

November 15, 2017

Handout for Spirit II—Week 12

Two meta-attitudes:

The **edelmütig meta-attitude** takes it that there really are norms that attitudes are directed towards and answer to. It treats norms as genuinely efficacious, as really making a difference to what individuals do.

The **niederträchtig meta-attitude** sees only normative attitudes. The norms are construed as at most adverbial modifications of the attitudes: a way of talking about the contents of those attitudes. *Niederträchtigkeit* is the purest expression of the alienated character of modern normativity (hence culture, self-consciousness, and community).

Crucial passage about “playing the moral valet.” ‘Valet’ is ‘Kammerdiener’, so I will call this focal stretch of text “**the Kammerdiener passage**”. It expresses a cardinal form of *Niederträchtigkeit*, holding fast to the *disparity* that action involves:

“Now the judging consciousness does not stop short at the former aspect of duty, at the doer's knowledge of it that this is his duty, and the fact that the doer knows it to be his duty, the condition and status of his reality. On the contrary, it holds to the other aspect, and explains [the action] as resulting from an intention different from the action itself, and from selfish motives.

Just as every action is capable of being looked at from the point of view of conformity to duty, so too can it be considered from the point of view of the particularity [of the doer]; for, qua action, it is the actuality of the individual. This judging of the action thus takes it out of its outer existence and reflects it into its inner aspect, or into the form of its own particularity. If the action is accompanied by fame, then it knows this inner aspect to be a desire for fame. If it is altogether in keeping with the station of the individual, without going beyond this station, and of such a nature that the individuality does not possess its station as a character externally attached to it, but through its own self gives filling to this universality, thereby showing itself capable of a higher station, then the inner aspect of the action is judged to be ambition, and so on. Since, in the action as such, the doer attains to a vision of himself in objectivity, or to a feeling of self in his existence, and thus to enjoyment, the inner aspect is judged to be an urge to secure his own happiness, even though this were to consist merely in an inner moral conceit, in the enjoyment of being conscious of his own superiority and in the foretaste of a hope of future happiness. **No action can escape such judgement, for duty for duty's sake, this pure purpose, is an unreality;** it becomes a reality in the deed of an individuality, and the action is thereby charged with the aspect of particularity. **No man is a hero to his valet; not, however, because the man is not a hero, but because the valet—is a valet,** whose dealings are with the man, not as a hero, but as one who eats, drinks, and wears clothes, in general, with his individual wants and fancies. Thus, **for the judging consciousness, there is no action in which it could not oppose to the universal aspect of the action, the personal aspect of the individuality, and play the part of the moral valet towards the agent.”** [PG §665]

Four Species of *Niederträchtigkeit*:

- 1) All the explanatory work is done by attitudes. Statuses superfluous or irrelevant. Kammerdiener. Harman.
- 2) Humean eschewing of motivationally “external” reasons.
- 3) Reductive naturalism about normativity.
- 4) Genealogy of normative attitudes (their rational contingency) undercuts rational bindingness of norms. Wittgenstein.

Four Meta-Meta-Normative Attitudes to the Two Meta-Normative Attitudes

- 1) The first way of understanding the relation between the *edelmütig* normativist and the *niederträchtig* naturalist is as a *cognitive* disagreement about a matter of *objective fact*. They disagree about the correct answer to the question: Are there norms, or not?
- 2) The second is an almost diametrically opposed subjectivist meta-meta-attitude. According to this way of thinking, the normativist and the naturalist employ different vocabularies in describing the world. Using one rather than the other is adopting a *stance*. The two stances are incompatible; one cannot adopt them both. One either uses normative vocabulary or one does not. But both of them are available, and both of them are legitimate. As for the legitimacy of the reductive, *niederträchtig* attitude, Hegel acknowledges that the Kammerdiener is *not wrong*. **“No action can escape such judgement,”**
 there is no action in which it could not oppose to the universal aspect of the action,
 the personal aspect of the individuality, and play the part of the moral valet towards
 the agent. [PG §665].

Every intentional action is “charged with the aspect of particularity,” in that the agent must have had some motive for performing it, some attitude that was efficacious in bringing it about. Norms are efficacious only through attitudes towards them.

Just so, **“every action is capable of being looked at from the point of view of conformity to duty,”** that is, in the *edelmütig* normative vocabulary. What shows up in the causal-psychological vocabulary of the Kammerdiener is nature, natural beings, and natural processes: the world of desire. What shows up in the normative vocabulary of the hero is Spirit, *geistig* beings, and discursive practices: the world of recognition.

(1) and (2) are purely *cognitive* meta-meta-attitudes.

- 3) The third construal of the *niederträchtig* and *edelmütig* meta-attitudes toward norms and normative attitudes is that they are ***recognitive rather than cognitive attitudes***, which have the effect of *practical commitments*. Adopting the *niederträchtig* meta-attitude not only “holds fast” to the “disparity of the action with itself,” but “divides up the action” and “*produces*” the disparity. Normativity and rationality are *products* of our *edelmütig* meta-attitudes, of our practically taking or treating what we are doing (recognizing each other) as acknowledging rational commitments. Spirit exists insofar as we *make* it exist by *taking* it to exist: by understanding what we are doing in normative, rational terms.

This third understanding of the meta-attitudes of *Niederträchtigkeit* and *Edelmütigkeit*, as practical, recognitive, hence community- and self-constitutive, like the second, still presents them as **options available for the subject freely to choose between**. It is up to us whether to make ourselves into merely natural or genuinely normative beings.

4) A fourth way of understanding the status of these two stances is that **we have always already implicitly committed ourselves to adopting the edelmütig stance**, to identifying with the unity that action and consciousness involve, to understanding ourselves as genuinely binding ourselves by conceptual norms that we apply in acting intentionally and making judgments.

Confession, Forgiveness, and Trust: The Final Form of Reciprocal Recognition

The final movement of *Spirit* is discussed in the concluding eleven paragraphs of this long chapter. It takes the form of a parable, a narrative recounting sequential stages in the relationship between an “evil consciousness” [PG 661] and a “hard-hearted judge” [PG 669-70]: evil [PG 661-62], judgment [PG 662-66], confession [PG 666], refusal of reciprocal confession [PG 667-68], the breaking of the hard heart and confession by the judge [PG 669], forgiveness [PG 669-71], and the achievement of a new kind of community (“The reconciling Yea, in which the two 'I's let go their antithetical existence, is the existence of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality.” [PG 671]).

As our story begins, the recognitive attitudes in virtue of which the acting consciousness is denominated ‘evil’ or ‘wicked’ [böse], and the judge “hard-hearted” are *niederträchtig* ones.

The consciousness that judges in this way is itself base [*niederträchtig*], because it divides up the action, producing and holding fast to the disparity of the action with itself. [PG 666]

“The consciousness of an act declares its specific action to be a duty.” [PG 665]

This is how the agent justifies his action: by saying (here using Kantian terminology) that it falls under a norm, that it correct or required.

The first step toward a symmetric, genuinely reciprocal interpersonal recognitive relation is taken by the individual who is judged, who *confesses* its particularity and the contingency of its attitudes. [PG 666] Confessing is acknowledging and accepting the correctness of the indictment of the *niederträchtig* judge. It is a speech act, because “language as the existence of Spirit...is self-consciousness existing for others,” [PG 652], “it is the self which as such is actual in language, which declares itself to be the truth, and just by so doing acknowledges all other selves and is acknowledged by them.” [PG 654] “Confession” is *Bekennntnis*.

If the Kammerdiener’s reductive naturalism is correct, then it applies to the judge too.

Perceiving this identity and giving utterance to it, he confesses this to the other, and equally expects that the other, having in fact put himself on the same level, will also respond in words in which he will give utterance to this identity with him, and expects that this mutual recognition will now exist in fact. [PG 666]

The confession of the one who is wicked, 'I am so', is not followed by a reciprocal similar confession. This was not what the judging consciousness meant: quite the contrary. It repels this community of nature, and is the hard heart that is for itself, and which rejects any continuity with the other. [PG 667]

As a result, the situation is reversed. The one who made the confession sees himself repulsed, and sees the other to be in the wrong when he refuses to let his own inner being come forth into the outer existence of speech, when the other contrasts the beauty of his own soul with the penitent's wickedness, yet confronts the confession of the penitent with his own stiff-necked unrepentant character, mutely keeping himself to himself and refusing to throw himself away for someone else. [667]

It is thus its own self which hinders that other's return from the deed into the spiritual existence of speech and into the identity of Spirit, and by this hardness of heart produces the disparity which still exists. [PG 667]

The next step in Hegel's allegory is *forgiveness* [*Verzeihung*]. Hegel introduces this notion in the penultimate paragraph of *Spirit*:

The forgiveness which it extends to the other is the renunciation of itself, of its unreal essential being which it put on a level with that other which was a real action, and acknowledges that what thought characterized as bad, viz. action, is good; or rather it abandons this distinction of the specific thought and its subjectively determined judgement, just as the other abandons its subjective characterization of action. The word of reconciliation is the objectively existent Spirit, which beholds the pure knowledge of itself qua universal essence, in its opposite, in the pure knowledge of itself qua absolutely self-contained and exclusive individuality—a reciprocal recognition which is absolute Spirit. [PG 670]

Forgiving, like confessing, is a *speech* act, something done in *language*. It is doing something by saying something. That is why Hegel talks about it in terms of the “word of reconciliation [*Versöhnung*] [PG 670].

Spirit, in the absolute certainty of itself, is lord and master over every deed and actuality, and can cast them off, and make them as if they had never happened.” [PG 667]

The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind. The deed is not imperishable; it is taken back by Spirit into itself, and the aspect of individuality present in it, whether as intention or as an existent negativity and limitation, straightway vanishes. The self that carries out the action, the form of its act, is only a moment of the whole... [PG 669]

But just as the former has to surrender its one-sided, unacknowledged existence of its particular being-for-self, so too must this other set aside its one-sided, unacknowledged judgement. And just as the former exhibits the power of Spirit over its actual existence, so does this other exhibit the power of Spirit over its determinate concept [seinen bestimmten Begriff¹]. [PG 669]

The forgiveness which it extends to the other is the renunciation of itself, of its unreal essential being which it put on a level with that other which was a real action, and acknowledges that what thought characterized as bad, viz. action, is good; or rather it abandons this distinction of the specific thought and its *subjectively* determined judgement, just as the other abandons its subjective characterization of action. The word of reconciliation is the *objectively* existent Spirit, which beholds the pure knowledge of itself qua universal essence, in its opposite, in the pure knowledge of itself qua absolutely self-contained and exclusive individuality—a reciprocal recognition which is *absolute* Spirit. [PG 670]

The reconciling Yea, in which the two 'I's let go their antithetical existence, is the existence of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and, in its complete externalization and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself: it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge. [PG 671]

At this point I bring this history of Philosophy to a close. It has been my desire that you should learn from it that the history of philosophy is not a blind collection of fanciful ideas, nor a fortuitous progression. I have rather sought to show the necessary development of the successive philosophies from one another, so that the one of necessity presupposes another preceding it. The general result of the history of Philosophy is this: in the first place, that throughout all time there has been only one Philosophy, the contemporary differences of which constitute the necessary aspects of one principle; in the second place, that the succession of philosophic systems is not due to chance, but represents the necessary succession of stages in the development of this science; in the third place, that the final philosophy of a period is the result of this development, and is truth in the highest form which the self-consciousness of spirit affords of itself. The latest philosophy contains therefore those which went before; it embraces in itself all the different stages thereof; it is the product and the result of those that preceded it....It is my desire that this history of Philosophy should contain for you a summons to grasp the spirit of the time, which is present in us by nature, and—each in his own place—consciously to bring it from its natural condition, i.e. from its lifeless seclusion, into the light of day.

[*Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (trans.) [New Jersey: Humanities Press 1983] volume 3, pp. 552-53.]

¹ I have altered the translation here. Miller has: “over its specific Notion *of itself*” [emphasis added], reading “its concept” (or “his concept”), “seinem (bestimmten) Begriff,” as a concept *of* the forgiving judge in the sense of having him as its object, rather than its subject—that is, as an objective, rather than a subjective genitive.