

Reason I Notes

1. “Reason” [Vernunft] is used in three important, and importantly different, though related ways here:

- a) “Reason is purposive action” [22] Die Vernunft ist das *zweckmäßige Tun*.
- b) The distinction between construing the discursive (- what is conceptually structured = everything) according to the categories of *Verstand* and construing them according to the categories of *Vernunft*. This is the move from *representational* to *conceptual* [*begrifflich*] categories.
- c) “Die Vernunft ist die Gewißheit des Bewußtseins, alle Realität zu sein: so spricht der Idealismus ihren Begriff aus.” [233]

Re (a): This passage indicates the topic of the *Reason* chapter: intentional agency. This pairs with the *Consciousness* treatment of empirical knowledge, as theoretical **cognition** to practical **action**. In between had treatment of normative selves (subjects), statuses, and attitudes. Now will come to see cognition as an aspect of the TOTE cycle of perception-thought-action, which becomes the more-encompassing topic in *Reason*.

Re (b): The features that distinguish *Vernunft* from *Verstand* are:

- i. From *representation* to *conceptual content*
- ii. From *atomism* to *holism* about content.
- iii. From *static* to *dynamic* understanding of content.
- iv. From Kant-Frege understanding of determinateness and relations between senses and referents to Hegelian determinateness and relations between senses and referents.
- v. From Kantian to Hegelian understanding of sense in which sensuous *immediacy* outruns conceptual *mediation*: from *infinite accumulation* of empirical judgments to *necessary instability* of determinate concepts.

All of these are to be understood in terms of practical agency, more specifically, the *social* and *historical* structure of the cycle of perception-thought-agency.

We will come to see the prospective determination of the content of intentions and thoughts and the retrospective-recollective determination of them (*Absicht* and *referents*) as two sides of one coin. Both involve **giving contingency the form of necessity, incorporating immediacy into mediated conceptual contents**.

Re (c):

Since **self-consciousness is reason, what had so far been its negative relation to otherness is now converted into a positive relation**. Until now it had occupied itself only with its self-sufficiency and its freedom in order to save and preserve itself for itself at the cost of the *world* or its own actuality, both of which appeared to it as the negative of its own essence. However, as reason assured of itself, it has come to be at rest with regard to both of them, and it can sustain them, for **it is certain of itself as being reality**. That is, it is certain **that all actuality is nothing**

but itself, that its thought itself is immediately actuality, and it is therefore as idealism that it conducts itself in relation to actuality. Since it grasps itself in this way, in its own eyes it is as if the world had only now come to be for it for the first time.

Formerly, it did not understand the world; it desired it and worked on it, withdrew itself from it, took an inward turn back into itself away from it, and abolished the world for itself and itself as consciousness, that is, it abolished itself both as consciousness of it as the essence as well as consciousness of its nullity.

...it discovers here for the first time the world as *its* newly actual world. In its continuing existence, this world interests it in the way it previously was only interested in the world's disappearance, for that world's *durable existence* comes to be in its eyes its own *truth* and *present moment*, and it is certain that it experiences only itself within it. [232]

I think this invokes all three layers of idealism that I have distinguished:

- Conceptual realism
- Objective idealism
- Conceptual idealism.

But particularly, the last of these. For the processes that establish the relations between the subjective and objective poles of the intentional nexus have the form of the cycle of perception-thought-action.

Overall themes:

1. LW expresses the topic with his question: "What is the difference between my raising my arm and my arm going up?" Hornsby: the transitive and intransitive senses of doings.

2. Two ideas (one ancient and one modern) about agency, and two orders of explanation:

- a) First idea: Aristotle forges the connection with **practical reasoning**.
- b) Second idea: Agency connected to issue of **freedom**, and **responsibility**.

These are connected by the principle "No responsibility without freedom."

Locke in effect constructs a notion of intentional agency by combining two elements:

i. What Dummett calls "largely forensic *consequences* of application": genuine doings are those one is *responsible* for, with

ii. with the *circumstances* of application that one must have produced the doing *freely*, in the sense that one could have done otherwise.

c) The *empiricist* tradition starts with the circumstances of application: one is responsible for whatever one has done freely, and only that. Free will, by contrast to determinism, requires that one could have done otherwise. That is to say that free will is understood in terms of conditions expressed in *alethic modal* vocabulary, of possibility and necessity.

d) *Kant* accepts the Lockean circumstances and consequences of application for intentional doings (the transitive sense), but reverses the order of explanation. He starts with a notion of responsibility, and understands freedom in terms of it. What we are responsible is *by definition* done freely. That is to say, he understands freedom ultimately in *deontic normative* terms: as a kind of *authority*.

What it is for a performance to be *mine* in the sense of being *my doing*, is for me to be in a distinctive way *responsible* for it. For that to be true, it must be possible to understand me as having a special kind of *authority* over what happens. This is the Kantian deontic-normative version of the consequences and circumstances of application of “intentional doing.”

- e) Kant connects the conditions formulated in alethic modal and deontic normative vocabularies by the principle that “ought implies can.”
- f) Kant applies that principle atomistically, to each individual action, with the ‘ought’ and the ‘can’ applying to that individual acting subject on that occasion. Hegel thinks this is far too simplistic and individualistic. The relation between objective alethic necessity and subjective normative necessity is much more complicated, and is articulated along both *social* and *historical* dimensions. Properly understood, *individuals* produce actions (causally), but *recognitive communities* are equally responsible for them.
- g) Hegel, of course, is in the Kantian tradition.
- h) Wittgenstein belongs to the normative tradition, rather than the empiricist one, on this issue.
- i) So does Anscombe.
- j) Davidson goes both ways: he sees that the issue is normative, but is a humean about practical reasoning.
- k) Thompson and McDowell both come out of Anscombe.

3. Specification of the problem:

We observe both:

- a) The unity of action, and
 - b) The disparity that action involves.
- c) **Two Sides of the Concept of Action: The unity and disparity that action involves**
- a) When he introduces the topic in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel says that the first determination of action [Handlung] is that “it must be known in its externality as mine,” [RP 113]
 - b) The sense in which the action is *mine*, its ownedness, is a *normative* one. It is a way of bringing into view a distinctive constellation of coordinate *responsibility* and *authority*: **responsibility for a performance, predicated on authority over it.**
 - c) The upshot of the discussions of *Consciousness* and *Self-Consciousness* has been that we must understand the sort of authority characteristic of agency in order to understand both the way our empirical judgments are responsible for their correctness to the objective world they thereby count as being about (acknowledge the authority of), and the self-conscious individual subjects of theoretical and practical commitments, who acknowledge and exercise various kinds of conceptually articulated authority. The theoretical challenge confronting all of the forms of practical self-consciousness canvassed in *Reason* is to **understand how the authority over what happens that is constitutive of agency can be genuine without being total.** The model of authority as *constitutive* authority introduced to us by the allegory of Mastery sees attributions of *independence* (authority) as incompatible with acknowledgment of coordinate *dependence* (responsibility) that limits that authority. Until a better model is developed,

the fact of what Hegel calls “**the first division [Bruch] in action**”, namely “**that between what is purposed and what is accomplished in the realm of existence,**”¹ constantly threatens to make practical self-consciousness “**become a riddle to itself,**” because “**the consequences of its deed are for it not the deeds themselves.**”²

d) At this point, Hegel moves the question up a level, from concern with the contrast between different aspects of a doing to an issue about identity-through-difference (his favorite conceptual playground). The basic problem with which the model of authority as Mastery (independence as constitutive authority) finds itself unable to cope is that of bringing together into an intelligible whole two aspects of the concept of intentional action that stand in at least apparent tension with one another. These are:

i) the unity of an action, as it develops from envisaged purpose to completed performance, and

ii) “the *distinction* and *dichotomy* that lie in action as such and so constitute a stubborn actuality confronting action.”³

e) The “unity and necessity” of an action are what constitute its identity. “The necessity of the action consists in the fact that purpose is related simply to actuality, and this unity is the Notion of action.”⁴

Action alters nothing and opposes nothing. It is the pure form of a transition from a state of not being seen to one of being seen, and the content which is brought out into the daylight and displayed is nothing else but what this action already is in itself.⁵

Note that what is at issue here is two forms of one content. Understanding that notion of content requires understanding it as *essentially* capable of taking *both* forms, and, indeed, as intelligible in principle only in virtue of the *process of transition* from the one form to the other. This *expressive* process is the cycle of perception-thought-and-action.

“Action simply translates an initially implicit being into a being that is made explicit....”⁶

The Notion of this sphere requires that these various aspects be grasped in such a way that the content in them remains the same without any distinction, whether between individuality and being in general,
or between End as against individuality as an original nature,
or between End and the given reality;
or between the means and that reality as an absolute End,
or between the reality brought about by the agent as against
the End,
or the original nature
or the means.⁷

¹ *Philosophy of Right* §114Z.

² *Phenomenology* §365.

³ *Phenomenology* §793.

⁴ *Phenomenology* §408.

⁵ *Phenomenology* §396.

⁶ *Phenomenology* §401. See also *Philosophy of Right* §109, where “the will is the struggle to transcend this barrier [Schränke], i.e. it is the activity of *translating* this content in some way or other from subjectivity into objectivity. The simple identity of the will with itself in this opposition is the content which remains self-identical in both these opposites and indifferent to this formal distinction of opposition.”

⁷ *Phenomenology* §400.

“This unity is the true work.”⁸

It is a fundamental criterion of adequacy of an account of action that it explain how it is possible for me, when all goes well, to succeed in actually achieving what I intend, in the same way and for the same reasons that it is a fundamental criterion of adequacy of an account of cognition that it explain how it is possible for me to succeed in knowing how things actually are. This amounts to the requirement that our *semantic* understanding of agency not make successful action in principle unintelligible. This requirement amounts to a **Genuine Agency Condition (GAC)**, **which should be laid alongside the Genuine Knowledge Condition (GKC)**, with which I began my discussion of Hegel’s *Introduction*.

f) On the other hand,

Consciousness...in doing its work, is aware of the antithesis of doing and being...This *disparity* between Notion and reality, which lies in its essence, is learnt by consciousness from experience in its work; in work, therefore, consciousness becomes what it is in truth...this [is the] fundamental contradiction inherent in work....⁹

The simple original nature now splits up into **the distinction which action implies**. Action is present at first...as End, and hence opposed to a reality already given. The second moment is the movement of the End...hence the idea of the transition itself, or means. The third moment is...the object, which is no longer in the form of an End directly known by the agent to be his own, but as brought out into the light of day and having for him the form of an 'other'.¹⁰

Consciousness, therefore, through its experience in which it should have found its truth, has really become a riddle to itself, **the consequences of its deed are for it not the deeds themselves**. What befalls it is, for it, not the experience of what it is in itself, **the transition is not a mere alteration of the form of the same content** and essence, presented now as the content and essence, and again as the object or [outwardly] beheld essence of itself.¹¹

Note the hylomorphic language.

On the other hand, our semantic understanding of agency must also make sense of the possibility of *failure*: of *not* doing what one *intends* to do. This requirement amounts to an **Intelligibility of Failure Condition (IFC) that should be laid alongside the Intelligibility of Error Condition (IEC)** with which I began my discussion of Hegel’s *Introduction*.

Failure:Agency :: Error:Knowledge.

Looking ahead: These are the two aspects of *experience*, both essential to the cycle of perception, thought, and action. Everything is going to be understood as an abstraction from the unity that such a process of experience exhibits. This is the holism as functionalism idea below.

⁸ *Phenomenology* §409.

⁹ *Phenomenology* §406-7.

¹⁰ *Phenomenology* §400.

¹¹ *Phenomenology* §365.

We will see here a synthesis of the first three sections of the book (*Consciousness*, *Self-Consciousness*, and *Reason*). At its center is the idea of a cycle of perception, thought, and action, which is at once the actualization of an individual self-consciousness and the process by which conceptual contents are determined (from the prospective point of view, made more determinate, and from the retrospective point of view made more explicit through the process of expressing what was all along implicit by actualizing that potential).

The question is how to reconcile these, or to understand them as related.

This is one instance (a paradigmatic one) of identity articulated by (or constituted by) differences.

4. In the *Introduction*, H criticizes K for not being able to meet the GKC and IEC. He also thinks Kant cannot satisfy the GAC and IFC. As H sees it, all a Kantian rational agent can genuinely *do* is *will*. That, ultimately, is what he is both *free* to do, and *responsible for*. That is why the goodness of his action is to be judged solely by the *will* with which it was produced (which is in turn assessed according to the *practical reasoning* that led to it). What happens after the willing (volition), its consequences, are no responsibility of the doer, for they are not under her control. If her intention to do something in the objective world is satisfied, that is because the world does her a favor, she is *lucky*, in that her willing has the consequences she intended.

On this picture, willings *are* entirely within the control of the agent. They are the *only* thing one cannot *try* to do (*will* to do) and fail. One can *merely try* to put the ball through the hoop, and fail. But one cannot *try* and *fail* to *try*—shy of the practical analog of *insincerity*. Here the analogy between this ultimately Cartesian conception of agency and the Cartesian conception of epistemic certainty is exact. Things can *merely seem* to one to be thus-and-so, but one is mistaken as to how they objectively are. But the seems/is distinction does not apply to seemings. It cannot merely, erroneously, *seem* to one that it *seems* to one that things are thus-and-so. If it so seems to seem, then it genuinely does seem. The certainty of how things look, seem, or are represented to be contrasts with the fallibility of such representings in relation to what is represented. The certainty of willings or tryings contrasts with the fallibility of the doings to which those tryings lead.

[Tell story of Sellars on “looks” vs. “is” talk.

Explain the parallel “tries” vs. “does” talk.]

This is a *contraction strategy*, restricting genuine (certain) knowledge to one’s own representings, and genuine doings to one’s own volitions or tryings.

Hegel sees such a view as not making intelligible the possibility of genuine knowledge (of how things objectively are) or of genuine agency, of doing what one intends.

He will pursue instead an *expansion strategy*.

The next such piece articulating and filling-in the picture of the transcendental conditions of the determinate contentfulness of conceptual norms comes in the treatment of intentional agency in *Reason*. What it is for a performance to be *mine* in the sense of being *my doing*, is for me to be in a distinctive way *responsible* for it. For that to be true, it must be possible to understand me as having a special kind of *authority* over what happens. But that authority is obviously anything

but total. In acting I am also *responsible* to how things actually are—the *conditions* in which I act, some generally unknown to me—and to the *consequences* that actually ensue, some generally unpredictable by me. The overall conceptual challenge being addressed by the allegorical discussions of various forms of practical self-consciousness in *Reason* is how to understand the constellation of authority and responsibility within which intentional agency is intelligible, according to the category of *freedom*, and not some form or other of *independence*.

5. Hylomorphic account:

One *content* appears in different *forms*.

Recall the antecedent to this on the side of language-entry transitions in perception.

Here deontic-normative acknowledgment of commitments comes before alethic-modal characterization of what is done.

6. Expressivism:

a) As a *semantic* view (a view about content) opposed to representationalism, which is of little use in theories of agency.

b) As a form of hylomorphism: one content appears now as *implicit* and again as *explicit*.

7. Holism as Functionalism:

- a) The different aspects of a doing (what is done and the doing of it—what can be unified or disparate and is somehow both), the one content and the two forms, what is expressed and how it is expressed, intention and consequences, must be understood precisely *as aspects* of a *unity*. One cannot build that unity by bolting together independently intelligible items.
- b) Here what Dilthey would later call the “hermeneutic circle” (better: spiral) is the only method available. A hazy, substantially indeterminate conception of the whole (as a unity) allows a rough functional analysis of the role different aspects of it play in constituting that unity. That rough functional analysis permits a more determinate conception of the functional system and its distinctive unity. That in turn makes possible a more determinate conception of the functional components and their interactions, and so on.
- c) Note that classical functionalism in the philosophy of mind, from its origins in the ‘60s and ‘70s through computationalism and Fodorian LoT, presupposes the availability of *nonfunctional* characterizations of the functional units. This was essential to its providing a *synthesis* of materialism and dualism with credentials as a successor to both. In its paradigm, a system with a fluid, pipes, valves, filters, and pumps, one could say, with the materialist, that there is nothing non-physical going on. Each of the parts is just the physical item that it is, and each works by physical principles. But when we see that we can *also* think of what plays the role of the fluid as electricity, of the pipes as wires, the valves as vacuum tubes or transistors, the filters as rectifiers, and the pumps as transformers, we see that what makes something a ‘valve’ is its role in regulating ‘flow’, and that there need be *nothing* specifiable in physical-material terms that all valves (also heart valves) have in common. When one calls something a valve, one is not describing its *physical* or *material* characteristics. That is what the dualists were right about.
- d) The biggest rival to such views in the philosophy of mind has turned out to be understandings of intentional states (beliefs, desires, intentions) as *vehicleless*, as having *no nonintentional* specifications. Davidson is a paradigm of this. (Dennett should also be mentioned.) Lynn Rudder-Baker is the one who first drew explicit attention to this feature of his view. It has since been developed above all by McDowell, and by his students, such as Sonia Sedivy, and in our immediate community by Kris Duda. For Davidson, beliefs are states of the whole knower-agent-speaker, attributable only as part of a whole intentional interpretation, on the basis of all the behavior, actual and dispositional, of the knower-agent-speaker. They are *in principle* not identifiable with any sub-personal states. To think they are is to mistake the distinctive kind of thing they are.
- e) Sidebar on Kris Duda’s view of two senses of “vehiclelessness”: not identifiable with any subpersonal states and not having nonintentional specifications.
- f) This is part of the backstory behind my claiming some weeks ago that it is not harmless to think of the relation between unrepeatable instances (“tropes”) of believing and the kind of belief state in question (the difference between my believing right now that the Washington Monument is 555 feet high and that belief as shareable by you) in terms of the token/type (or even the tokening/type) distinction.

- g) Sidebar: Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* as a metaphysics of socially constituted-instituted things systematically ignores the possibility of this kind of view in *social* functionalism, about things like *money*. His account works *much* better when there are bills and coins than when we talk about the difference between M2 and M3 as measures of the nation's money supply in a digital age that is not even necessarily tied to electronics (it won't matter if we move to photonic quantum computing and don't use electrons anymore, for instance). Need there be *any* nonfunctional specification of the money I have in my brokerage account? Where is it, for instance, spatiotemporally?
- h) Hegel's sort of holism-as-functionalism is—though he was not in a position explicitly to locate it in this conceptual space—of the vehicleless variety, rather than the variety that sees what *plays* functional roles, the carved pieces of wood that are pawns, Wittgenstein's sign-post considered just as a piece of wood, as independently specifiable.
- i) Furthermore, Hegel is a *temporal* holist (here as in semantics generally). That is, one must look at functional roles played in a whole historically developing *process* in order to understand the notion of intention, for instance.
- j) This holism as *vehicleless functionalism* is a crucial part of what Hegel means by the difference between thinking in metaconceptual categories of *Vernunft* rather than *Verstand*. Newell and Simon, Fodor, and Searle are all on the *Verstand* side.

So how *does* it work, for Hegel?

8. Social-Perspectival Analysis:

- a) I think the place to start is with Davidson's theory of agency—which is distinct and to a significant extent independent of his interpretivism generally. Davidson is *not* at the level of *Vernunft*, as his endorsement of anomalous monism indicates. It is a theory that *insists* on vehicles.

This is just where McDowell parts company with him, claiming correctly that there is a tension between these retro views and the progressive vehiclelessness of his interpretivism. But his theory of agency does take very important steps in that direction. (I mentioned that DD was very interested in the way, in my story, Hegel takes a crucial step beyond Davidsonian views about agency.)

- b) One large problem that begins to emerge in this section, and which will be with us throughout the discussion of *Reason*, is how to reconcile two different roles that individual self-consciousness plays.
 - On the one hand, each individual self-consciousness is *dependent* on, in the sense of *responsible to*, something other than itself, in both its *work* on things (which have natures) and its *recognition* by others (which have histories). It is bound by norms, and in being assessed according to them is specifically recognized, its authority acknowledged.
 - On the other hand, individual self-consciousness is *independent* in that it is *responsible for* assessing, *authoritative* in, specifically recognizing others. Apart from its recognizing and assessing activity, there are no selves, no social substance, and no binding universals (determinate norms or concepts). This latter dimension of independence expresses the *certainty* of self-consciousness, what things, including itself, are *for* it. The former dimension of dependence expresses the *truth* of self-consciousness, what things, including itself, are *in* themselves.

The conceptual challenge is to find a coherent way of conceiving this dual structure, according to which self-consciousness as individual is both constrained and constraining, both constituted and constituting, both assessed and assessing.

9. **Intentional and Consequential Specifications of Actions:**

a) Hegel offers us strong statements of two views about action that starkly contrast and stand in at least apparent tension with one another:

- a broadly **behaviorist, consequentialist, externalist** view, which identifies and individuates actions according to what is actually done, the performance that is produced (cf. Anscombe's: "I do what happens,"), and
- an **intentionalist, internalist** view, which identifies and individuates actions by the agent's **intention or purpose** in undertaking them.

b) According to the **first view**, the inner can only be understood in terms of its outer expression, so that it makes no sense to think of intentions as states whose content is related only contingently to, and so can diverge radically from, that of the performances to which they give rise. "Action simply translates an initially implicit being into a being that is made explicit...Consciousness must act merely in order that what it is in itself may become explicit for it...An individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action."¹² "The deed [Tat] is the actual self,"¹³ the agent "only gets to know...his End, from the deed."¹⁴ "The deed does away with the inexpressibility of what is '**meant**'."¹⁵ [Cf. what is "merely meant" in *Sense Certainty*, on the side of perception.] If the content of the inner intention is settled by what is true of the actual external performance that expresses it, then it is epistemically available, even to the agent, only retrospectively. (Here one might think of Velleman's view of intentions, in our own day.)

Therefore, feelings of exaltation or lamentation, or repentance are altogether out of place. For all that sort of thing stems from a mind which imagines a content and an in-itself which are different from the original nature of the individual and the actual carrying-out of it in the real world. Whatever it is that the individual does, and whatever happens to him, that he has done himself, and he *is* that himself. He can have only the consciousness of the simple transference *of himself* from the night of possibility into the daylight of the present, from the *abstract in-itself* into the significance of *actual* being.¹⁶

The analysis of this being into intentions and subtleties of that sort, whereby the actual man, i.e. his deed, is to be explained away again in terms of a being that is only 'meant', just as the individual himself even may create for himself special intentions concerning his actuality, all this must be left to the laziness of mere conjecture.¹⁷

A final index passage expressing this perspective explicitly maintains that the point is not affected by acknowledging the possibility of vulgar failure:

From what has now been said, we may learn what to think of a man who, when blamed for his shortcomings, or, it may be, his discreditable acts, appeals to the (professedly) excellent intentions and sentiments of the inner self he distinguishes therefrom. There certainly may be individual cases where the malice of outward circumstances frustrates well-meant designs, and disturbs the execution of the best-laid plans. But in general even here the essential unity between inward and outward is

¹² *Phenomenology* §401.

¹³ *Phenomenology* §464.

¹⁴ *Phenomenology* §401.

¹⁵ *Phenomenology* §322.

¹⁶ *Phenomenology* §404.

¹⁷ *Phenomenology* §322.

maintained. We are thus justified in saying that a man is what he does; and the lying vanity which consoles itself with the feeling of inward excellence may be confronted with the words of the Gospel: 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' That grand saying applies primarily in a moral and religious aspect, but it also holds good in reference to performances in art and science... if a daub of a painter, or a poetaster, soothe themselves by the conceit that their head is full of high ideals, their consolation is a poor one; and if they insist on being judged not by their actual works but by their projects, we may safely reject their pretensions as unfounded and unmeaning.¹⁸

Hegel wants to bring into view a sense in which a bad painting, poem, or novel *cannot* be understood as the botched execution of a fine aim or plan, but must be understood rather as showing *exactly* what its creator actually intended—*however* it might seem to its author.¹⁹ Just how we are to understand this in the light of the acknowledged possibility of such contingencies as slips of the brush remains to be seen. But the perspective Hegel seeks to put in place here is not just a casual literary flourish or a mistake we are eventually to see through. It is an absolutely central and essential feature of the model of *expression*—making the implicit explicit—that plays such a crucial role in structuring his understanding of the relations between the subjective and the objective in both action and cognition.

c) But There are “two aspects possessed by the practical consciousness, intention and deed (what is 'meant' or intended by the deed and the deed itself),”²⁰ and each must be given its due. The other is the **internalist, intentionalist perspective**:

d) It is the right of the will to recognize as its *action* [Handlung], and to accept *responsibility* for, only those aspects of its *deed* [Tat] which it knew to be presupposed within its end, and which were present in its *purpose* [Vorsatz]—I can be made *accountable* for a deed only if *my will was responsible* for it—the *right of knowledge*.²¹

Elsewhere²² Hegel makes the same point under the heading of the “right of intention”:

So far as the action comes into immediate touch with existence, my part in it is to this extent formal, that external existence is also independent of the agent. This externality can pervert his action and bring to light something else than lay in it. Now, though any alteration as such, which is set on foot by the subjects' action, is its deed [Tat], still the subject does not for that reason recognize it as its action [Handlung], but only admits as its own that existence in the deed which lay in its knowledge and will, which was its purpose. Only for that does it hold itself responsible.²³

Indeed, distinguishing within the action some elements for which the agent is responsible from others for which the agent is not responsible is one of the achievements of modernity:

The *heroic* self-consciousness (as in ancient tragedies like that of Oedipus) has not yet progressed from its unalloyed simplicity to reflect on the distinction between *deed* [Tat] and *action* [Handlung], between the external event and the purpose and knowledge of the

¹⁸ *Encyclopedia* §140.

¹⁹ Robert Pippin offers a nice discussion of this perspective in his essay “Hegel’s Practical Realism: Rational Agency as Ethical Life” [ref. [presented in Münster, February 2003]].

²⁰ *Phenomenology* §319.

²¹ *Rechtsphilosophie* §117.

²² *Encyclopedia* §505. See also *Philosophy of Right* §120. For my purposes here the difference between the right of knowledge and the right of intention do not matter.

²³ *Encyclopedia* §504.

circumstances, or to analyse the consequences minutely, but accepts responsibility for the deed in its entirety.²⁴

The distinction between Tat and Handlung is the distinction between what is *done* as an actual event, performance, or (as we'll see is most important to Hegel) process—something that happens—and those features in virtue of which it is a *doing*—something normatively imputable to the agent. This latter is what Hegel calls “the first determinate characteristic of an action: that “in its externality it must be known to me as my action”²⁵

What makes what is done (the deed) mine, that is, an action, rather than just something that happens, is its relation to a purpose. For the concept of action includes “the right that the content of the action as carried out in immediate existence shall be in principle mine, that thus the action shall be the purpose [Vorsatz] of the subjective will.”²⁶ The passages concerning the identity of content of the outer deed and the inner state it expresses rehearsed above invoked the *intention* [Absicht] expressed, rather than the *purpose*. **So corresponding (at least roughly) to the Tat/Handlung distinction in Hegel's account is an Absicht/Vorsatz distinction.**²⁷ The content of the feature of an action that Hegel calls its ‘purpose’ need not extend to everything the developed deed contains, while the content of the feature of an action that Hegel calls its ‘intention’ does extend to everything the developed deed expressing it contains. The distinction among features of the deed that is induced by the purpose is what determines the deed as the agent's doing, in the normative sense of being something the agent is *responsible* for. *What* the agent thereby becomes responsible for (doing) is the whole deed (what is done). And that fully developed deed reveals an intention that extends beyond what is merely ‘meant’ or purposed.

10. Davidsonian approach to action:

a) At the most basic level, I think **Hegel's account of agency ought to be understood as having a Davidsonian structure.** (Someone who has pursued this line of thought in some detail—though somewhat differently than I shall—is Michael Quante, whose German book *Hegels Handlungsbegriff* has now been translated into English, as *Hegel's Concept of Action*.)

²⁴ *Philosophy of Right* §118Z. [BB: I will later claim that this “contraction strategy” is something that is to be overcome eventually, and replaced by an “expansion strategy”, which reinstates the heroic (now edelmütig) sense of responsibility, but with an expanded subject of responsibility. That is why the discussion in the *Philosophy of Right* is explicitly flagged in §117 (and especially its Zusatz) as pertaining to *finite* action. The final story, retailed in the next chapter of ASOT, is about action conceived under the speculative category of *infinity*.]

²⁵ *Philosophy of Right* §113.

²⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §114.

²⁷ The passage from *Philosophy of Right* §114 just quoted continues, laying out the general outlines of the claims that must be interpreted to make sense of the Vorsatz/Absicht distinction, connecting it with the further notions of welfare (das Wohl) and the good (das Gute):

(b) The particular aspect of the action is its inner content (α) as I am aware of it in its general character; my awareness of this general character constitutes the worth of the action and the reason I think good to do it—in short my Intention. (β) Its content is my special aim, the aim of my particular, merely individual, existence, i.e. Welfare.

(c) This content (as something which is inward and which yet at the same time is raised to its universality as to absolute objectivity) is the absolute end of the will, the Good—with the opposition in the sphere of reflection, of subjective universality, which is now wickedness and now conscience.

There are five basic elements of Davidson's theory of action that seem to me helpful in beginning to understand Hegel's. Davidson starts by developing a way of talking about events (such as the performances that result from exercises of agency) according to which:

1) One and the same event can be described or specified in many ways.

Further,

2) One important way of identifying or singling out an event is in terms of its *causal consequences*.

Thus moving one's finger, flipping the switch, turning on the light, and alerting the burglar can all count as specifications of one single event. As the effects of an event unfold, each new concentric ripple surrounding it makes available new ways of specifying it by the causal contribution it made to the occurrence of *those* later events. It is simply not settled yet whether the investment I made yesterday will eventually be identifiable as "the wisest financial decision I ever made", or "the most foolish...", or (more probably), something less dramatic in between. We'll just have to await the results. Davidson calls the way the potential descriptions of an event expand with the passage of time "the accordion effect."

3) Some, but not all, of the descriptions of an action may be privileged in that they are ones under which it is *intentional*.

Flipping the switch and turning on the light were intentional, while alerting the burglar (of whom I was unaware) was not. Buying a bond issued by company XYZ was intentional, while buying a bond issued by a company that would go bankrupt the following week, which might be a description of the very same event, would not have been intentional.

4) What makes an event, performance, or process an *action*, something *done*, is that it is *intentional* under *some* description.

Alerting the burglar and buying the bond of a soon-to-be-bankrupt company are things genuinely *done*, even though they were not intentional under those descriptions. For they *were* intentional under other descriptions of the same event: turning on the light and buying an XYZ bond. The performance is an action under *all* its descriptions and specifications, including all the distant, unforeseeable, consequential ones that come in under the accordion principle. But what *makes* it an action is that it *was* intentional under *some* such specifications.

5) What distinguishes some descriptions as ones under which a performance was intentional is their role as conclusions in processes of *practical reasoning*.

Turning on the light and buying an XYZ bond were things I had *reasons* to do, provided by *ends*, *purposes*, or *goals* I endorse, *commitments* I acknowledge, or *values* I embrace. Those reasons in the form of ends, purposes, goals, commitments, or values provide *premises* for potential pieces of practical reasoning justifying the practical conclusion that I ought to bring about an event satisfying a description such as being a turning on of a light or a buying of an XYZ bond—but not being an alerting of a burglar or a buying of a bond of an incipiently bankrupt company. That securing the applicability of *those* descriptions is in this way practically justifiable is what makes them the ones under which what I go on to do is *intentional*, and hence counts as an *action*.

The structure of this account is quite different from one (such as Kim's) that identifies three distinct kinds of events standing in sequential causal relations: prior internal intentions or states of intending, actions, and consequences of those actions. The place of distinct occurrences of intendings and consequences has been taken by different descriptions of the one thing done:

intentional and consequential ways of picking out the same doing. That is why it makes no sense to talk about an intention apart from what was done intentionally.²⁸ What qualifies an occurrence as an action—something an agent is *responsible* for—is the existence of a privileged subset of specifications. And they are privileged precisely by their *normative* relation to the agent. Specifically, they are *justified* by practical *reasons* whose normative force or validity the agent acknowledges.

b) **My first interpretive suggestion is that Hegel's 'Tat' refers to the deed done, with *all* of its accorded descriptions, and that his 'Handlung' is that same deed *as* the agent's doing, that is, *as* specifiable by the restricted set of descriptions under which it is intentional, and hence something *done* at all.** Here is a crucial passage of Hegel's that puts together a number of the Davidsonian theses:

Action has multiple *consequences* in so far as it is translated into external existence; for the latter, by virtue of its context in external necessity, develops in all directions. These consequences, as the *shape* whose *soul* is the *end* to which the action is directed, belong to the action as an integral part of it. But the action, as the end translated into the external world, is at the same time exposed to external forces which attach to it things quite different from what it is for itself, and impel it on into remote and alien consequences.

The will thus has the right to *accept responsibility* only for the first set of consequences, since they alone were part of its *purpose* [Vorsatz].²⁹

Endorsement of the accordion principle, and so of the Davidsonian principles (1) and (2), is implicit in saying that the action's consequences, the action as an external existence developing in all directions, are an integral part of the action.³⁰ This deed is what the action is in itself. But what the action is *for* itself is determined by the subjectively envisaged end or goal it serves, the purpose for which it is performed. In Davidsonian terms, the purpose settles the specifications under which it is intentional (principle (3), which are the ones in virtue of which the deed is recognizable as the agent's (principle (4)), in the sense that they are the ones in virtue of which the agent is responsible for what is done. (This is the "right of knowledge" distinctive of modern conceptions of agency, by contrast to those presented in ancient tragedy, adverted to in the passages further above.) Thus considerations of responsibility induce a distinction within the consequential specifications of the actual performance produced. The end or purpose endorsed (principle (5)) is translated into the external world in the shape of the deed in the sense that the purpose it justifies provides descriptions of the very same deed that also has consequential descriptions under which it is not intentional.

The *deed* posits an alteration to this given existence, and the will is entirely *responsible* [hat schuld] for it in so far as the predicate 'mine' attaches to the existence so altered...But responsibility involves only the wholly external

²⁸ "[W]e ought to will something great. But we must also be able to achieve it, otherwise the willing is nugatory. **The laurels of mere willing are dry leaves that never were green.**" [*Philosophy of Right* §124Z.]

²⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §118.

³⁰ Very much the same language is used at *Phenomenology* §642:

Action, in virtue of the antithesis it essentially contains, is related to a negative of consciousness, to a reality possessing intrinsic being. Contrasted with the simplicity of pure consciousness, with the absolute other or implicit manifoldness, **this reality is a plurality of circumstances which breaks up and spreads out endlessly in all directions, backwards into their conditions, sideways into their connections, forwards in their consequences.**

judgment as to whether I have done something or not; and the fact that I am responsible for something does not mean that the thing can be imputed to me.³¹ The deed is what I do under all its descriptions. I am responsible for it in the sense that it is ‘mine’: I did it. But it is *imputed* to me only under the intentional descriptions: the ones appearing in a specification of my purpose, the descriptions that specify the deed as something I had reason to do.

11. It is just the failure to appreciate this point about the necessary unity of action—the expression (translation) of the inner in the outer as the actualization of the purpose in that intentional specifications and unintentional consequential ones specify the *same* actual deed—that characterizes the defective forms of practical self-consciousness rehearsed in the *Reason* chapter:

Consciousness, therefore, through its experience in which it should have found its truth, has really become a riddle to itself: the consequences of its deed are for it not the deeds themselves. What befalls it is, for it, not the experience of what it is in itself, the transition is not a mere alteration of the form of the same content and essence, presented now as the content and essence, and again as the object or [outwardly] beheld essence of itself.³²

For the consequences of the deeds to be the deeds themselves is just for the accordion principle to apply. For what befalls consciousness (the consequential specifications of its deed under which it is *not* intentional) to be *for* consciousness what consciousness is *in* itself is for the specifications under which the deed *is* intentional (specifications in terms of its endorsed purpose, expressing the agent’s taking of responsibility for a doing) to be acknowledged as specifications of the very same deed that also has external consequential descriptions.

12. The “distinction that action implies” is “that between what is purposed and what is accomplished in the realm of existence.”³³ More specifically, when we look at the internal articulation of the process that in its unity we identify as an action:

The simple original nature now splits up into the distinction which action implies. Action is present at first...as End, and hence opposed to a reality already given. The second moment is the movement of the End...hence the idea of the transition itself, or means. The third moment is...the object, which is no longer in the form of an End directly known by the agent to be his own, but as brought out into the light of day and having for him the form of an ‘other’.³⁴

The broadly Davidsonian understanding of this “splitting up” of the action can be exploited so as to explain how the deed, unfolding consequentially beyond the ken or compass of the purpose of the agent, can nevertheless be acknowledged by the agent as the agent’s doing—so that the agent does not in its practical activity “become a riddle to itself”. The Davidsonian suggestion is that **the division of action into its aspects is a matter of different ways of specifying one event or performance.**

Q: But how does Hegel understand the difference between the different kinds of what I have been calling ‘descriptions’ or ‘specifications’ of the deed?

³¹ *Philosophy of Right* §115 and §115H.

³² *Phenomenology* §365.

³³ *Philosophy of Right* §114Z.

³⁴ *Phenomenology* §400.

A1: The distinction that action implies is, on the Davidsonian line being pursued, a distinction between *intentional* and *consequential* characterizations of one and the same deed.

A2: The short version of the answer I will offer here is

- first, that **it is a distinction of social perspective**, between the agent, who acknowledges a specifically contentful responsibility, and an audience, who attributes and assesses it. This is the distinction between the *context of deliberation* and the *context of assessment*.
- Second, that difference of social perspective is a *normative* one in a dual sense. What they are perspective on is a normative status: a question of the imputation of a specific *responsibility*. And **the perspectives are defined by distinct seats of authority concerning the characterization of what the agent is responsible for**.
- Third, the ultimate determinate *identity* (unity) of the content of the action—what we should understand as common to its inner (in the Hegelian sense of implicit, rather than the Cartesian sense of epistemically transparent) form and the outer (in the Hegelian sense of explicit, rather than the Cartesian sense of epistemically opaque) form that translates, actualizes, and expresses it—is the product of a process of reciprocal specific *recognition*, in which the competing complementary socially distinct authorities negotiate and their claims are adjudicated and reconciled.

The work is, i.e. it exists for other individualities. [405]

Actualization is...a display of what is one's own in the element of universality whereby it becomes, and should become, the affair of everyone. [417]

The work produced is the reality which consciousness gives itself; it is that in which the individual is explicitly for himself what he is implicitly or in himself, and in such a manner that the consciousness for which the individual becomes explicit in the work is not the particular, but the universal, consciousness. [405]

The Sache selbst is present as the in-itself or the reflection into itself of consciousness; the supplanting of the moments by one another finds expression there, however, in their being established in consciousness, not as they are in themselves, but only as existing for another consciousness. One of the moments of the content is exposed by it to the light of day and made manifest to others; but consciousness is at the same time reflected back from it into itself and the opposite is equally present within consciousness which retains it for itself as its own. [416]

Consciousness experiences both sides as equally essential moments, and in doing so learns what the nature of the Sache selbst really is, viz. that it is neither merely something which stands opposed to action in general, and to individual action...Rather is its nature such that its being is the action of the single individual and of all individuals and whose action is immediately for others, or is a Sache and is such only as the action of each and everyone: the essence which is the essence of all beings, viz. spiritual essence. [418]

The existent reality of conscience, however, is one which is a self, an existence which is conscious of itself, the spiritual element of being recognized and acknowledged. The action is thus only the translation of its individual content into the objective element, in which it is universal and recognized, and it is just the fact that it is recognized that makes the deed a reality. The deed is recognized and thereby made real because the existent reality is directly

linked with conviction or knowledge; or, in other words, knowing one's purpose is directly the element of existence, is universal recognition. [640]

13. The essentially social character of that distinction shows up if we think about who is in a normative position—**who has the authority—to offer specifications of the two sorts.** To say that the deed or work is actual is to say that it is public, available to all. The truth of the performance, what it is in itself, is expressed in *all* of the descriptions of what is actually achieved, all the specifications of the content in terms of its consequences. These descriptions are available in principle to anyone in the community to recognize the performance under or to characterize its content. “The work is, i.e. it exists for other individualities.”³⁵ For others, who witness or hear about my action (coming to know about it in any of the various ways we come to know about actual occurrences), what my deed is can be said of it.³⁶

Actualization is...a display of what is one's own in the element of universality whereby it becomes, and should become, the affair of everyone.³⁷

The consequential descriptions specify what the action is for others, and for the agent qua other, that is as recognizing and assessing his own action via his empirical consciousness of it as an actuality.

The work produced is the reality which consciousness gives itself; it is that in which the individual is explicitly for himself what he is implicitly or in himself, and in such a manner that the consciousness for which the individual becomes explicit in the work is not the particular, but the universal, consciousness.³⁸

The universal consciousness is that of the community, as opposed to the individual agent. The other members of the community can describe what it is that I have done; they can specify what I have achieved or accomplished. Accordingly, the distinction between what I intended and what I accomplished, between what the performance is for me and what it is in itself, takes the form of the distinction between what it is for me and what it is for others.

14. The actuality available to all is the explicit form of the commitment the agent has undertaken in acting. But **what makes the commitment, and so the action, the agent's (the moment of certainty) is his acknowledgment of it as such. And for that the specifications under which the agent endorses it have special authority**, not shared by those who merely observe the results of that endorsement. These are the specifications under which it is intentional. We can look at this notion in terms of its circumstances and consequences of application. **What in this distinctive way privileges the association of some descriptions of the deed with the doer is that they are the ones that appear as conclusions of processes of practical reasoning endorsed by the agent.** For example: It is dark; I need to see; Turning on the light will enable me to see; Flipping the switch will turn on the light; So I shall flip the switch. The agent's endorsement of such practical reasoning may have been explicitly attached to its actual rehearsal as part of an antecedent process of deliberation leading up to the performance, or it may be implicit in a disposition to trot it out when challenged to give reasons for the performance. The consequences of application of the concept description under which the performance is

³⁵ *Phenomenology* §405.

³⁶ Cf. *Phenomenology* §322.

³⁷ *Phenomenology* § 417.

³⁸ *Phenomenology* §405.

intentional are that these specify the content of the commitment the agent takes himself to be acknowledging in producing the performance. **The performance is intentional under those descriptions the agent is prepared to acknowledge himself as responsible for it under**, apart from any knowledge of the descriptions that become available only with its being actualized, specifically, descriptions of it in terms of its consequences. These are the descriptions under which the agent is petitioning the community to be specifically recognized as responsible for the performance.

15. Practical Success and Failure in the Vulgar Sense: The *Vorstand/Absicht* Distinction

- a) Preliminary: **From events to plan-structured processes.** Where theories of action of the sort epitomized by Davidson's find their paradigmatic actions in momentary, punctiform events such as flipping a switch or letting go of a rope, the paradigms of the actions Hegel addresses are to be found rather in complex, extended processes such as writing a book or properly burying a slain brother. Such processes develop according to a distinctive kind of internal normative structure. That is why in the passage quoted two paragraphs back Hegel refers to "well-meant *designs*" and "best-laid *plans*". In all except degenerately simple cases (indeed, even in the case of intending to turn on the lights or pour water in the glass) one plans to realize one purpose *by* realizing others that function as instruments or means to that end. (Even when talking about *events* rather than *actions*, his paradigms are complex events such as the French Revolution.³⁹) And those sub-goals may be subserved, in the plan by further sub-sub-goals. So the intention endorsed does not in the general case consist of a single description under which the performance is to be intentional, but something more like a tree-structure or flow-chart in which the performance-description nodes are linked by intended means-end connections.
- b) This thought is **the basis for Hegel's distinction between *purpose* [Vorsatz] (and the closely related *end* [Zweck]), on the one hand, and *intention* [Absicht] on the other.** An action as an external event is a complex of connected parts which may be regarded as divided into units *ad infinitum*, and the action may be treated as having touched in the first instance only one of these units. The truth of the single, however, is the universal; and what explicitly gives action its specific character is not an isolated content limited to an external unit, but a universal content, comprising in itself the complex of connected parts. Purpose [Vorsatz], as issuing from a thinker, comprises more than the mere unit; essentially it comprises that universal side of the action, i.e. the *intention* [Absicht].⁴⁰

The "complex of connected parts" is structured as a *plan*, articulated by an instrumental 'by' relation. Even in the very simplest sort of example, one intends to achieve the purpose of turning on the lights *by* flipping the switch, and intends to flip the switch *by* moving one's finger. "The action may be treated as having touched in the first instance only one of these units" in that the rest are consequential descriptions of the action that is intentional under this initial description. If things go wrong, contingencies intervene (one's finger misses the switch, the switch is broken...), then those consequential descriptions may *not*, as planned, be true of the doing that is intentional under the specification "moving one's finger."

³⁹ For one example put forward in the context of elaborating his theory of action, see *Philosophy of Right* §115Z.

⁴⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §119.

What Hegel calls the ‘intention’ associated with an action encompasses the plan that prospectively links what is *immediately* done (the unit the action may be treated as having in the first instance touched) with the purpose aimed at. It is a ‘universal’ in that it comprises all of the ‘units’ [Einzelheiten] into which the process can be divided. The *content* of the action is not to be identified solely either with the initial immediate *means* adopted, nor with the purpose whose realization is eventually aimed at, but with the plan-structured intention of which they are elements.

The universal quality of the action is the manifold content of the action as such, reduced to the simple form of universality. But the subject, an entity reflected into himself and so particular in correlation with the particularity of his object, has in his end his own particular content, and this content is the soul of the action and determines its character.⁴¹

The particular, subjective content of the action (what one decided to do) is the content of the *Vorsatz*, while the universal, manifold (articulated) content of the action as planned is the *Absicht* (which includes how one decided to do it). What is intended is the whole structure (the universal), not just the end or purpose aimed at, nor (at the other end of the planned process) the immediate initial means adopted:

Actuality is touched in the first instance only at one individual point (just as in arson the flame is applied directly only to a small portion of the wood...⁴²

[W]hat the arsonist sets on fire is not the isolated area of wood an inch wide to which he applies the flame, but the universal within it—i.e. the entire house...⁴³

c) This **Vorsatz/Absicht distinction gives Hegel a theoretical way of saying what vulgar success and failure of actions consists in**. An action succeeds in this sense if the consequential descriptions that are true of it include the purpose whose achievement is the endorsed end in the service of which all the other elements of the intention-plan function as means. An action fails in this sense if, although some things are done intentionally, i.e. as part of the plan, the purpose is not achieved, because the means adopted do not have the consequences envisaged.

16. Two Models of the Unity and Disparity that Action Essentially Involves

a) One natural way to think about the aspects of unity and disparity that action essentially involves is in terms of the distinction between success and failure. Disparity of purpose and achievement is failure (in accomplishing what one intended to accomplish); identity of purpose and achievement is success (in accomplishing what one intended to accomplish). Since one cannot understand what intentional action is without understanding that such actions are essentially, and not just accidentally, subject to assessment as successful or failed, it follows that one cannot grasp the concept of intentional action without implicitly acknowledging the two aspects of that concept that Hegel distinguishes.

b) On a natural way of rendering these claims, the relations between the aspects of unity and difference that the concept of action involves has it that **the question of whether those aspects are realized is to be answered differently for each particular**

⁴¹ *Philosophy of Right* §121.

⁴² *Philosophy of Right* §119Z.

⁴³ *Philosophy of Right* §132Z.

performance. That is to say that **the relation between the aspects is understood as local, contingent, and disjunctive.**

- It is **local** in that the assessment of success or failure is made for *each* action, one by one. It exhibits identity of (content of) purpose and achievement in case it succeeds, and difference of (content of) purpose and achievement in case it fails. The *possibility* of disparity and the *ideal* of identity of content between purpose and achievement are universal, but those features are each *actualized* only in some actions.
- It is **contingent** whether any particular action succeeds or fails—for instance, whether, as I intended, the ball goes through the hoop.
- And the two aspects are **disjunctively** related (indeed, related by *exclusive* disjunction) because for any given action *either* the action succeeds, and so exhibits identity of content of purpose and content of achievement, *or* it fails, and so exhibits their disparity. I'll call this sort of account an “LCD” view of the identity-in-difference that structures the concept of action.

c) Hegel's view of the identity-in-difference that structures the concept of action is rather **global, necessary, and conjunctive.** Assessment of success or failure in the ordinary sense—what I'll tendentiously call “vulgar” success or failure—is, if not completely irrelevant to understanding the unity and disparity that action involves, at any rate something that comes into the story only much later. According to a GNC account:

- *every* action (‘globally’),
- *as* an action (‘necessarily’)
- *both* (‘conjunctively’) **simply translates** something inner or implicit into something outer or explicit, hence exhibiting the unity of action and the identity of content in two different forms, *and* necessarily **involves an actual disparity between purpose and achievement** (“the distinction that action involves”).

On this view, *if* exhibiting the identity of content between purpose and achievement that is the unity of action is in some sense *succeeding*, and exhibiting a disparity between them is in some sense *failing*, then in order to understand the GNC approach to the identity-through-disparity of action we must appreciate a sense in which *every* action succeeds and another in which *every* action fails, regardless of its success or failure in the vulgar sense. And we must come to see these as two sides of one coin: as reciprocally sense-dependent concepts playing essential roles in the concept of intentional action.

d) Key: **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.**

Thus I can intend to put the ball through the hoop (intend that I put the ball through the hoop), and I can put the ball through the hoop. The notion of assessments of vulgar *success* and *failure*, in terms of which both the *unity* and the *disparity* of intention and accomplishment are defined in LCD approaches, depends on the possibility of identifying and individuating the *contents* of intentions and achievements *antecedently* to the processes by which they are related in intentional action seeking to *actualize* those intentions in the form of achievements. But **Hegel's overall claim is that that notion of determinate conceptual contents is ultimately intelligible only in terms of the *process* of determining**

such contents—making them *more* determinate—by seeking the objective fulfillment of subjective practical commitments.

17. Identity of Content of Deed and Intention

a) It remains, then, to ask in what sense it is that even *failed* actions should be understood to exhibit the necessary *unity* that action involves. We were told that even in such cases there is an *identity of content* between intention and achievement. In what sense does such a failure to realize the intended purpose “simply translate an initially implicit being into a being that is made explicit...”⁴⁴? In what sense can we say of it that it

alters nothing and opposes nothing. It is the pure form of a transition from a state of not being seen to one of being seen, and the content which is brought out into the daylight and displayed is nothing else but what this action already is in itself. It is implicit: this is its form as a unity in thought; and it is actual—this is its form as an existent unity. Action itself is a content only when, in this determination of simplicity, it is contrasted with its character as a transition and movement.⁴⁵ ?

The Tat/Handlung distinction already entails that “actions, in their external existence, include contingent consequences.”⁴⁶ But Hegel is claiming something much stronger. The contingencies to which the process of trying to realizing a purpose is subject are somehow to be understood as features of the content that are retrospectively discernable as always already having been implicit in the intention. That is why, for instance, “Consciousness must act merely in order that what it is in itself may become explicit for it...[A]n individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action.”⁴⁷ And, as we have seen, Hegel explicitly tells us that failed actions are not to be considered exceptions to the conceptual truth that in action one and the same content appears in two forms, once as intention and once as actuality. Here is a passage from the part of the *Rechtsphilosophie* that presents the Tat/Handlung and Vorsatz/Absicht distinctions we have been considering:

It is certainly the case that a greater or lesser number of circumstances may intervene in the course of an action. In a case of arson, for example, the fire may not take hold, or conversely, it may spread further than the culprit intended. Nevertheless, no distinction should be made here between good and ill fortune, for in their actions, human beings are necessarily involved in externality. An old proverb rightly says, “The stone belongs to the devil when it leaves the hand that threw it.” By acting, I expose myself to misfortune, which accordingly has a right over me and is an existence of my own volition.⁴⁸

18. Anaphora and Recollection (Wiedererinnerung) (Cf. *Sense Certainty*)

a) An anaphoric link is a matter of the acknowledged *authority* of the antecedent over the content of the anaphoric dependent, the pronoun’s *responsibility* to its antecedent for what it expresses. This historical, normative, inferential structure linking unrepeatable demonstrative

⁴⁴ *Phenomenology* §401.

⁴⁵ *Phenomenology* §396.

⁴⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §120Z.

⁴⁷ *Phenomenology* §401.

⁴⁸ *Philosophy of Right* §119H.

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.

b) Think of the phenomenon of *speaker's reference* in terms of demonstratives and anaphora.

c) A failed action is one where the initial purpose only, as it were, speaker-referred to what I go on to do, but does not semantically refer to it. In this sense, the content of the responsibility I have undertaken in the form of my intention is inherited from the actual deed. Here the thought is that it is the very same intention that matures from being describable in the most general terms, "turning on the light by flipping the switch" to being specifiable in the most immediate demonstrative terms "doing *this now*." From this point of view—not available to the agent *ab initio*—the final demonstrative picks out what we were all along referring to. Prospectively, the agent can only pick it out by descriptions that may or may not semantically refer to it. But retrospectively we can tell what the actual content of the intention was, given the possibly unknown circumstances in which it was to be actualized.

Responsibility in this sense is attributed by discerning a kind of *forward anaphora*: where the expression uttered earlier in a discourse inherits its content from an antecedent uttered only later in the discourse.

Consciousness must act merely in order that what it is in itself may become explicit for it...[A]n individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action. [401]

d) The disparity that action necessarily involves is the social-perspectival distinction of loci of authority that distinguish between *Handlung* and *Tat*: the endorsed acknowledged purpose that the agent is authoritative about, in virtue of which what happens is an action at all, and the consequential specifications that necessarily outrun any specification of purpose available in advance of the actual doing. This is the distinction between what one intended *that* one do, and what one thereby intended *of* that one do *that*. The unity that action necessarily involves is the unity of content that takes these two forms. "Action itself is a content only when, in this determination of simplicity, it is contrasted with its character as a transition and a movement." [396] In intending in actual circumstances *that* one make true the claim that *p*, there is always something *of* which one *thereby* intends to do *that*. These are two normative perspectives on *one* action: the intentional and the consequential. (Cf. "the two aspects possessed by the practical consciousness, intention and deed." [319])

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.

Hegel calls **the unity that action exhibits** as concept and content the "**Sache selbst**."

The *Sache selbst* is only opposed to these moments in so far as they are supposed to be isolated, but as an interfusion of the reality and the individuality it is essentially their unity.

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.

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