

Self-Consciousness Notes

My accounts of both SC and FU often invoked Sellars's later formulations of points. But from here forward we'll hardly hear from him.

It is in self-consciousness, in the Notion of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind it **the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now** and **the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond**, and steps out into **the spiritual daylight of the present**.
[177]

Some readers of the *Phenomenology* have been misled by the fact that there is a retrospectively discerned historical progression *within* the discussions of each of *Consciousness*, *Self-Consciousness*, and *Reason* into supposing that these three sections themselves form a single historical progression. But the largest divisions in the *Phenomenology* are not related to one another like this. The movements of self-consciousness do not come *after* those of consciousness, nor do they come *before* those of Reason, except in the exposition of the book. *Consciousness* concerns what Sellars calls “language-entry transitions” in perception, and the kind of empirical knowledge built on them. *Self-Consciousness* concerns the knowing and acting subjects or selves, who live and move and have their being in a *normative* space that is necessarily a *social* space. *Reason* concerns what Sellars calls “language-exit transitions” through exercises of *intentional agency*. “Reason is purposeful agency,” Hegel says in [24]. To understand the book in the traditional way is to mistake the order of exposition for the order of the developments it relates. Hyppolite was already quite explicit on this fundamental point:

Hegel quite clearly insists that the three moments, consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason, are not to be considered a succession. They are not in time: they are abstractions contrived from within the whole of spirit and studied in their separate development. Only the specific forms of these moments -- sensuous certainty, perception, understanding, etc., which represent a concrete totality -- can be considered to be successive within the moment of which they are a part.¹

"The moments are **consciousness**, **self-consciousness**, **Reason**, and **Spirit** -- Spirit that is, as immediate Spirit, which is not yet consciousness of Spirit. Their totality, **taken together**, constitutes Spirit in its mundane existence generally; Spirit as such contains the previous structured shapes in universal determinations, in the moments just named...Only the totality of

¹ Jean Hyppolite *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* [ref.] pp. 36-7.

Spirit is in Time, and the 'shapes', which are 'shapes' of the totality of **Spirit**, display themselves in a temporal succession; for only the whole has true actuality and therefore the form of pure freedom in the face of an 'other', a form which expresses itself in Time. But the **moments** of the whole, consciousness, self-consciousness, Reason, and Spirit, just because they are moments, have no existence in separation from one another." [679]

"Thus while the previous single series in its advance marked the retrogressive steps in it by nodes, but continued itself again from them in a single line, it is now, as it were, broken at these nodes, at these universal moments, and falls apart into many lines, which, gathered up into a single bundle, at the same time combine symmetrically so that the similar differences in which each particular moment took shape within itself meet together." [681]

(I take it that the inclusion of immediate Spirit along with consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason in the first passage is explicitly to mark the role of the community, which is the other side of individual self-consciousness.)

After (in the order of exposition of the *Phenomenology*) we have learned various lessons about the different aspects of discursive activity discussed severally in *Consciousness*, *Self-Consciousness*, and *Reason*, we can put all three of them together and discuss the whole phenomenon they are aspects of, in *Spirit*.

1. Four Kantian master ideas:
 - a) Normativity of intentionality. Judgment and intentional action.
 - b) Criterion of demarcation of the normative: autonomy. One is only genuinely *normatively* bound by commitments one has undertaken oneself.
 - c) Positive notion of freedom as constraint by norms.
 - d) This last idea has two aspects:
 - i. Constitutivism about morality: some commitments are implicit in being a knower and an agent at all. They are framework-explicating commitments.
 - ii. This is the practical analogue of categories (=pure concepts of the understanding) as framework-explicating concepts on the cognitive side.
2. Six Hegelian master ideas:
 - a) Distinction between normative statuses and normative attitudes: what things are in themselves and what they are for consciousness. This is on (normative) side of subjects. On side of objects this is properties and relations, and on side of our knowledge of them it is what is known and knowing of it. (Will see connection between alethic and deontic-normative in various forms of idealism.)

- b) Biggest historical change: from one-sided appreciation of the status-dependence of normative attitudes (traditional) to one-sided appreciation of the attitude-dependence of normative statuses (modern).
- c) [For next time:] Allegory of struggle-unto-death is to explain why this change from the status-dependence of normative attitudes (traditional) to the attitude-dependence of normative statuses (modern) coincides with shift from **subordination-obedience model** of normativity to **autonomy**: the epitome of modernity. This story starts with notion of identification in terms of *risk* and *sacrifice*, as what makes one *essentially* self-conscious.
- d) Social account of normativity. Naturalizing Kant's autonomy notion. Cf. LW on sign-post. From autonomy to **reciprocal recognition**. Normative statuses instituted by attitudes of *recognition* when they have the right social structure—specifically, when they are mutual or reciprocal.

Note that in Ch. 9, I reread history of early modern metaphysics of normativity in the light of (1a)—so it is not just about moral normativity—(2a), (2b), and (2c).

- e) On low end, in service of naturalizing: self-consciousness as desire. “
[T]he unity of self-consciousness with itself... must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. **self-consciousness is Desire in general**.” [167]
My reading: tripartite orectic theory of proto-consciousness.
- f) On high end: idea of **essentially self-conscious creatures** as ones such that what they are for themselves is an essential element of what they are in themselves (attitudes essential to statuses). They are subject to a distinctive kind of developmental process: a *historical* one. They have histories, not natures.

Two other points:

- My model of how Hegel gets from autonomy to recognition (with diagrams of BKNS and socially augmented BKNS, then RR).
- [For next time:]The ironic structural metaphysical defect in Mastery and the subordination-obedience model generally: Why the Master can't get what he wants or be who he wants to be. The causality of fate.

3. Next: methodology. One thing that is vividly going to be on display today is a feature of the way I do philosophy that is in many ways unusual. That is the construction of relatively simple *models* which I then elaborate to construct analogues of various philosophical phenomena, including those phenomena *as* rendered by other philosophers. This amounts to theory-building (constructions) in Sellars's sense of postulating unobservables. LW objects to this. “Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences,” he says in both TLP and PI. And he thinks that one would be guilty of scientism in this sense if one created philosophical theories, by postulating unobservables. (As a consequence, he is a nihilist about semantics.) But this is too far. I think Hegel has a model of the metaphysics of normativity, and I'm going to reconstruct and explicate it in my own terms.

But first, I want to consider two very simple models I think Hegel has in play, one at the naturalistic base, and one at a very high level. These are:

- a) The tripartite orectic model of proto-consciousness, in terms of *desire*.
- b) The idea of *essentially self-conscious* creatures as *historical* beings.

4. Tripartite orectic model of proto-consciousness:

- a) Start from two-part behaviorist stimulus/response model.

Dewey on the “Reflex Arc Concept.”

Dennett’s version of Chomsky’s criticism of behaviorist Skinnerian operant conditioning (learning) model. Rat trained to walk forward, push bar to get treat.

- b) We’ll see what we get by switching from 2 to 3 components.

“[T]he unity of self-consciousness with itself... must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. **self-consciousness is Desire in general.**” [167]

Self-consciousness which is simply for itself and directly characterizes its object as a negative element, or is primarily desire, will therefore, on the contrary, learn through experience that the object is independent. [168]

; self-consciousness is Desire. [174]

[175] to [177]

The three elements of the model are:

- c) an *attitude* or desire, e.g. **hunger**,
- d) a responsive *activity*, e.g. **eating**, and
- e) a *significance*, e.g. **food**.

The three principal relations of elements in the model are:

- f) 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.
- g) 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.
- h) 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.

Compare: My MIE development: Dummett adding cons to circs, me breaking propriety (appropriate/not) into commitment/entitlement.

5. 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*.

Normativity itself has a history.

To understand it, we need to look at Hegel's overall model of statuses and attitudes.

6. Hegel's model: normative statuses and attitudes.

At this point have seen in-itself/for-another

- a) objectively, for intrinsic vs relational properties,
- b) intentionality, for in itself and for consciousness, the two poles of consciousness, and
- c) now look at side of subject. Here it is the distinction between normative *statuses* of subjects and normative *attitudes* of subjects.

One of the biggest ideas of the book is about the relations between these: his historical idea about tradition to modernity. This is that the single biggest thing that ever happened in human history, the shift in the structure of normativity itself, both what it is in itself and what it is for consciousness--these being inextricably intertwined, for we are essentially self-conscious--from a traditional to a modern structure. That change in the metaphysical structure of normativity is the change from normative statuses as authoritative over normative attitudes to the converse. For reasons that will become clear, I'll put this in terms of status-dependence of attitudes and attitude-dependence of statuses.

The single biggest thing that ever happened in human history is the transformation from traditional to modern structures of normative statuses and attitudes.

This is the change from one-sided practical appreciation of the *status-dependence of normative attitudes* to one-sided practical appreciation of the *attitude-dependence of normative statuses*.

It is also the change from *subordination-obedience* models and structures of normativity to *autonomy* models and structures of normativity (in both Kant's individual form and Hegel's social-recognitive form). (Next time we'll read Hegel's allegorical account of why these are two aspects of one transformation, in terms of the "struggle-unto-death.")

7. BKNS and autonomy.

- a) Rousseau: "Obedience to a law one has prescribed for oneself is freedom." [*Social Contract* I.viii.]
- b) Hegel: "The principle of freedom emerges in Rousseau...This furnishes the transition to the Kantian philosophy..." [*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Volume III].
- c) Kant turns Rousseau's definition of freedom into a criterion of demarcation for a distinctive sense of normative bindingness. He appeals to the symmetric attitudes involved in obedience to self-imposed obligations to define what it is for a status to count as a *normative* status, using autonomy as a criterion of demarcation for the normative.
- d) Kant's idea: can *make* oneself responsible by *taking* oneself to be responsible.

8. Social BKNS to Recognition

Recognition Passages (emphases added):

“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 'I' 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 'I' 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: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I.'” [PG §177].

“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].

“Now, this movement of self-consciousness in relation to **another** self-consciousness has in this way been represented as the action of **one** self-consciousness, but this action of the one has itself the double significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well. For the other is equally independent and self-contained, and there is nothing in it of which it is not itself the origin...Thus the movement is simply **the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses**. Each sees the other do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. **Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.**” [182]

“They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.” [184]

“We have now to see how **the process of this pure Notion of recognition, of the duplicating of self-consciousness in its oneness**, appears to self-consciousness. At first, it will exhibit the side of the inequality of the two, or the splitting-up of the middle term into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only recognized, the other only recognizing.” [185]

“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].

- a) Kant and Rousseau achieved symmetry within a conception that is recognizably a version of the legislating/obeying model by adopting a *reflexivity* strategy: identifying the commanding with the commanded. Hegel does so by adopting a *symmetry* strategy: understanding the key social normative relation to be one where both subjects standing in that social cognitive relation play both roles. Both metaphysical models can be seen as versions of the idea that normative attitudes of command and obedience between

individuals standing in subordination relations can institute statuses of obligation that are genuinely *normative* statuses only if they are intelligible as having the structure of *self-government*. The autonomy model applies that idea by requiring that the instituting attitudes be reflexive. The recognition model applies that idea by requiring that the instituting attitudes be symmetric. According to this new essentially *social* conception of normative self-hood, the self-constituting, self-conscious subject of both normative attitudes and the normative statuses they institute is what Hegel calls “the ‘I’ that is ‘we’, the ‘we’ that is ‘I’.” [PhG 177].

- b) According to the recognitive model of the institution of normative statuses by normative attitudes, the *authority* to recognize (which is, *inter alia*, attributed by the attitude of recognition) and the *responsibility* to recognize are two sides of one coin. Attributing recognitive authority implies acknowledging recognitive responsibility.
- c) To be a self in the full normative sense is to have not only actual normative attitudes, but also actual normative statuses: not only to *take* oneself or others to have authority or be responsible, but actually to *have* authority or *be* responsible. To achieve such a status, a normative subject must participate in a general recognitive dyad: must actually be recognized by someone that subject actually recognizes. For only suitably socially complemented attitudes institute actual statuses
- d) In the mutual recognition model, authority and responsibility are co-ordinate and complementary. It is entirely up to me whom I recognize: to whom I attribute the authority to institute normative statuses by their attitudes, when those attitudes are suitably complemented by those to whom they attribute them. In doing so, though, I make myself responsible to those I do recognize. For while it is up to me in that same sense (I have the authority) to acknowledge commitments (responsibilities) on my own part, it is not in the same sense up to me whether I succeed in *making* myself responsible by so *taking* myself to be responsible. My acknowledgement of a commitment, my claim of authority, yield actual statuses of responsibility and authority only if those statuses are also attributed to me by those I have granted the authority to do so, by recognizing them. Nothing but attitudes are necessary (or sufficient) to institute genuine normative statuses. But on the Hegelian recognitive model such normative statuses are understood as essentially *social* statuses. It is *our* attitudes—my attitudes *and* the attitudes of those I recognize and who recognize me, a recognitive community—that institute normative statuses. My attitudes play an essential role in determining what authority and responsibility I have, but I cannot make myself authoritative or responsible all on my own.
- e) Structure of authority and responsibility illustrated by choices about being a good chess player—or writer.

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