b* *robustly* recognizes someone, then that recognition is *successful* just in case it satisfies *b*’s desire for robust recognition.
 - d) If *b*’s robust recognition of someone is successful in this sense, then in virtue of robustly recognizing *b*, *a* must acknowledge *b*’s robust recognitions as authoritative.
 - e) But since by hypothesis *a* *does* robustly recognize *b*, *b*’s desire for robust recognition *is* satisfied, so all *b*’s robust recognitions are successful (in *a*’s eyes).
 - f) Thus if it should happen that *b* *does robustly* recognize *a*, then since *a* robustly recognizes *b*, we have a symmetry of robust recognition.
 - g) Since, as we have seen, robust recognition is transitive, this means that *a* will acknowledge the authority of *b*’s robust recognition of *a*.
 - h) So *a* counts as robustly recognizing himself.
 - i) Thus reciprocal robust recognition is what robust self-consciousness consists in.
35. Because it persists as part of the necessary background against which any other commitments are adopted and relinquished, being for oneself a recognizer is an *essential* element of one’s self-conception. One’s identification with it consists practically in the structural impossibility of relinquishing that commitment in favor of others. To be self-conscious *is* to be *essentially* self-conscious: to be *for* oneself, and identify oneself with oneself *as* something that is for oneself, a recognized and recognizing being.