

*Animating Ideas of Idealism:  
A Semantic Sonata in Kant and Hegel*

Lecture One: Norms, Selves, and Concepts

Lecture Two: Autonomy, Community, and Freedom

Lecture Three: History, Reason, and Reality

## Lecture One

### **Norms, Selves, and Concepts**

1. In the first three chapters I consider some of the ideas that animated the philosophical tradition, anchored and epitomized by Kant and Hegel, which they called ‘idealism.’ My aim is to reanimate some of those ideas, breathing new life into them by exhibiting a new perspective from which they show up as worthy of our interest and attention today. I do that by retrospectively rationally reconstructing a coherent, cumulative trajectory of thought, carving it out of the context in which it is embedded, ruthlessly ignoring elements near and dear to Kant and Hegel that are not essential to the line of thought on which I am focusing. This will seem to some a perverse sort of enterprise. At the end of Chapter Three I assemble conceptual raw materials drawn from all three chapters, in order to address the methodological issue of how to think about the nature, justification, and possible value of this sort of undertaking.

2. At the heart of Descartes’ innovations in epistemology and the philosophy of mind lies a revolutionary semantic idea. He saw that the rising new science required giving up the old ways of thinking about the relations between appearance and reality. Since the Greeks, the idea had been that, at least when things go well, the way things appear to us *resembles* the way they really are. Resemblance in this sense is a matter of

sharing properties (or some more general sort of form), as a realistic picture shares some elements of shape and perhaps color with what it pictures. But on Copernicus's account, the reality behind the appearance of a stationary Earth and a revolving Sun is a rotating Earth and stationary Sun. No resemblance there. And Galileo's reading of what he calls the "book of nature, written in the language of mathematics" finds the best way of getting a grip on the reality of motion to be by manipulating geometrical appearances, in which a period of time shows up as the length of a line, and acceleration as the area of triangle. The category of resemblance is of little help in understanding the connections that are being exploited. And in Descartes' own algebraized geometry, the equations of lines and circles do not at all resemble the geometrical figures about which they let us reason so effectively. Descartes sees that a more abstract notion of representation is needed. We've been worrying about it ever since.<sup>1</sup>

For Descartes, the way discursive algebraic equations represent geometrical figures serves as a paradigm of representational relations generally, and in particular of the relation between appearance and reality—between the concept-manipulating mind and the geometrical Galilean world of extended things in motion that mind thinks about by representing it. What makes it possible to use algebraic formulae to reason about geometrical objects—the phenomenon I am claiming provided Descartes with his semantic paradigm—is the *global isomorphism* between the two systems. One can, if one likes, still think of a formula and the figure it represents as sharing something or being alike in some way. But what they share must be thought about in terms of the role

---

<sup>1</sup> John Haugeland tells this story well, in the opening chapter of his *Artificial Intelligence: The Very Idea* [MIT Press, 1989]. On Kant's early rejection of resemblance in favor of representation, see his *Dissertation* [§4, Ak. II, 385-393].

each plays in the *system* of which it is a part: the structure-preserving way in which a formula's relations to other formulae can be mapped onto a figure's relations to other figures. Apart from those horizontal relations between representings and other representings, the vertical semantic relations between representings and representeds are invisible and unintelligible. This holistic character of the new notion of representation was not lost on Spinoza, for whom thought of the world is possible only because "the order and connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas," nor on Leibniz, who required each monad to represent its whole universe in order to represent any of it.<sup>2</sup>

3. Where Descartes' semantic concerns center on the nature of representational *success*, Kant addresses more fundamental questions about the nature of representational *purport*. What is it, he wants to know, for our ideas so much as to *seem* to be about something? What is it for us to take or treat them as, for them to show up to us as, representings, in the sense of something that answers for its correctness to what thereby counts as being represented?<sup>3</sup> This issue is the core around which cluster the other elements of Kant's concern with what he calls "objectivity." The line of thought he develops to answer these questions begins with the identification of a critical shortcoming of the account of judgment he inherited. That account finds its place as part of the traditional *classificatory theory of consciousness*. This is the idea that to be aware of

---

<sup>2</sup> I discuss some of the details of their holistic accounts of representation in Chapters Four and Five of *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* [Harvard University Press, 2002].

<sup>3</sup> Already in the letter to Herz of 1772, Kant says:

I noticed that I still lacked something essential, something that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to pay attention to and that, in fact, constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics. I asked myself: What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call 'representation' to the object?

something is to take it *as* something: paradigmatically, to classify something particular as being of some general kind. In its form as a theory of judgment, it becomes the view that judging is *predicating* one concept of another: putting two concepts into a relation, marked by a copula, whose paradigm once again is bringing a particular concept under a general one, or subordinating a less general to a more general one.

In a radical break with the whole of the logical tradition he inherited, Kant rejects this way of thinking about judgment. The reason he gives is that it does not apply to logically compound judgments:

I have never been able to accept the interpretation which logicians give of judgment in general. It is, they declare, the representation of a relation between two concepts...(W)hat is defective in this interpretation...(is) that it applies only to categorical, not to hypothetical and disjunctive judgments (the two latter containing a relation not of concepts but of judgments), an oversight from which many troublesome consequences have followed. [CPR B140-1]

It will be instructive to fill in some of those “troublesome consequences.” The same logical tradition distinguishes between mental *acts* and their *contents*—that is, between the two sides of what Sellars calls the “notorious ‘ing’/‘ed’ ambiguity,” which affects concepts such as judgment, representation, experience, and perception—between what one is *doing* in judging, representing, experiencing, or perceiving, on the one hand, and what is judged, represented, experienced, or perceived, on the other. Sensitivity to that distinction should prompt the question whether understanding judgment as consisting in

predication or the relation of two concepts is intended to address the activity of judging or the propositional contents of such acts. It is in the context of that question that the invocation of the sorts of compound judgment that populate Kant's Table of Judgments—negative, hypothetical, disjunctive, and modal judgments—makes most visible the inadequacy of the traditional way of thinking about judgment.

For it then becomes clear that in the traditional theory, the notion of predication is being asked to do two incompatible jobs. On the one hand, it serves as a structural way of building up new judgeable contents. On the other hand, it is thought of as a kind of doing that has the significance of endorsing such contents. The collision between these two senses in which predication is an 'operation' is clearest when one thinks about judgeable contents appearing as unasserted (unendorsed) components of more complex sentences (judgments). The conditional is a paradigm. When I assert "If  $Pa$  then  $Pb$ ," I have *not* asserted  $Pa$ . Have I predicated  $P$  of  $a$ ? If so, then predication does not amount to endorsement: predicating is not judging. If not, then it looks as though there is an equivocation when I detach from the conditional, reasoning:

If  $Pa$  then  $Pb$

$Pa$

So:  $Pb$

For the second premise *is* a predication, and the antecedent of the first premise is *not* a predication.

Geach picks up this Kant-Frege point, using it in his masterful, gem-like essay “Ascriptivism,” to argue against emotivist semantic analyses of terms of moral evaluation.<sup>4</sup> His target is theories that understand the normative significance of terms such as ‘good’ not as part of the *content* of what is said about an act, not as specifying a characteristic that is being attributed, but rather as marking the *force* of the speech act. Calling something good is thought of as *doing* something distinctive: commending. Geach first asks what the limits of this ploy are. He points to the lovely archaic English verb “to macarize”, which means to characterize someone as happy. Does the possibility of understanding calling someone happy as macarizing her mean that happiness is not a property being invoked in specifying the content of the claim that someone is happy, because in saying that we are really *doing* something else, namely performing the special speech act of macarizing? If we can do that with ‘happy’, why not with ‘mass’ or ‘red’? What are the rules of this game? He then suggests the embedding test: look to see if an expression can be used to construct a judgeable content that is *not* directly used to perform a speech act, paradigmatically in the antecedent of a conditional. Because imperatival force *is* grammatically marked, we cannot say:

\*“If shut the door, then....”

But we *can* say things like “If he is happy, then I am glad,” and “If that is a good thing to do, then you have reason to do it.” In the first of these, I have *not* macarized anyone, and in the second, I have not commended any action. So the terms ‘good’ and ‘happy’ contribute to the specification of content, and are not to be understood as mere force indicators. (I called this essay “masterful” and “gem-like.” Geach exhibits a deep fault-

---

<sup>4</sup> The Philosophical Review, Vol. 69, No. 2, 221-225. Apr., 1960.

line in an entire philosophical approach, nails down his point, and leaves it at that. The essay is five pages long.<sup>5</sup>)

Worrying about compound forms of judgment containing unendorsed judgeable contents as components required Kant to distinguish the operations by which such contents are constructed from the activity of endorsing the results of those operations. Further, once we see that the doctrine of judgment as predication is trying to have things both ways, and that no single ‘operation’ can be taken both to form contents and to be the adoption of an attitude towards those contents, the need to deal with compound judgements shows that predication is inadequate for *both* purposes. Endorsing hypothetical (conditional) judgeable contents is not happily thought of as predicating, and those contents are not happily thought of as formed by predication.<sup>6</sup>

4. For this reason, Kant could not take over the traditional classificatory theory of consciousness, which depends on understanding judging as predicating. But what can go in its place? Here is perhaps Kant’s deepest and most original idea, the axis around which I see all of his thought as revolving. What distinguishes judging and intentional doing from the activities of non-sapient creatures is not that they involve some special sort of mental processes, but that they are things knowers and agents are in a distinctive

---

<sup>5</sup> Of course this argument does not make it forever impossible to pursue emotivist-expressivist theories. It just obliges those who do to have something to say about embedded uses as well as free-standing ones. Addressing just this issue is what marks the divide between classical expressivists such as C.L. Stevenson, and the more sophisticated generation of neo-expressivists epitomized by Allen Gibbard and Simon Blackburn.

<sup>6</sup> At this point some (even Frege himself, briefly) have been tempted to think of judging as predicating *truth* of a sentence—at the cost of seeing the *same* predicate as involved in all judgments. But sentences formed by applying “...is true” to a sentence can also appear as the antecedents of conditionals, and the same question arises: In asserting such a conditional, has one “predicated” truth of the sentence that appears in the antecedent?

way *responsible* for. Judging and acting involve *commitments*. They are *endorsements*, exercises of *authority*. Responsibility, commitment, endorsement, authority—these are all *normative* notions. Judgments and actions make knowers and agents liable to characteristic kinds of *normative* assessment. Kant’s most basic idea is that minded creatures are to be distinguished from un-minded ones not by a matter-of-fact ontological distinction (the presence of mind-stuff), but by a normative *deontological* one. This is his *normative characterization* of the mental.

Drawing on a jurisprudential tradition that includes Grotius, Pufendorf, and Crusius, Kant talks about norms in the form of *rules*. Judging and acting—endorsing claims and maxims, committing ourselves as to what is or shall be true—is binding ourselves by norms. It is making ourselves subject to assessment according to rules that articulate the *contents* of those commitments. Those norms, those rules, he calls ‘concepts’. In a strict sense, all a Kantian subject can do *is* apply concepts, either theoretically, in judging, or practically, in acting. Discursive, that is to say, concept-mongering creatures, are normative creatures—creatures who live, and move, and have their being in a normative space.

It follows that the most urgent philosophical task is to understand the nature of this normativity, the bindingness or validity (*Verbindlichkeit*, *Gültigkeit*) of conceptual norms. For Descartes, the question was how to think about our grip on our concepts, thoughts, or ideas (Is it clear? Is it distinct?). For Kant the question is rather how to

understand their grip on us: the conditions of the intelligibility of our being bound by conceptual norms.

5. This master idea has some of Kant's most characteristic innovations as relatively immediate consequences. The logical tradition that understood judging as predicating did so as part of an order of semantic explanation that starts with concepts or terms, particular and general, advances on that basis to an understanding of judgments (judgeables) as applications of general to particular terms, and builds on that basis an account of inferences or consequences, construed syllogistically in terms of the sort of predication or classification exhibited by the judgments that appear as premises and conclusions. In a radical break with this tradition, Kant takes the whole judgment to be the conceptually and explanatorily basic unit at once of meaning, cognition, awareness, and experience.<sup>7</sup> Concepts and their contents are to be understood only in terms of the contribution they make to judgments: concepts are functions of judgment. Why? Kant adopts this order of semantic explanation because judgments are the minimal units of *responsibility*—the smallest semantic items that can express *commitments*. The semantic primacy of the propositional is a consequence of the central role he accords to the *normative* significance of our conceptually articulated doings. In Frege this thought shows up as the claim that judgeable contents are the smallest units to which pragmatic force can attach: paradigmatically, assertional force. In the later Wittgenstein, it shows up as the claim that sentences are the smallest linguistic units with which one can make a move in the language game.

---

<sup>7</sup> As we might say, judgment is for Kant the *Ur-teil* of discourse.

Understanding judging in normative terms, as undertaking a distinctive kind of responsibility, is also responsible for the most general features of Kant's account of the *form* of judgment. The subjective form of judgment is the 'I think', which, we are told, can accompany all our judgments, and so, in its pure formality, is the emptiest of all representations. Thought of in terms of the normative pragmatics of judgment, it is the mark of *who* is responsible for the judgment. (A corresponding point applies to the endorsement of practical maxims.) It indicates the relation of a judging to the "original synthetic unity of apperception" to which it belongs. I will say something more soon about the use Kant makes of this central concept. But the idea behind it is that the sorting of endorsements into co-responsibility classes is a basic condition of the normative significance of commitments. Committing myself to the animal being a fox, or to driving you to the airport tomorrow morning normatively preclude *me* from committing myself to its being a rabbit, or to *my* sleeping in tomorrow (in the sense that I cannot be entitled to such commitments), but they do not in the same way constrain the commitments *others* might undertake.

The objective form of judgment, Kant says, is "the object=X" to which judgments always, by their very form as judgments, make implicit reference. Thought of in terms of the normative pragmatics of judgment, it is the mark of what one has made oneself responsible *to* by making a judgment. It expresses the objectivity of judgments, in the sense of their having intentional objects: what they purport to represent. The understanding of the intentional directedness of judgments—the fact that they *represent* or are *about* something—is through-and-through a *normative* one. What the judgment is

about is the object that determines the *correctness* of the commitment one has undertaken by endorsing it. (On the practical side, it is normative assessments of the *success* of an action for which the object to which one has made oneself responsible by endorsing a maxim must be addressed.) In endorsing a judgment one has made oneself liable to distinctive kinds of normative assessment. What one is thinking and talking *about* is what plays a special role, exercises a special sort of *authority* in such assessments. Representing something, talking *about* or thinking *of* it, is acknowledging its semantic *authority* over the correctness of the commitments one is making in judging. Representational *purport* is a normative phenomenon. As we shall see, representational *content* is to be understood in terms of it.

6. Besides *who* is responsible for a judging, and what that judging is responsible *to*, there are two other elements a normative pragmatics of judgment should address:

- What is it that one makes oneself responsible *for* by judging?
- and
- What is it that one is *doing* in making oneself responsible, committing oneself, endorsing?

The first is a question of how to understand judgeable *contents*. The second is the challenge to fill in the bare-bones picture of judging as a normative doing, the alteration of one's normative status, the undertaking of some sort of responsibility. This is the key issue, for it is in terms of the answer to this question that we will have to understand both dimensions of content—what one makes oneself responsible *for* in judging, and what one

makes oneself responsible *to*—as well as the nature of the subject of those responsibilities. Here, I think, we get Kant’s next big idea.

That is that the responsibility one undertakes in judging (and there is a parallel story about endorsing a practical maxim) is generically a kind of *task* responsibility: the responsibility to *do* something. Specifically, it is the responsibility to *integrate* the judgment into a *unity of apperception*. Synthesizing a unity of apperception is the activity that provides the background and the context in which episodes can have the significance of judgments. Engaging in that activity produces, sustains, and develops a synthetic unity of apperception: a *self* or *subject*. What must one do to be doing that? One must *integrate* new endorsements into the whole that comprises one’s previous endorsements. Synthesis by successive integration can be thought of as involving three sorts of activity: critical, ampliative, and justificatory. One’s *critical* responsibility is to weed out materially incompatible commitments.<sup>8</sup> This means rejecting candidate judgments that are incompatible with what one is already committed to and responsible for, or relinquishing the offending prior commitments. Judges as such are obliged to renounce commitment to contents that are *incompatible* with their other commitments, or which have such commitments as their consequences. For if two commitments are incompatible, each serves as a reason to give up the other.

---

<sup>8</sup> My talk here and in what follows of “material” relations of incompatibility and inferential consequence is adapted from Sellars’s usage. It refers to inferential and incompatibility relations that hold in virtue of what is expressed by *non-logical* vocabulary. Thus claiming that Pittsburgh is West of New York City has as a material inferential consequence that New York City is East of Pittsburgh, and is materially incompatible with the claim that Pittsburgh is a prime number. I discuss this idea further in Chapter One of *Articulating Reasons* [Harvard University Press, 2000].

One's *ampliative* responsibility is to extract the material inferential consequences of each commitment, including new ones, in the context of the auxiliary hypotheses and collateral premises provided by the rest of one's commitments. Each commitment gives one reason to accept others, which one ought to accept in the sense that one has already implicitly committed oneself to them by acknowledging the commitment from which they follow. One's *justificatory* responsibility is to be prepared to offer reasons for the commitments (both theoretical and practical) that one acknowledges, by citing prior commitments (or undertaking further commitments) that inferentially entitle one to those new commitments. Seeking to fulfill the first sort of responsibility is aiming at a whole constellation of commitments that is *consistent*. Seeking to fulfill the second is aiming at one that is *complete*. And seeking to fulfill the third is aiming at a constellation of commitments that is *warranted*. (Perhaps it will be clear at this point how it is that Kant can take it that the systematic obligations of philosophers are merely the explicit form of the very same obligations that are implicitly incumbent on rational knower and agents as such.)

What is produced, sustained, and developed by practically acknowledging these critical, ampliative, and justificatory integrative task responsibilities is a *unity* precisely in the sense of being governed by, subject to assessment according to, those norms of integration. It is a *synthetic* unity in that it is produced by the activity of synthesis that is integrating disparate commitments into such a unity.<sup>9</sup> It is an *original* synthetic unity of

---

<sup>9</sup> This is not the only sort of "combination" that Kant calls "synthesis" (cf. B130-1). But the claim that this is the basic species is an important element of the reading I am offering. Cf. the claim at A79/B104: The same function which gives unity to the various representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations in an intuition; and this unity,

*apperception* because what makes an act or episode a *judging* in the first place is just its being subject to the normative demand that it be integrated into such a systematically unified whole<sup>10</sup>, and awareness in the sense of apperception (a matter of sapience, rather than mere sentience) is judgment (apperceiving is judging).<sup>11</sup> Kant also, tellingly, calls the product of this synthetic activity a *transcendental* unity of apperception. It is transcendental in that it is that in terms of which we must understand the relation to objects—representation—which is an essential dimension of the *content* of judgments. The key to Kant’s account of representation is to be found in the story about how representational purport is to be understood in terms of the activity of synthesizing an original unity of apperception, as I have described it so far. It will help to approach that story in stages.

7. So far I have attributed to Kant two positive moves in response to his principled rejection of traditional accounts of judgment as predication:

- understanding the activity of judging in *normative* terms, as the undertaking of a kind of responsibility or commitment; and

---

in its most general expression, we entitle the pure concept of the understanding. The same understanding, through the same operations by which in concepts, by means of analytical unity, it produced the logical form of a judgment, also introduces a transcendental content into its representations, by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuition in general.

(I have said—and will here say—nothing about the move from unifying judgments into an original synthetic unity of apperception to the unification of concepts and intuitions in judgments.)

<sup>10</sup> This is what I take to be the idea behind Kant’s apparently awkward claim that representations must both already “stand under” a synthetic unity and “be brought under” it by the activity of synthesis:

I am conscious to myself *a priori* of a necessary synthesis of representations—to be entitled the original synthetic unity of apperception—under which all representations that are given to me must stand, but under which they have also first to be brought by means of a synthesis. [CPR B135]

<sup>11</sup> [T]hat act of understanding by which the manifold of given representations... is brought under one apperception, is the logical function of judgment. [CPR B143]

- understanding that kind of responsibility as a *task*-responsibility, a commitment to *do* something, namely to integrate the judgeable content one endorses into a synthetic unity of apperception.

In light of the justificatory, ampliative, and critical dimensions of that practical synthetic-integrative responsibility, another way of putting this last point is that what one is responsible for is having *reasons* for one's endorsements, using the contents one endorses *as* reasons for and against the endorsement of other contents, and taking into account possible *countervailing* reasons. And that is to say that as *normative* creatures, we are *rational* creatures—not in the sense that we always or even generally think or act as we have reason to, or that we usually have good reasons for thinking and doing what we do, but in the sense that whether we do or not, we are always liable to normative *assessment* concerning our reasons for thinking as we do or doing what we do. However *sensitive* we are in fact on any particular occasion to the normative force of reasons (that peculiar force, at once compulsory and yet not always compelling, that so fascinated and puzzled the ancient Greek philosophers), we are the kind of creatures we are—knowers and agents, creatures whose world is structured by the *commitments* and *responsibilities* we undertake—only because we are always liable to normative assessments of our *reasons*.

The norms that articulate the contents of judgments are *concepts*. The conceptual faculty, the understanding, is the faculty of judgment. Concepts articulate the contents of judgments by determining what one would make oneself responsible for, what one would be committing oneself to, were one to endorse those contents. Kant thinks of concepts as a kind of *rule*. What are they rules for doing? They are rules for synthesizing a unity of

apperception. And that is to say that they are rules articulating what is a *reason* for what. The concepts being applied determine what *follows* from a given claim(able), hence what (else) one would have committed oneself to or made oneself responsible for by endorsing it. They determine what counts as rational *evidence for* or against, or *justification of* a judgeable content, hence would count as a *reason for* or against endorsing it.

The task of integrating a judgment (or practical maxim) into a synthetic unity of apperception has determinate conditions of success and failure only insofar as the judgments have contents that stand in relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility to one another. A knower can have a determinate *critical* integrative task-responsibility only if it is settled which judgeable contents are materially incompatible with which others, so that endorsing some provides good reasons to reject others. And a knower can have a determinate *ampliative* or *justificatory* integrative task-responsibility only if it is settled which judgments inferentially commit or entitle one to which others, and so provide good reasons for accepting those further judgments. The concepts applied in judging articulate the content of the judgment (the judgeable *content* one becomes responsible *for*) by specifying the material inferential and incompatibility relations that content stands in to other such contents. For that is what settles what one is responsible for *doing* in making the judgment. Conceptual content in that sense provides the details of the synthetic-integrative responsibility one is undertaking thereby. Here the paired notions of a judgeable content and of being responsible for such a content in the sense of endorsing or committing oneself to it, are being made sense of in terms of a

basic kind of task-responsibility: being responsible for *doing* something (namely integrating the judgment into a normative unity of apperception).

Kant's ideas about the act or activity of *judging* settle how he must understand the content *judged*. In conditioning the semantic account of *content* on the pragmatic account of *force* (in Frege's sense)—the way the story about what is *endorsed* is shaped by the story about what *endorsing* is—Kant exhibits a kind of methodological *pragmatism*. In this sense, that pragmatism consists not in the explanatory privileging of *practical* discursive activity over *theoretical* discursive activity, but in the explanatory privileging of *act* over *content*, within *both* the theoretical and the practical domains. Kant's explanatory privileging of the *activity* of synthesizing a unity of apperception would reverberate through subsequent German Idealism, and be embraced and exploited in particular by Fichte and Hegel.

8. The argumentative and explanatory structure I have been indicating as guiding and working out (in a pragmatist spirit) Kant's master idea of the fundamentally *normative* character of judging is a way of thinking about the relations between four things:

- 1) What one must *do* in order in the relevant sense to be taking responsibility for or committing oneself to a judgeable content (or practical maxim). This is engaging in the activity of *synthesizing* an original unity of apperception, by *integrating* the content in question into the whole that comprises all of one's commitments in the light of the

relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility they stand in to one another.

- 2) What one creates, sustains, and develops by doing that: the constellation of commitments that is an original synthetic unity of apperception (OSUA).
- 3) The elements of that synthetic unity, what one takes responsibility *for* or commits oneself to. These are the judgeable contents that are integrated into the OSUA.
- 4) What one thereby makes oneself responsible *to*. These are the *objects* that one comes to *represent*, in the sense of making oneself answerable (*for* the correctness of the endorsed judgeable contents that make up the OSUA) *to* objects, which one in that normative sense thereby counts as thinking (talking, judging) *about*. It is because of this dimension of conceptual contentfulness that the synthetic unity of apperception deserves to count as a *transcendental* unity of apperception. For in Kant's usage, *transcendental* logic differs from *general* logic in addressing the *content*, and not just the *form* of judgments, in the sense of their representation of, or reference (in the sense of normative answerability) to, *objects*.

This list amounts to an order of explanation. The strategy is to make sense of each of these elements in terms of those that precede it. Because the kind of normative *unity* distinctive of the synthetic unity of apperception must be understood in terms of the

synthetic-integrative *activity* that produces it, the cognitive-practical subject or self that is identified with a synthetic unity of apperception is not happily thought of using the traditional category of substance. It is the moving, living constellation of its “affections”, that is, of the concomitant commitments that compose and articulate it. The significance of each of the component commitments that contingently and temporarily are included in a particular synthetic unity of apperception depends holistically on its rational consequential and incompatibility relations to its fellows. This reciprocal dependence of the whole and its parts, together with the dynamic character of such relational structures as sustained by rational synthetic-integrative activity made it irresistible for subsequent idealists (following Kant himself, in his *Critique of Judgment*) to appeal to and apply *organic* metaphors.

The two-sided notion of conceptual content adverted to in the last two items on the list—what one makes oneself responsible *for* and what one makes oneself responsible *to*, by judging—is also to be explained in terms of the original synthetic activity of integrating one’s commitments according to their rational relations to one another. I have claimed that we can think of this as a *pragmatist* explanatory strategy, in the sense that we find in contemporary philosophers of language who want to understand the *meanings* expressed by various locutions in terms of the *use* of those expressions—that is, in suitably broad senses of the terms, to give explanatory priority to *pragmatics* over *semantics*. But I have so far said nothing about the relations between the two dimensions of conceptual content that show up as the third and fourth items on the list. I have suggested that the target notion of representational purport should itself be understood as

a normative (meta)concept: as a matter of taking or treating one's commitments as subject to a distinctive kind of *authority*, as being *responsible* (for its correctness, in a characteristic sense) *to* things that in that normative sense count as represented by those representing states, which are what must be integrated into an original synthetic unity. What remains to be seen is how that rational synthetic integrative activity can be understood as instituting a specifically *representational* normative dimension of authority and responsibility. That is what is required to justify the claim that the original rational synthetic unity of apperception as so far described also deserves to be thought of as a *transcendental* unity of apperception, the subject studied by *transcendental* logic, which goes beyond *general* logic precisely in its concern not with the *form* of judgments, but of their *content*, in particular, their *representational* content.

Intentionality—semantic contentfulness—comes in two flavors: 'of'-intentionality and 'that'-intentionality. The first, or *representational* dimension, is semantic directedness at objects: what one is thinking *of* or talking *about*. The second, or *expressive* dimension, concerns the *content* of our thought and talk: *what* one is thinking or saying (*about* what one is thinking or talking *about*). So one can think *of* or *about* foxes, *that* they are nocturnal omnivores. What falls within the scope of the 'of' in such a specification is a term, while what follows the 'that' in such phrases as "I think (or John thinks) *that* foxes are nocturnal omnivores," is a declarative sentence. The pre-Kantian early modern philosophical tradition took it for granted that one ought first to offer an independent account of representational, 'of'-intentionality, of what it is to represent

something, and only then, on that basis to explain expressive, ‘that’-intentionality, what it is to judge or claim *that* things are thus-and-so.

That commitment is not strictly entailed by the traditional bottom-up order of logical-semantic explanation that begins with an account of concepts, builds on that an account of judgments, and on that in turn an account of inferences. For one might pursue such a three-stage account first for what expressions of the various orders of complexity *express*, and only then turn to consideration of what they *represent* (for instance: objects-and-properties, facts, and laws). So Kant’s rejection of the traditional logic, in light of the normative-pragmatic priority of judgment (which we have seen, in his hands already has a substantial inferential component)—his treating concepts as “functions of judgment”—is not tantamount to a prioritizing of the expressive over the representational dimensions of semantic content.<sup>12</sup> But in fact, once again, Kant turns the traditional order of explanation on its head. The fact that Kant’s approach to judging appeals to integration of judgments by synthesizing them into a whole according to their *rational* relations to one another brings into view in the first instance a notion of the content a declarative sentence expresses, what one has become responsible *for*, that is understood in terms of the broadly inferential relations of *inclusion* and *exclusion* it stands in to other contents (both those included in the current synthetic unity of apperception and candidates not currently endorsed). But for what thereby becomes visible to be intelligible as a notion of conceptual content, it must exhibit also a representational

---

<sup>12</sup> In terms of later developments, we can see it as a question of the relative explanatory priority of the notions of the sense expressed by a sentence and the object represented by a singular term. With the wisdom of hindsight vouchsafed us by Frege’s analysis (still opaque to Russell), we can see that the two issues that need to be disentangled are the distinction between the content associated with declarative sentences and that associated with singular terms, and the distinction between sense and reference.

dimension. Thinking *about* something is not a special kind of thinking. It is an aspect of *all* thinking.

So the question is how reference to or representation of objects (representational ‘of’-intentionality) can be made intelligible or shown to be a necessary sub-structure of inferential ‘that’-intentionality, when the latter is understood in terms of the rational synthetic integrative activity that is judging. Here is how I think that story goes (and this is really the punchline of my story in this chapter, the “one far-off, divine event” toward which this whole creation has been moving): The relations of material incompatibility and inferential consequence among judgeable contents that we have seen are a necessary condition of synthesizing a rational unity of apperception (which is to say judging) already implicitly involve commitments concerning the identity and individuation of *objects* they can accordingly be understood as representing or being *about*. Why? The judgment that *A* is a dog is *not* incompatible with the judgment that *B* is a fox. The judgment that *A* is a dog *is* incompatible with the judgment that *A* is a fox. That means that taking a dog-judgment to be materially incompatible with a fox-judgment *is* taking them to refer to or represent an object: the *same* object. And the same thing holds for relations of material inferential consequence. Taking it that *A* is a dog does *not* entail that *B* is a mammal. But taking it that *A* is a dog *does* entail that *A* is a mammal. So drawing the inference is taking it that the two judgments refer to one and the same object.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> It doesn’t matter that these examples appeal only to sentences formed by applying monadic predicates. Inferential and incompatibility relations among sentences formed using relational predicates exhibit corresponding phenomena. For instance, the identities of the terms are essential to the goodness of the inference from “Kant admired Hamann,” and “Hamann was a teacher of Herder,” to “Kant admired a teacher of Herder.” One might also worry about logically compound premises and conclusions (especially in light of the emphasis placed on these in motivating the whole line of thought being considered). I’ll say more about those in the next section, in the context of the categories. But once again, the goodness of

This *triangulation* by acknowledging material incompatibilities and inferences is, in a nutshell, how the *normative* demand for a *rational* unity of apperception (judgments) makes intelligible *representational* purport: what it is to take or treat judgments as *representing* or being *about objects*. It shows how the *representational* dimension of conceptual content can be understood as already implicit in its articulation by relations of inference and incompatibility, which is how we understood the *expressive* dimension. It provides a sense in which making oneself rationally responsible *for* an inferentially articulated judgeable content, in the sense of being committed to integrating it into a rational unity of apperception, involves taking or treating those judgments as *about* objects, and so as making oneself responsible *to* them. It puts us in a position to understand Kant's otherwise dark claim that "it is the unity of consciousness that alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, and therefore their objective validity...."<sup>14</sup> Represented objects show up as something like *units of account* for the inferential and incompatibility relations judgeable contents stand in to one another. If

---

*material* inferences involving the paradigmatic negative, hypothetical, and disjunctive judgments, for instance, depends on the identity of the objects addressed by the premises and conclusions. "If my dog Coda broke any home furnishings, I will be angry with Coda," entails "If my dog Coda broke my favorite lamp, I will be angry with Coda," but not "If my dog Coda broke my favorite lamp, I will be angry with John," or even "If John broke my favorite lamp, I will be angry with John."

One might think that if I believe that A is the mother of B, then "A is a dog" is incompatible with "B is a fox." But we should rather say that "A is the mother of B," "A is a dog," and "B is a fox," form an incompatible triad. Here there is still triangulation, pointing to *common* objects: "A is the mother of B," invokes objects common to each of the other two elements.

If there are not "enough" other claims in play, we may not be able to tell whether an incompatible triad has the structure of this example, involving a relational predicate, rather than that exhibited by "A is a blackberry," "A is red," and "A is ripe," which also are irreducibly triadically incompatible. This sort of possible underdetermination would be a problem if the aim were to produce a theory of reference that would say what objects any given claim referred to, given only the rational relations it stands in to other claims. But the aim is only something much weaker: to say what it is to take or treat a claim as so much as purporting to refer to some object or other. For that purpose, it is enough that all the patterns of multiadic incompatibility involve some sort of triangulation-by-coreference.

<sup>14</sup> B 137.

two properties are incompatible, then it is impossible for *one and the same* object to exhibit both, but not impossible for *two different* objects to do so. And if possession of one property entails possession of another, then any object that exhibits the first will necessarily exhibit the second. But it is not necessary that some other object do so.

Here, then, is an answer to the question with which we began: what is it for something so much as to *seem* to be a representation (a representing of something represented)? What does one have to *do* to count as taking or treating it *as* a representing of something? The answer is that treating it as standing in relations of material incompatibility and inferential consequence to other such things *is* taking or treating it as a representation, as being *about* something. This decidedly non-atomistic way of thinking about representational purport is recognizably a way of picking up Descartes' idea (endorsed and developed by Spinoza and Leibniz) that horizontal relations among representings are what is needed to make intelligible the vertical relations between them and representeds. The account of what one must *do* in order to synthesize a unity of apperception provides the context in which it is possible to understand *both* dimensions of conceptual content: the inferential-expressive and the referential-representational.

9. In order to be able to integrate a judgeable content into a unity of apperception, we have seen, one must be able to distinguish in practice what follows from it and would be evidence for it, and what is incompatible with it.<sup>15</sup> But that means that those abilities

---

<sup>15</sup> That is, one must make such distinctions. It is not to say that for any judgeable whatsoever one must be disposed to put it into one of these classes. And it is not to say that one must always get it *right*—though if one gets *enough* of it wrong, one will throw into doubt the attribution of commitment to *that* content, in extreme cases, perhaps to *any* content.

can be recruited to introduce a new kind of claim, the conditional *if p then q*, for instance according to the rules:

- One is committed to the conditional *if p then q* if and only if one takes it that the material inference from *p* to *q* is a good one.
- The inference from the conditional *if p then q* and *r* to *q* is good just in case the material inference from *r* to *p* is good.
- The conditional *if p then q* is incompatible with *r* just in case the material inference from *r* to *p* is good, and there is some *s* incompatible with *q* such that the material inference from *r* to *s* is good.

(Many different ways of introducing conditionals present themselves at this point. I offer these rules just for definiteness.<sup>16</sup>) These amount to rules for forming *conditional* (Kant's "hypothetical") judgments. They specify the *conceptual content* of such judgments, for they associate a definite set of material inferential and incompatibility relations with each such judgment. And those relations are what settle what counts as successfully integrating such hypothetical judgments into a synthetic unity of apperception. But that means that anyone who can integrate *any non-hypothetical* judgments into a synthetic unity of apperception already knows how to do everything in principle needed to integrate hypothetical judgments involving those same judgeable contents into such a synthetic unity. In a similar way, it is possible to use the practical mastery of the notion of material incompatibility exhibited by anyone capable of engaging in basic synthetic-

---

<sup>16</sup> Another way to go starts with material incompatibilities. Say that *p* entails *q* ( $p|q$ ) iff everything incompatible with *q* is incompatible with *p*. (So Coda's being a dog entails Coda's being a mammal, in the sense that everything incompatible with his being a mammal is incompatible with his being a dog.) Then what is incompatible with  $p \rightarrow q$  is just whatever is incompatible with *q* and *not* incompatible with *p*. Those incompatibilities will in turn settle the entailments of  $p \rightarrow q$ . The possibility of doing everything with material incompatibilities is significant in understanding the metaphysical and logical primacy Hegel assigns to *determinate negation*, which is just his version of that concept.

integrative activity to introduce explicit notions of negation and necessity—the idea being that one counts as committed to  $\Box\sim(p\&q)$  whenever one treats  $p$  and  $q$  as materially incompatible.<sup>17</sup>

Now a concept, on Kant’s usage, is a rule for forming a judgment. In this sense, “forming” a judgment (that is, a judgeable) is settling what counts as successfully integrating it into a synthetic unity of apperception. The concepts according to which hypothetical, modal, and negative judgments are formed, then, are *a priori*, not in the first instance in an *epistemological* sense, but in the *semantic* sense that any subject of apperception, which is to say any subject that can engage in judging (and hence be aware of anything in the sense of sapient or apperceptive awareness), at least implicitly always already possesses (can deploy) those concepts. They are in this sense “pure” concepts: what Kant calls “categories.” And each is associated with a form of judgment. In these cases, they are associated with forms of *compound* judgment: the very kind of judgment consideration of which turned out to require a new theory both of the activity of judging and of the contents judged. In this case of the hypothetical, Kant thinks the category is that of *causation* in the sense of one thing *necessitating* another. Thereon hangs a tale. The only conclusion I want to draw from this line of thought at this point is that here we have an example of at least some of Kant’s central categories that we can understand entirely in terms of the process of synthesizing a rational unity of apperception. And notice that in this way of telling the story, we did *not* have to *presuppose* the possibility

---

<sup>17</sup> I show in detail how one might do something like this in the Appendices to the fifth of my 2006 John Locke lectures *Between Saying and Doing: Toward an Analytic Pragmatism* [Oxford University Press, 2008].

of something called “synthetic knowledge *a priori*,” and then search for the conditions of its possibility.

What we *have* had to presuppose, in telling this story about the activity of synthesizing a transcendental unity of apperception, is the availability, as raw materials, of judgeable (or practically endorsable) items possessing *determinate conceptual contents*. That is, it must already be settled, at each stage of the process of rational critical and ampliative integration, what relations of material incompatibility and inferential consequence the conceptual contents that are to be integrated stand in to one another. In order to assess the status of that presupposition concerning conceptual *contents*, we need to look more closely at the kind of normative *force* that is involved in taking responsibility for the *use* of concepts in judgment and intentional action. That is the topic of the next chapter.

10. I pointed out above that when we understand *represented objects*—what one makes oneself responsible *to* in becoming responsible *for* a judgeable content by judging (integrating it into a synthetic unity of apperception)—in terms of triangulation of the material incompatibility and inferential consequence relations that articulate the contents of those judgeable contents, those objects show up as something like units of account for properties, which stand in those relations of exclusion and inclusion (or consequence) [Hegel’s ‘ausschließen’ and ‘schließen’] to one another. *Representing subjects*, understood as original synthetic unities of apperception, can also be understood as something like units of account, for commitments (judgings, and, in the extended system,

also endorsements of practical maxims), which stand in relations of exclusion and consequence to one another. Subjects and objects are alike in “repelling” material incompatibilities, and encompassing material consequences. They are different in that while it is *impossible* for one and the same object at the same time to exhibit two incompatible properties (or stand in incompatible relations) and *necessary* that it have all the properties entailed by any properties it does have, it is merely *inappropriate* for one and the same subject at the same time to undertake incompatible commitments, and *obligatory* that it acknowledge all the commitments entailed by any commitments it does acknowledge. In the case of *objects*, the relations of exclusion and inclusion are *alethic modal* ones: a matter of what is and is not possible and what is and is not necessary. In the case of *subjects*, the relations of exclusion and inclusion are *deontic* or *normative* ones: a matter of what one is and is not entitled and committed to or responsible for, hence of liability to normative assessment and criticism.

Objects play the conceptual functional role of *units of account for alethic modal incompatibilities*. A single object just is what cannot have incompatible properties (at the same time). That is, it is an essential individuating feature of the metaphysical categorical sortal metaconcept object that objects have the metaproperty of *modally* repelling incompatibilities. And in a parallel fashion, subjects too are individuated by the way they normatively ‘repel’ incompatible commitments. It is *not* impermissible for two *different* subjects to have incompatible commitments—say, for me to take the coin to be copper and you to take it be an electrical insulator. What *is* impermissible is for one and the *same* subject to do so. Subjects play the conceptual functional role of *units of account for*

*deontic normative incompatibilities*. That is, it is an essential individuating feature of the metaphysical categorical sortal metaconcept subject that subjects have the metaproperty of *normatively* repelling incompatibilities. A single subject just is what *ought* not to have incompatible commitments (at the same time).<sup>18</sup>

When Hegel looks back at Kant's account of the nature of the subject, construed as an original unity of apperception and marked by the subjective form of all judgments, the "I think," and of the objects to which subjects make themselves responsible in judging, marked by the objective form of all judgments, the "object=X," it strikes him that both are to be understood in terms of the synthetic *activity* of integrating judgments with one another, by critical exclusion and ampliative inclusion or extension. That sort of *doing* is what makes the concepts both of subject and of object intelligible: as what is responsible *for* judgments, and what judgments are responsible *to*, respectively. This is one of the core ideas around which Hegel elaborates his *idealism*. Consciousness, in the sense of apperception, a relation between subjects and objects, presupposes and is to be explained in terms of the *process* of synthesizing a self—the process that is *self*-consciousness. What now show up as symmetric subjective and objective poles of consciousness (the intentional nexus) are to be understood as corresponding to two aspects of the activity of synthesizing a unity of apperception that can, in the way we have rehearsed, be seen to be necessarily a *transcendental*, that is, object-representing, unity. Alethic and deontic modalities, what is expressed by modal and normative

---

<sup>18</sup> I am suppressing many complications in these formulations. In one sense, it is the whole objective world that "repels" incompatible *facts*, and so is analogous to *each* subject. Thought of this way, it is clusters of intersubstitutable singular terms that are analogous to objects. The general point I am after does not require considering this level of fine structure.

vocabulary, show up as two sides of one coin, intimately bound together by the synthetic-integrative systematizing activity that is the ultimate source of the *senses* of both kinds of locution. I'll have more to say about this idea, and the demarcation of the normative, in Chapter Two: "Autonomy, Community, and Freedom."

11. I have now finished telling the substantive part of the story to which this chapter is dedicated. I want to close by briefly addressing a methodological question that will have occurred to just about everyone who has come this far with me: "What in the world do you think you are doing?" How could I think that I have been talking about anything that *Kant* thought, given all the concepts absolutely central to his project that do *not* appear at all in my tale. Among the topics I did not find it necessary so much as to mention are: intuition, sensibility, receptivity, the fact that concepts without intuitions are empty, space and time, conditions of the possibility of experience, synthetic truths known *a priori*, the distinction between phenomena and noumena, transcendental idealism, the Copernican revolution...and a lot more. One might well think that these topics are somewhat important to Kant; certainly they loom large in his own telling of his story.

Of course they are important. There is a lot more going on, even just in his theoretical philosophy, than I have adverted to. For instance, Kant is the first philosopher to try to think through the consequences of moving from Aristotelian principles of identity and individuation of empirical objects, in terms of substance and accident, to Newtonian ones, which appeal instead to spatiotemporal location. (This is a naturalist

idea, but not one the British empiricists—even the “celebrated Mr. Locke”—had contemplated, never mind endorsed.) He thinks that this metaconceptual transformation has profound consequences for what it is to be semantically in touch with—to be able to represent—objects so conceived. Those considerations are interwoven with a line of thought about sensibility and receptivity and neither are in any obvious way necessarily connected to the story about representational purport that I have told here. That there is nonetheless a deep connection, indeed a necessary harmony, between them is what the transcendental deduction aims to explain.

But the fact that one of Kant’s central preoccupations is synthesizing these two thoughts about content—one, as Kant seems to have thought of it, having to do with the *form* of the metaconcept conceptual content, and the other having to do with its *content*—does not at all mean that it is not possible to dissect from the results of his synthesis one of the constellations of commitments he is concerned to integrate into a larger whole. There is an internal coherence to the line of thought about concepts, judging, hence apperception and understanding that I have been laying out. And we can consider it in abstraction from the other elements with which Kant combines it. Indeed, we *must* distinguish it if we are to ask the potentially interesting philosophical question of whether you get a better story about intentionality, semantics, and representation with or without the considerations concerning sensibility that he is concerned to integrate with those I have indicated. And I think we must discern the train of thought I have picked out here in order to address the historically interesting question of how to understand the paths that lead from Kant’s to Hegel’s most interesting ideas.

Of course, there are many such paths. In Chapter Two, I will lay out another one, centering on practical, rather than theoretical philosophy.

## Lecture Two

### **Autonomy, Community, and Freedom**

1. My theme in Chapter One was the innovative *normative* conception of intentionality that lies at the heart of Kant's thought about the mind. He understands judging and willing as taking on distinctive kinds of *responsibility*. And he understands *what* one endorses by doing that—judgeable contents and practical maxims—in terms of what one is thereby committing oneself to *do*, the kind of *task*-responsibility one is taking on. The practical activity one is obliging oneself to engage in by judging and acting is *integrating* those new commitments into a unified whole comprising all the other the commitments one acknowledges. What makes it a *unified* whole is the *rational* relations among its parts. One is obliged to resolve material incompatibilities one finds among one's commitments, by rejecting or modifying some of the offending elements. This is one's *critical* obligation. And one is obliged to acknowledge commitment to the material inferential consequences of one's commitments. This is one's *ampliative* obligation.

Engaging in those integrative activities is synthesizing a *self* or *subject*, which shows up as what is responsible *for* the component commitments into which it is articulated. Kant's core *pragmatist* commitment consists in his methodological strategy of understanding *what* one is in this sense responsible for or committed to, the *contents* of one's judgments and willings, in terms of the role they play in what acts with those

contents make one responsible for *doing*: criticizing and amplifying the commitments one thereby undertakes. Such a strategy accordingly demands that those contents determine the relations of material incompatibility and inferential consequence in which they stand to each other (since that is what is needed to make possible resolution of conflicts and extraction of consequences). The rules that settle those rational relations are the *concepts* one counts as applying in judging or willing, which activities then become visible as endorsements of specifically *discursive* (that is, *conceptual*) contents.

We saw that in taking two commitments to be materially incompatible, or to stand in material inferential-consequential relations, one is in effect taking them to *refer to* or *represent* a single *object*: to attribute to that object properties that exclude or include one another, that is, that are themselves incompatible or stand in a consequential relation. As a result, the synthetic-integrative process, with its aspects of critical and ampliative activity (what Hegel with characteristic imagery talks about as the “exhaling and inhaling” that maintain the rational organic integrity of the discursive subject), provides the basis for understanding both the subjective and the objective poles of the intentional nexus. Subjects are what repel incompatible commitments in that they *ought* not endorse them, and objects are what repel incompatible properties in that they *cannot* exhibit them. (Subjects are *obliged* to endorse the consequences of their commitments, and objects *necessarily* exhibit the properties that are consequences of their properties.)

On this account, there is an intimate connection—grounded in the fundamental process or activity of rational synthesis or integration—between the (vertical) *semantic-*

*intentional* relations between representing subjects and represented objects, on the one hand, and the (horizontal) *deontic normative* relations among subjective commitments and *alethic modal* relations among objective properties, on the other. The way I have told this bit of the story perhaps owes more to what Hegel makes of Kant's thought than to Kant's own understanding of it. But Kant himself did, as no-one had done before, connect deontic and alethic modalities as pure concepts expressing related species of *necessity*: practical and natural necessity, respectively.

2. For Kant read Hume's practical and theoretical philosophies as raising variants of a single question. On the side of *practical* reasoning, Hume asks what our warrant is for moving from descriptions of how things *are* to prescriptions of how they *ought* to be. How can we rationally justify the move from 'is' to 'ought'? On the side of *theoretical* reasoning, Hume asks what our warrant is for moving from descriptions of what *in fact* happens to characterizations of what *must* happen, and what *could not* happen. How can we rationally justify the move from descriptions of matter-of-factual regularities to formulations of necessary laws? In Kant's terminology, these are both kinds of 'necessity,' practical and natural necessity, because for him, 'necessary' (notwendig) just means "according to a *rule*". Hume's predicament is that he finds that even his best understanding of *facts* doesn't yield an understanding of either of the two sorts of *rules* governing and relating those facts, underwriting assessments of which of the things that actually happen (all he thought we can directly experience) *ought* to happen (are *normatively* necessary), or *must* happen (are *naturally* necessary). (I have been expounding the fundamental *idealist* idea that to understand, in terms of our normative,

rational, synthetic activity, why there must be these two flavors of rules, deontic and alethic, and how they are related to one another as they are, is to understand the basic nature and structure of *intentionality*, in the sense of the expressive and representational relations between subjects and objects.)

Kant's response to the proposed predicament is that we cannot be in the position Hume envisages: understanding matter-of-factual empirical claims and judgments perfectly well, but having no idea what is meant by modal or normative ones. To judge, claim, or believe that the cat is on the mat one must have at least a minimal practical ability to sort material inferences in which that content is involved (as premise or conclusion) into good ones and bad ones, and to discriminate what is from what is not materially incompatible with it. Part of doing that is associating with those inferences ranges of counterfactual robustness: distinguishing collateral beliefs functioning as auxiliary hypotheses that would, from those that would not, infirm the inference. So, for example, one must have such dispositions as to treat the cat's being on the mat as compatible with a nearby tree being somewhat nearer, or the temperature a few degrees higher, but not with the sun being as close as the tree or the temperature being thousands of degrees higher. One must know such things as that the cat might chase a mouse or flee from a dog, but that the mat can do neither, and that the mat would remain essentially as it is if one jumped up and down on it or beat it with a stick, while the cat would not. It is not that there is any one of the counterfactual inferences I have mentioned that is necessary for understanding what it is for the cat to be on the mat. But if one makes *no* distinctions of this sort—treats the possibility of the cat's jumping off the mat or yawning

as on a par with its sprouting wings and starting to fly, or suddenly becoming microscopically small, does not at all distinguish between what can and cannot happen to the cat and what can and cannot happen to the mat—then one does not count as understanding the claim well enough to endorse it, in any sense save the derivative, parasitic one in which one can believe of a sentence in Turkish, which one does not at all understand, that it is true. Sellars puts this Kantian point well in the title of one of his essays: “Concepts as Involving Laws, and Inconceivable without Them.”

If that is right, then in being able to employ concepts such as cat and mat in ordinary empirical descriptive claims one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do in order to deploy concepts such as possible and necessary—albeit fallibly and imperfectly. Grasp of what is made explicit by judgments formed using those alethic modal concepts is *implicit* in and presupposed by grasp of *any* empirical descriptive concepts. This is part of what Kant means by calling them “pure” concepts, that is “categories,” and saying that our access to them is “*a priori*”—in the sense that the ability to deploy them is presupposed by the ability to deploy *any* concepts, including especially ordinary empirical descriptive concepts. This latter claim is not at base *epistemological*, but *semantic*.

What about the concern, on the side of practical philosophy, with the question of how grasp of *normative* vocabulary is related to grasp of empirical descriptive vocabulary? A closely analogous argument applies. Any rational agent, anyone who can act intentionally, must practically understand the possibility of acting for *reasons*. That

means making some distinction in practice between sample bits of practical reasoning that do, and those that do not, entitle or commit those who endorse their premises to their conclusions. For being an intentional agent means being intelligible as responding differentially to the goodness of practical reasons for action provided by one's discursive attitudes. The sort of force such reasoning gives to its conclusion is *normative* force. Good bits of practical reasoning give the agent *reason* to act in one way rather than another, in the sense of showing that it is rationally *permissible* or *obligatory* to do so. If that is right, then being able to engage in practical reasoning at all, being able to act for practical reasons, which is to say to be an intentional agent, already involves exercising all of the abilities needed to deploy normative concepts. For concepts such as commitment or obligation, entitlement or permission, expressing various kinds of oughts, just make it possible to express *explicitly* (which is to say, in judgeable form), distinctions and attitudes that one *implicitly* acknowledges and adopts already in sorting practical inferences into materially good and bad ones (however fallibly).

In fact (though this is a fact Hegel makes more of than Kant does), Kant's normative account of theoretical judgments means that we do not even have to look to the practical sphere to mount an argument along these lines. Taking responsibility for or committing oneself to any judgeable content is integrating it into a synthetic unity of apperception. Doing that is practically acknowledging both critical and ampliative *obligations*, treating the embrace of incompatible contents and the failure to acknowledge consequential ones as not *permissible*. So in being apperceptively aware of anything at all one is already exercising all the abilities needed to master the use of at least some

basic normative concepts. These, too, are “pure” concepts, which make explicit something implicit in the use of *any* concepts. Indeed, we saw last time that in Kant’s picture, alethic modal and deontic normative concepts show up as intimately related. For they make explicit different, but complementary aspects of the process of apperceptive synthesis, corresponding respectively to the subjective form of judgment, which gives us our grip on the concept of representing subjects, and the objective form of judgment, which gives us our grip on the concept of represented objects.

A central observation of Kant’s is that what we might call the framework of empirical description—the commitments, practices, abilities, and procedures that form the necessary practical background within the horizon of which alone it is possible to engage in the cognitive theoretical activity of describing how things empirically are—essentially involves elements expressible in words that are *not* descriptions, that do *not* perform the function of describing (in the *narrow* sense) how things are. These include, on the objective side, what is made explicit as statements of *laws*, using alethic modal concepts to relate the concepts applied in descriptions. Kant addresses the question of how we should understand the semantic and cognitive status of those framework commitments: are they the sort of thing that can be assessed as *true* or *false*? If true, do they express *knowledge*? If they are knowledge, how do we come to know and justify the claims expressing these commitments? Are they a kind of *empirical* knowledge? I think that the task of crafting a satisfactory idiom for discussing these issues and addressing these questions is still largely with us, well into the third century after Kant first posed them.

Now Kant already realized that the situation is much more complicated and difficult than is suggested by this way of putting the issue: as though all that were needed were to distinguish framework-constitutive commitments from commitments that become possible only within the framework (what becomes the dichotomy between language and theory, meaning and belief, that Carnap endorses and Quine rejects). For it is one thing to acknowledge that the existence of “lawlike” relations among concepts or properties (that is, ones that support counterfactually robust inference) that are expressed explicitly by the use of alethic modal vocabulary is a necessary part of the framework of empirical description, that (as Sellars puts the point) no *description* is possible except in a context in which *explanation* is also possible, and that the function of the modal vocabulary that expresses those explanatory relations is not descriptive in the narrow sense whose paradigm is the statement of particular empirical facts. That is granting the claim *that* there must be laws (reflected in rules of inference) governing the properties (reflected in concepts) used in empirical descriptions is part of the framework of description(-and-explanation). *That* claim will not itself be an *empirical* claim, in the sense of one that can only be established by investigating what descriptions actually apply to things. If it is true and knowable, it is so, we could say, *a priori*. It is, we would be tempted to say in Kant’s hylomorphic terms, a matter of the *form*, rather than the *content* of empirical knowledge. But the further point must then be granted that *which* lawlike statements express *genuine* laws (are “objectively valid”) and which do not *is* an *empirical* question. So we need a way of talking about broadly *empirical* claims that are not in the narrow sense *descriptive* ones, codifying as they do *explanatory* relations among ground-level

particular descriptive applications of determinate empirical concepts. Responding to this challenge (and to its analog on the side of practical activity) is one of the central animating and orienting themes of Kant's and Hegel's work (as it would be later for Peirce's and Sellars's).

3. Upstream from all these considerations, in the order of explanation I am pursuing, is Kant's *normative* understanding of mental activity, on both the theoretical and the practical side: his taking judging and endorsing practical maxims both to consist in *committing* oneself, taking on distinctively discursive sorts of *responsibility*. This is what corresponds on the subjective side to the framework elements made explicit on the objective side in terms of alethic modal vocabulary. In Chapter One, I suggested that this idea about the centrality of normativity is the axis around which all of his thought should be understood to turn, and that in light of that, understanding the nature of the *bindingness* of conceptual norms becomes a central philosophical task. That is the topic of this chapter.

An integral element of Kant's normative turn is his radically original conception of *freedom*. His theory is unusual (though not wholly without precedent) in putting forward a conception of *positive* rather than negative freedom. That is, it is a conception of freedom *to* do something, rather than freedom *from* some sort of constraint. Freedom for Kant is a distinctive kind of practical ability. What *is* unprecedented, I think, is the way he thinks about that ability. The philosophical tradition, especially its empiricist limb, had understood the issues clustering around the notion of human freedom in alethic

modal terms. Determinism asserted the *necessity* of intentional performances, given non-intentionally specified antecedent conditions. The freedom of an intentional action was thought of in terms of the *possibility* of the agent's having done otherwise. The question was how to construe the subjection of human conduct to *laws* of the sort that govern the natural world. For Kant, though, these categories apply to the *objective* side of the intentional nexus: the domain of represented objects. Practical freedom is an aspect of the spontaneity of discursive activity on the *subjective* side: the domain of representing subjects. The modality that characterizes and articulates this dimension is not alethic but deontic. What is distinctive of it is not being governed by laws, but by *conceptions* of laws, that is, normative attitudes. Kant's conception of freedom, too, is a *normative* one.

*Spontaneity*, in Kant's usage, is the capacity to deploy concepts. Deploying concepts is making judgments and endorsing practical maxims. Doing that, we have seen, is *committing* oneself, undertaking a distinctive sort of discursive *responsibility*. The positive freedom exhibited by exercises of our spontaneity is just this normative ability: the ability to commit ourselves, to become responsible. It can be thought of as a kind of *authority*: the authority to bind oneself by conceptual norms. That it is the authority to *bind* oneself means that it involves a correlative kind of *responsibility*. That the norms in question are *conceptual* norms means that the responsibility involved in exercising that sort of authority is a *rational* responsibility. We have seen that it is a kind of *practical* responsibility, the responsibility to *do* something. It is the responsibility to integrate the commitment one has undertaken with others that serve as *reasons* for or

against it. Kantian positive freedom is the *rational* capacity to adopt *normative statuses*: the ability to *commit* oneself, the *authority* to make oneself *responsible*.

To get an intuitive sense of how such a capacity can sensibly be thought of as a kind of positive *freedom*, it is helpful to think of an example suggested by the guiding metaphor of Kant's popular essay "Was ist Aufklärung?" Consider what happens when a young person achieves her legal majority. Suddenly she has the authority to bind herself legally, for instance by entering into contracts. That gives her a host of new abilities: to borrow money, take out a mortgage, start a business. The new authority to bind oneself normatively, to take on these new normative statuses, involves a huge increase in positive freedom. The difference between discursive creatures and non-discursive ones is likewise to be understood in terms of the sort of *normative positive freedom* exhibited by the concept-users.

Further, for Kant this sort of normative positive freedom is a kind of *rational* freedom. For the exercise of that spontaneity is *rational* activity. Rationality in this sense does not consist in knowers and agents generally, or even often, having good reasons for what they believe and do. It consists rather just in being in the space of reasons, in the sense that knowers and agents count as such insofar as they exercise their normative authority to bind themselves by conceptual norms, undertake discursive commitments and responsibilities, and so make themselves liable to distinctive kinds of normative *assessment*. For they are liable to assessment as to the goodness of their *reasons* for exercising their authority as they do, for taking on *those* specific

commitments and responsibilities. Assessment of those reasons is assessment of their success at integrating the new commitments with others they have similarly adopted and acknowledged. Whatever the actual causal antecedents of their judgments and intentional doings, Kantian knowers and agents are *obliged* (committed) to have *reasons* for their judgments and actions. (This rational justificatory obligation is a kind of resultant of the critical and ampliative obligations we have already registered.)

On this account, far from being incompatible with constraint, freedom *consists* in a distinctive kind of constraint: constraint by norms. This sounds paradoxical, but it is not. The positive freedom Kant is describing is the practical capacity to be bound by discursive norms. This is a capacity that is compatible with, but extends beyond being bound by the laws that govern natural beings. It is by exercising this capacity that we raise ourselves above the merely natural, and become beings who live, and move, and have our being in the normative space of commitments and responsibilities, and so (because it is the rational relations they stand in that articulate the contents of those normative statuses) *reasons*.

4. The aspiration to be entitled to a conception of normative positive freedom along these lines makes all the more urgent the philosophical project of understanding normative statuses such as commitment, responsibility, and authority. One of the permanent intellectual achievements, and great philosophical legacies of the Enlightenment—and perhaps the greatest contribution modern philosophers have ever made to the wider culture—is the development of secular conceptions of legal, political,

and moral normativity. In the place of traditional appeals to authority derived ultimately from divine commands (thought of as ontologically based upon the status of the heavenly lord as creator of those he commands), Enlightenment philosophers conceived of kinds of responsibility and authority (commitment and entitlement) that derive from the practical attitudes of human beings. So for instance in social contract theories of political obligation, normative statuses are thought of as instituted by the intent of individuals to bind themselves, on the model of promising or entering into a contract. Political authority is understood as ultimately derived from its (perhaps only implicit) *acknowledgment* by those over whom it is exercised.

This movement of thought is animated by a revolutionary new conception of the relations between normative *statuses* and the *attitudes* of the human beings who are the subjects of such statuses, the ones who commit themselves, undertake responsibilities, and exercise authority, and who acknowledge and attribute (practically take themselves and others to exhibit) those statuses. This is the idea that normative statuses are *attitude-dependent*. It is the idea that authority, responsibility, and commitment were not features of the non- or pre-human world. They did not exist until human beings started taking or treating each other *as* authoritative, responsible, committed, and so on—that is, until they started adopting normative *attitudes* towards one another. Those attitudes, and the social practices that make adopting them possible, *institute* the normative statuses—in a distinctive sense that it is a principal task of philosophy to investigate and elucidate. This view of the global attitude-dependence of norms contrasts with the traditional objectivist one, according to which the norms that determine what is “fitting” in the way of human

conduct are to be read off of features of the non-human world that are independent of the attitudes of those subject to the norms. The job of human normative subjects on this traditional picture is to conform their attitudes (what they *take* to be correct or appropriate conduct) to those attitude-independent norms—to discover and acknowledge the objective normative facts, on the practical side, just as they are obliged to discover and acknowledge objective non-normative facts on the theoretical side.

Kant identifies himself with this modern tradition in that he embraces the Enlightenment commitment to the attitude-dependence of basic normative statuses (a commitment that, in the context of a normative approach to cognitive-practical activity, and a pragmatist approach to understanding conceptual contents in terms of what one is *doing* in endorsing them, has considerable significance for subsequent idealism). This is a thought that can be developed in a number of ways. (Further along, I'll consider some paths opened up by beginning to disambiguate it along two crucial dimensions.) One of Kant's big ideas is that it can be exploited to provide a criterion of demarcation for the normative. To be entitled to a normative conception of positive human freedom as discursive spontaneity, Kant must be able to distinguish the *normative* constraint characteristic of knowing and acting *subjects* from the necessitating *causal* constraint characteristic of the *objects* they know about and act on. In his terms, he must be able to distinguish constraint by *conceptions*<sup>19</sup> of laws from constraint by laws. What is the difference between adopting a *normative status* and coming to be in a *natural state*? What is the difference between how norms and causes “bind” those subject to them?

---

<sup>19</sup> Or representations: “Vorstellungen.”

Following his hero Rousseau, Kant radicalizes (what he and his followers thought of as) the Enlightenment discovery of the attitude-dependence of normative statuses into an account of what is distinctive of normative bindingness, according to a model of *autonomy*. This model, and the criterion for demarcating normative statuses from natural properties that it embodies, is intended as a successor-conception to the traditional model of *obedience* of a subordinate to the commands of a superior. On that traditional conception, one's normative statuses are determined by one's place in the great feudal chain of normative subordination—which may itself be thought of either as an objective feature of the natural (and supernatural) world, or as itself determined normatively by some notion of the deserts of those ranked according to their asymmetric authority over and responsibility to one another. The contrasting autonomy idea is that we, as subjects, are genuinely *normatively* constrained only by rules we constrain *ourselves* by, those that we adopt and acknowledge *as* binding on us. Merely natural creatures, as objects, are bound only by rules in the form of laws whose bindingness is not at all conditioned by their attitudes of acknowledging those rules *as* binding on them. The difference between non-normative *compulsion* and normative *authority* is that we are genuinely *normatively* responsible only to what we *acknowledge as* authoritative. In this sense, only we can bind ourselves, in the sense that we are only *normatively* bound by the results of exercises of our freedom: (self-constitutive) *self*-bindings, commitments we have undertaken by acknowledging them.<sup>20</sup> This is to say that the positive freedom to adopt normative statuses, to *be* responsible or committed, is the same as the positive freedom to *make*

---

<sup>20</sup> The acknowledgement of authority may be merely implicit, as when Kant argues that in acknowledging others as concept users we are implicitly also acknowledging a commitment not to treat their concept-using activities as mere means to our own ends. That is, there can be background commitments that are part of the implicit structure of rationality and normativity as such. But even in these cases, the source of our normative *statuses* is understood to lie in our normative *attitudes*.

ourselves responsible, by our attitudes. So Kant's normative conception of positive freedom is of *freedom* as a kind of *authority*. Specifically, it consists in our *authority* to *make* ourselves *rationally responsible* by *taking* ourselves to be responsible. The capacity to *be* bound by norms and the capacity to *bind ourselves* by norms are one and the same. That they are one and the same is what it is for it to be *norms* that we are bound by—in virtue of binding ourselves by them. Here authority and responsibility are symmetric and reciprocal, constitutive features of the normative subject who is at once authoritative and responsible.

This whole constellation of ideas about normativity, reason, and freedom, initiated by Kant, and developed by his successors, is, I think, what Heidegger means when he talks about “the dignity and spiritual greatness of German Idealism.”

5. In Chapter One, I claimed that Kant's rejection of the traditional classificatory theory of consciousness and the need for a new theory both of judging and of what is judged results from considering the distinction between pragmatic force and semantic content, the act of judging and judgeable content, as it shows up in the context of *compound* forms of judgment. That same distinction now combines with the autonomy thesis (which is a thesis about pragmatic *force*, or what one is *doing* in judging) to yield a demand for the relative *independence* of force and content: attitude-*dependence* of normative force turns out to require attitude-*independence* of content. The Kant-Rousseau autonomy criterion of demarcation of the normative tells us something about normative *force*—about the nature of the bindingness or validity of the discursive

commitments undertaken in judging or acting intentionally. That force, it tells us, is *attitude-dependent*. It is important to realize that such an approach can only work if it is paired with an account of the *contents* that normative force is invested in that construes those contents (and in that regard, the normative statuses whose contents they are) as *attitude-independent*.

The autonomy criterion says that it is in a certain sense up to us (it depends on our activities and attitudes) *whether* we are bound by (responsible to) a particular conceptual norm (though acknowledging *any* conceptual commitments may involve further implicit rationality- and intentionality-structural commitments). However, if not only the normative *force*, but also the *contents* of those commitments—*what* we are responsible for—were *also* up to us, then, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, “whatever seems right to us would be right.” In that case, talk of what is right or wrong could get no intelligible grip: no norm would have been brought to bear, no genuine commitment undertaken, no normative status instituted. Put another way, autonomy, binding oneself by a norm, rule, or law, has two components, corresponding to ‘autos’ and ‘nomos’. One must bind *oneself*, but one must also *bind* oneself. If not only *that* one is bound by a certain norm, but also *what* that norm involves—what is correct or incorrect according to it—is up to the one endorsing it, the notion that one is *bound*, that a distinction has been put in place between what is correct and incorrect according to that norm goes missing. The attitude-dependence of normative *force*, which is what the autonomy thesis asserts, is intelligible in principle *only* in a context in which the boundaries of the *content*—what I acknowledge as constraining me and by that acknowledgment *make* into a normative

*constraint* on me in the sense of opening myself up to normative *assessments* according to it—are *not* in the same way attitude-dependent. That is a condition of making the notion of normative constraint intelligible. We may call it the requirement of the relative *independence* of normative *force* and *content*.

Kant secures this necessary division of labor by appeal to *concepts*, as rules that determine what is a reason for what, and *so* what falls under the concepts so articulated. (If being malleable is a conclusive consequence of being gold, then only malleable particulars can fall under the concept gold.) His picture of empirical activity as consisting in the application of concepts—of judging and acting as consisting in the endorsement of propositions and maxims—strictly separates the *contents* endorsed from the *acts* of endorsing them. The latter is our responsibility, the former is not.<sup>21</sup> In Kant’s picture, the judging or acting empirical consciousness always already has available a stable of completely determinate concepts. Its function is to choose among them, picking which ones to invest its authority in by applying to objects, hence which conceptually articulated responsibility to assume, which discursive commitments to undertake. Judging that what I see ahead is a *dog*—applying that concept in perceptual judgment—may initially be successfully integratable into my transcendental unity of apperception, in that it is not incompatible with any of my other commitments. Subsequent empirical experience may normatively require me to withdraw that characterization, and lead me to apply instead, say, the concept *fox*. That is my activity

---

<sup>21</sup> This does not require that the constitution of conceptual contents be wholly independent of our activity. Kant in fact sees “judgments of reflection” as playing a crucial role in it. It requires only that each empirical (“determinate”) judgment be made in a context in which already determinately contentful concepts are available as candidates for application.

and my responsibility. But what other judgments are compatible with something being a dog or a fox (so what would oblige me to withdraw the application of those concepts) is *not* at that point up to me. It is settled by the contents of those concepts, by the particular rules I can choose to apply and so to bind myself by.

In taking this line, Kant is adopting a characteristic rationalist order of explanation. It starts with the idea that empirical experience presupposes the availability of determinate concepts. For apperception—awareness in the sense required for sapience, awareness that can have *cognitive* significance—is judgment: the application of concepts. Even classification of something particular as of some general kind counts as *awareness* only if the general kind one applies is a *concept*: something whose application can both serve as and stand in need of *reasons* constituted by the application of *other* concepts. When an iron pipe rusts in the rain, it is in some sense classifying its environment as being of a certain general kind, but is in no interesting sense *aware* of it. So one must already have concepts in order to be aware of anything at all.

Of course, this is just the point at which the pre-Kantian rationalists notoriously faced the problem of where determinate concepts come from. If they are presupposed by experiential awareness, then it seems that they cannot be thought of as derived from it, for instance by abstraction. Once the normative apperceptive enterprise is up-and-running, further concepts may be produced or refined by various kinds of judgments (for instance, reflective ones), but concepts must always already be available for judgment, and hence apperception, to take place at all. Empirical activity, paradigmatically

apperception in the form of judgment, presupposes transcendental activity, which is the rational criticism and rectification of one's commitments, making them into a normatively coherent, unified system. Defining that normative unity requires the availability of concepts with already determinate contents (roles in reasoning). Leibniz's appeal to innateness is not an attractive response to the resulting explanatory demand. And it would not be much improvement to punt the central issue of the institution of conceptual norms from the realm of empirical into the realm of noumenal activity. I think it is a nice question just how Kant's account deals with this issue.

6. As I read him, Hegel criticizes Kant on just this point. He sees Kant as having been uncharacteristically and culpably uncritical about the origin and nature of the *determinateness* of the contents of empirical concepts. Hegel's principal innovation is his idea that in order to follow through on Kant's fundamental insight into the essentially *normative* character of mind, meaning, and rationality, we need to recognize that normative statuses such as authority and responsibility are at base *social* statuses. He broadens Kant's account of synthesizing normative individual selves or subjects (unities of apperception) by the activity of *rational integration*, into an account of the simultaneous synthesizing of apperceiving individual selves (subjects of normative statuses) and their communities, by practices of *reciprocal recognition*. How does this response fit into the space of possibilities defined by the considerations I have been putting forward as motivating Kant?

The problem is set by a tension between the autonomy model of normative bindingness, which is a way of working out and filling in the Enlightenment commitment to the attitude-dependence of normative statuses, on the one hand, and the requirement that the contents by which autonomous subjects bind themselves be at least relatively attitude-independent, in the sense that while according to the autonomy thesis the subject has the authority over the judging, in the sense of *which* concepts are applied, which judgeable content is endorsed (responsibility is taken for), *what* one then becomes responsible for must be independent of one's taking responsibility for it, on the other. This is to say that the content itself must have an *authority* that is independent of the *responsibility* that the judge takes for it. And the problem is to reconcile that requirement with the autonomy model of the bindingness of normative statuses such as authority. Whose attitudes is the authority of conceptual contents dependent on? The autonomy model says it must be dependent on the attitudes of those responsible to that authority, namely the subjects who are judging and acting, so undertaking commitments with those contents and thereby subjecting themselves to that authority. But the requirement of relative independence of normative force and content forbids exactly that sort of attitude-dependence.

To resolve this tension, we must disambiguate the basic idea of the attitude-dependence of normative statuses along two axes. First, we can ask: *whose* attitudes? The autonomy model takes a clear stand here: it is the attitudes of those who are responsible, that is, those over whom authority is exercised. This is not the only possible answer. For instance, the traditional subordination model of normative bindingness as

*obedience*, by contrast to which the autonomy view defines itself, can be understood not only in objectivist terms, as rejecting the attitude-dependence of normative statuses, but also in terms compatible with that insight. So understood it acknowledges the attitude-dependence of normative statuses, but insists that it is the attitudes of those *exercising* authority, the superiors, rather than the attitudes of those *over whom* it is exercised, the subordinates, that are the source of its bindingness. (It is in this form that Enlightenment thinkers fully committed to attitude-dependence, such as Pufendorf, could continue to subscribe to the obedience model.)

Hegel wants to respect both these thoughts. The trouble with them, he thinks, is that each of them construes the reciprocal notions of authority and responsibility in a one-sided [einseitig] way: as having an *asymmetric* structure that is unmotivated and ultimately unsustainable. If X has authority over Y, then Y is responsible to X. The obedience view sees only the attitudes of X as relevant to the bindingness of the normative relation between them, while the autonomy view sees only the attitudes of Y as mattering. Hegel's claim is that they *both* do. The problem is to understand how the *authority* to undertake a determinate responsibility that for Kant is required for an exercise of freedom is actually supplied with a correlative determinate *responsibility*, so that one is intelligible as genuinely *committing* oneself to something, constraining oneself. This co-ordinate structure of authority and responsibility ('independence' and 'dependence' in the normative sense Hegel gives to these terms) is what Hegel's *social* model of *reciprocal recognition* is supposed to make sense of. He thinks (and this is an Enlightenment thought, of a piece with that which motivates the autonomy criterion of

demarcation of the normative) that all authority and responsibility are ultimately *social* phenomena. They are the products of the *attitudes* of those who, on the one hand, *undertake* responsibility and *exercise* authority, and on the other, of those who *hold* others responsible, and *acknowledge* their authority. In spite of the formal parity of both models as asymmetric, the modern autonomy model represents for Hegel a clear advance on the traditional obedience model in that it *does* aspire to endorse symmetry of authority and responsibility. But it does so by insisting that these relations of authority and responsibility obtain only when X and Y are *identical*: when the authoritative one and the responsible one coincide. That immediate collapse of roles achieves symmetry, but only at the cost of making it impossible to satisfy the demand of relative independence of normative force and content.<sup>22</sup>

The next clarificatory question that must be asked about the basic idea of the attitude-dependence of normative statuses is: what *sort* of dependence? In particular, are the attitudes in question *sufficient* to institute the normative statuses? Or are they merely

---

<sup>22</sup> I think that the reason why the structural deficiency in the Kantian notion of autonomy that I take Hegel to be responding to has not been much discussed in contemporary treatments of that concept (which are extensive and sophisticated) is that those discussions typically take place within a substantially more limited horizon of concerns than that in which the issue is being situated here. If one thinks of autonomy exclusively as a principle in *practical* philosophy, one will be liable, and may be entitled, to take for granted the conceptual contents deployed in autonomously endorsed reasons for action (as opposed to heteronomous inclinations to act). If instead one sees it playing the pivotal role of providing a criterion of demarcation for normativity in the context of Kant's normative conception of apperception, subjectivity, and intentionality in *both* the theoretical and practical spheres and of the pragmatist order of semantic explanation that seeks to understand conceptual *content* in terms of normative *force* (in terms of what one is *doing*, the responsibilities one is undertaking, the authority one is exercising, in judging or endorsing a practical maxim), one does not have that luxury. For it is in that wider context that the requirement of relative independence of force and content arises, and needs to be reconciled (rationally integrated) with both the attitude-dependence of normative statuses at the core of autonomy and the pragmatist commitment to understanding content in terms of force. Cf. Kant's remark:

In respect of the faculties of the soul generally, regarded as higher faculties, i.e., as faculties containing an autonomy, understanding is the one that contains the constitutive *a priori* principles for the faculty of cognition (the theoretical knowledge of nature). [*Critique of Judgment* Introduction, Section IX.]

*necessary*? The stronger, sufficiency, claim seems to be required to sustain the tension between the autonomy model and the requirement of relative independence of force from content. When I introduced the attitude-dependence idea, I characterized it in two different ways. On the one hand, I said it was the idea that

Authority, responsibility, and commitment were not features of the non- or pre-human world. They did not exist until human beings started taking or treating each other *as* authoritative, responsible, committed, and so on—that is, until they started adopting normative *attitudes* towards one another.

This asserts only the *necessity* of normative attitudes for normative statuses. But I also put it as the idea that

Those attitudes, and the social practices that made adopting them possible, *institute* the normative statuses.

Here the suggestion is of the *sufficiency* of attitudes to bring normative statuses—genuine obligations and rights—into existence. A moderate version of the normative attitude-dependence thesis rejects objectivism by insisting that the notions of responsibility and authority essentially involve (in the sense of being unintelligible apart from) the notion of *acknowledging* responsibility and authority. One can say that political legitimacy is not possible without the consent of the governed without thereby being committed to the possibility of reducing legitimacy without remainder to such consent. And a moderate autonomy thesis might treat subjects as responsible only to what they acknowledge as authoritative without dissolving the authority wholly into that acknowledgement. The one-sided obedience view took the attitudes of the superior to be sufficient all by themselves to institute a normative status of authority and corresponding responsibility

on the part of the subordinate. And the one-sided autonomy view took the acknowledgement of responsibility by the one bound to be sufficient all by itself to institute the authority by which he is bound. What Hegel sees as wrong about the obedience view is accordingly not that it makes each subject's normative statuses dependent on the attitudes of others, but its asymmetric treatment of those attitudes as sufficient to institute those statuses all by themselves, independently of the attitudes of the one whose statuses they are.

Taking someone to be responsible or authoritative, attributing a normative deontic status to someone, is the attitude-kind that Hegel (picking up a term of Fichte's) calls 'recognition' [Anerkennung]. Hegel's view is what you get if you take the attitudes of *both* recognizer and recognized, both those who are authoritative and those who are responsible, to be essential *necessary* conditions of the institution of genuine normative statuses, and require in addition that those attitudes be symmetric or reciprocal [gegenseitig]. In a certain sense (which it will be our business to investigate more closely in the next chapter), Hegel also takes it that those *individually necessary* normative attitudes are *jointly sufficient* to institute normative statuses. What institutes normative statuses is *reciprocal* recognition. Someone becomes responsible only when others *hold* him responsible, and exercises authority only when others *acknowledge* that authority. One has the authority to *petition* others for recognition, in an attempt to become responsible or authoritative. To do that, one must recognize others as able to *hold* one responsible or *acknowledge* one's authority. This is according those others a certain kind of authority. To achieve such statuses, one must be recognized by them in turn. That is

to make oneself in a certain sense responsible to them. But they have that authority only insofar as one grants it to them by recognizing them as authoritative. So the process that synthesizes an apperceiving normative subject, one who can *commit* himself in judgment and action, become responsible cognitively and practically, is a *social* process of reciprocal recognition that at the same time synthesizes a normative recognitive community of those recognized by and who recognize that normative subject: a community bound together by reciprocal relations of authority over and responsibility to each other.

Here is a mundane example. Achieving the status of being a good chess-player is not something I can do simply by coming subjectively to adopt a certain attitude toward myself. It is, in a certain sense, up to me whom I regard as good chess-players: whether I count any woodpusher who can play a legal game, only formidable club players, Masters, or Grand Masters. That is, it is up to me whom I recognize as good chess-players, in the sense in which I aspire to be one. But it is not then in the same sense up to me whether I qualify as one of them. To earn their recognition in turn, I must be able to play up to their standards. To *be*, say, a formidable club player, I must be recognized as such by those I recognize as such. (The same is true of being a good philosopher.) My recognitive attitudes can define a virtual community, but only the reciprocal recognition by those I recognize can make me actually a member of it, accord me the status for which I have implicitly petitioned by recognizing them. My attitudes exercise recognitive authority in determining whose recognitive attitudes I am responsible to for my actual normative status.

As in the Kantian autonomy model of normative bindingness, according to the recognitive model we bind ourselves, collectively, and individually. No-one has authority over me except that which I grant by my recognitive attitudes. Those attitudes of mine are accordingly a necessary condition of my having the status I do. But as on the traditional obedience model, others do exercise genuine authority over my normative statuses: what I am committed to, responsible for, and authoritative about. Their attitudes are also a necessary condition of my actually having the status I do. The two aspects of normative dependence, authority and responsibility, are entirely mutual, reciprocal, and symmetrical. And together, the attitudes of myself and my fellows in the recognitive community, of those I recognize and who recognize me, are sufficient to institute normative statuses that are *not* subjective in the same way in which the normative attitudes that institute them are.

Hegel diagnoses the incompatibility of commitment to the attitude-dependence of normative statuses according to the Kantian autonomy model and the relative independence of normative content from normative force as resulting from the autonomy model's asymmetric insistence on the *sufficiency* of the attitudes of the committed one to institute the normative status in question, without acknowledging also any normative dependence, in the sense of a *necessary* condition, on the attitudes of others (due to an insufficiently nuanced appreciation of the dimensions along which the autonomy model of normative force or bindingness represents an advance over the obedience model). The reciprocal recognition model he recommends to resolve this incompatibility balances

moments of normative *independence* or authority of attitudes over statuses, on the part of both recognizer and recognized, with corresponding moments of normative *dependence* or responsibility to the attitudes of others, by reading both of these aspects as individually only necessary, and only jointly sufficient to institute normative statuses in the sense of giving them binding force.

7. For Hegel, social substance (a community) is synthesized by reciprocal recognition. It is articulated into individual recognizing and recognized *selves*, which are the *subjects* of normative statuses of commitment, authority, and responsibility—statuses instituted collectively by those cognitive attitudes. He sees these social cognitive practices as providing the context and background required to make sense of the Kantian process of integrating conceptual commitments so as to synthesize a rational unity of apperception. Hegel's term for the whole normatively articulated realm of discursive activity (Kant's "realm of freedom") is 'Geist': spirit. At its core is *language*: "Language is the Dasein of Geist," Hegel says.<sup>23</sup> That is where concepts (which for Hegel, as for Kant, is to say, norms) have their actual, public existence. (To look ahead: we might here think of Sellars's principle that "Grasp of a concept is mastery of the use of a word.")

Here is how I think the social division of conceptual labor understood according to the cognitive model of reciprocal authority and responsibility works in the paradigmatic linguistic case, so as to resolve the tension with which we have been concerned. It *is* up to me which counter in the game I play, which move I make, which word I use. But it is *not* then in the same sense up to me what the *significance* of that

---

<sup>23</sup> In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, [A.W. Miller, (trans.), Oxford University Press] paragraph 652.

counter is—what other moves playing it precludes or makes necessary, what I have said or claimed by using that word, what the constraints are on successful rational integration of the commitment I have thereby undertaken with the rest of those I acknowledge. It *is* up to me what concept I apply in a particular judgment—whether I claim that the coin is made of copper or silver, for instance. But if I claim that it is copper, it is *not* then up to me what *move* I have made, what *else* I have committed myself to by using that term. So, for instance, I have thereby committed myself to the coin melting at 1084° C, but not at 1083° C—in the sense that if those claims are not true then neither is the one I made. And I have made a claim that is incompatible with saying that the coin is an electrical insulator. I can bind myself by these determinate conceptual norms because they are always already there in the always already up-and-running communal linguistic practices into which I enter as a young one. An essential part of what maintains them is the attitudes of *others*—in this case, of the metallurgical experts who would hold me responsible for those commitments on the basis of my performance, if the issue arose. My authority to commit myself using public words is the authority at once to make myself responsible for and authorize others to hold me responsible for determinate conceptual contents, about which I am *not* authoritative. It is a petition for determinate recognition (attribution of specific commitments) by those I implicitly recognize as having, and thereby grant the authority so to recognize me. That is granting them the authority to assess the correctness or success of my rational integrative performances.

The point with which I want to close is that Hegel's social, linguistic development of Kant's fundamental insight into the essentially normative character of our mindedness

provides a model of positive *freedom* that, while building on his notion of autonomy, develops it substantially. One of the central issues of classical political philosophy was always how to reconcile individual freedom with constraint by social, communal, or political norms. Kant's vision of us as rational creatures opens up space for an understanding of a kind of freedom that consists in being able constrain ourselves by norms—indeed, by norms that are rational, in the sense that they are conceptual norms: norms articulating what is a reason for what. The normative conception of positive freedom then makes possible a distinctive kind of answer to the question of how the loss of individual negative freedom—freedom from constraint—inevitably involved in being subject to institutional norms could be *rationally justified* to the individual. (Even if it could be justified from the point of view of the collective—which cannot exist without such constraints on individual behavior—it is important that it can it also be understood as rationally justifiable from the point of view of the individual herself.) In the Kantian context, such a justification could in principle consist in the corresponding increase in positive freedom.

The positive expressive freedom, the freedom *to* do something, that is obtainable only by constraining oneself by the conceptual norms implicit in *discursive* social practices, speaking a public language, is a central case where such a justification evidently is available. Speaking a particular language requires complying with a daunting variety of norms, rules, and standards. The result of failure to comply with enough of them is unintelligibility. This fact can fade so far into the background as to be well-nigh invisible for our home languages, but it is an obtrusive, unpleasant, and

unavoidable feature of working in a language in which one is *not* at home. The same phenomenon is manifest in texts that intentionally violate even a relatively small number of central grammatical and semantic norms, such as Gertrude Stein's prose. But the kind of positive freedom one gets in return for constraining oneself in these multifarious ways is distinctive and remarkable.

The astonishing empirical observation with which Chomsky inaugurated contemporary linguistic theory is that almost every sentence uttered by an adult native speaker is radically *novel*. That is, not only has that speaker never heard or uttered just that sequence of words before, but neither has anyone else—ever. “Have a nice day,” may get a lot of play in the States, and “Noch eins,” in Germany, but any tolerably complex sentence is almost bound to be new.

Quotation aside, it is for instance exceptionally unlikely that anyone else has ever used a sentence chosen at random from the story I have been telling. And this is not a special property of professor-speak. Surveys of large corpora of actual utterances (collected and collated by indefatigable graduate students) have repeatedly confirmed this empirically. And it can be demonstrated on more fundamental grounds by looking at the number of sentences of, say, thirty words or less that a relatively simple grammar can construct using the extremely minimal 5000-word vocabulary of Basic English. There hasn't been time in human history for us to have used a substantial proportion of those sentences (even the true ones), even if every human there had ever been always spoke English and did nothing but chatter incessantly. Yet I have no trouble producing, and

you have no trouble understanding, a sentence that (in spite of its ordinariness) it is quite unlikely anyone has happened to use before, such as:

We shouldn't leave for the picnic until we're sure that we've packed my old wool blanket, the thermos, and all the sandwiches we made this morning.

This capacity for *radical semantic novelty* fundamentally distinguishes sapient creatures from those who do not engage in linguistic practices. Because of it we can (and do, all the time) make claims, formulate desires, and entertain goals that no-one in the history of the world has ever before so much as considered. This massive positive expressive freedom transforms the lives of sentient creatures who become sapient by constraining themselves by linguistic—which is at base to say conceptual—norms.

So in the conceptual normativity implicit in linguistic practice we have a model of a kind of constraint—loss of negative freedom—that is repaid many times over in a bonanza of positive freedom. Anyone who was in a position to consider the trade-off rationally would consider it a once-in-a-lifetime bargain. Of course, one need not be a creature like us. As Sellars says, one always could simply *not speak*—but only at the price of having nothing to say. And non-sapient sentients are hardly in a position to weigh the pros and cons involved. But the fact remains that there *is* an argument that shows that at least *this* sort of normative constraint is rational from the point of view of the individual—that it pays off by opening up a dimension of positive expressive freedom that is a pearl without price, available in no other way. Hegel's idea is that this case provides the model that every other social or political institution that proposes to

constrain our negative freedom should be compared to and measured against. The question always is: what new kind of positive expressive freedom, what new kinds of life-possibilities, what new kinds of commitment, responsibility, and authority are made possible by the institution?

8. Kant's normative conception of intentionality moves to the center of the philosophical stage the question of how we should think about the force or bindingness ('Gültigkeit', 'Verbindlichkeit') of normative statuses such as commitment, authority, and responsibility. Kant's response is to develop and extend the Enlightenment commitment to the attitude-dependence of normative statuses in the form of his *autonomy* model, which serves also as a criterion demarcating the realm of the normative from that of the natural.<sup>24</sup> Hegel sees that the very distinction of force and content that called forth Kant's new normative conception of judging and intending demands a relative independence of those two aspects that cannot be accommodated on the autonomy model, so long as that model is construed as applying to individual normative subjects conceived in isolation from one another—that is, apart from their normative attitudes towards one another. He notices to begin with that the requisite dependence and independence claims can be reconciled if they are construed in terms of individually necessary conditions, rather than individually sufficient ones. And understanding the sort of *normative* dependence and independence in question as ways of talking about relations of *responsibility* and *authority*, he offers a *social* model of normative statuses as instituted by reciprocal recognition, according to which each cognitive relation (recognizing and

---

<sup>24</sup> Notice that on the reading I am presenting here, the significance of autonomy for Kant extends far beyond the realm of the moral, or even the practical. It encompasses the whole realm of the conceptual, the theoretical and cognitive applications of concepts just as much as practical.

being recognized) combines aspects of authority over and responsibility to those who are recognized or who recognize.

We have seen how the reciprocal recognition model (and criterion of demarcation) for normative bindingness underwrites all of:

- A strong version of the Enlightenment idea of the *attitude-dependence* of normative statuses, since the recognitive attitudes of individual members of a recognitive community, while individually only necessary, are understood as jointly sufficient for the institution of determinately contentful normative statuses of commitment, responsibility, and authority;
- A *social* version of the structure of *autonomy*—one that incorporates the dependence on or responsibility to the attitudes of others characteristic of the obedience model in the weaker form of merely necessary conditions—since each individual is responsible only for what she has authorized others to hold her responsible for; and
- Provision for the relative independence of the content of each commitment from the authority of the one who undertakes that commitment—a way normative statuses outrun normative attitudes.

Finally, we saw how Hegel's distinctively *linguistic* version of the social recognitive model of normativity opens up a powerful and original notion of positive *expressive* freedom and normative self-hood, as the product of the rationality-instituting capacity to constrain oneself by specifically *discursive* norms.

## Lecture Three

### **History, Reason, and Reality**

1. In Chapter Two I discussed Hegel's account of what we need to *do* in order thereby to count as adopting normative statuses: committing ourselves, taking responsibility, exercising authority. To be a self in this normative sense, one must authorize others to *hold* one responsible, must petition them to *acknowledge* one's authority to commit oneself to specific claims and actions, and they must respond by actually doing so. The subjects of normative statuses, those statuses, and their communities are understood as all simultaneously synthesized by such a process of mutual recognition—the taking up of reciprocal practical normative attitudes. I motivated this social model of the nature and origin of normative force or bindingness as a response to the requirement of relative independence of the *content* of conceptual norms from their normative *force* that shows up as a criterion of adequacy for Kant's way of working out the Enlightenment idea of the attitude-dependence of normative statuses in the form of his autonomy model.

According to that model, I have a certain sort of authority over what I am genuinely responsible for or committed to. In the most basic case, it is at least a necessary condition of my *being* responsible or committed, of something *having*

normatively binding authority over me, that I *acknowledge* that responsibility, commitment, or authority. Because my normative statuses are in this way conditioned on my normative attitudes, I have a certain kind of (meta)authority concerning them; they are in this sense up to me. That is my autonomy. I am only *normatively* bound when I have bound *myself*. But for this to be intelligible as a model of normative force or bindingness, we must be able to understand what I have done as *binding* myself by undertaking a responsibility or commitment, a normative status, whose content is not simply determined by my attitudes. For if the content were so determined—if whatever *seems* right to me *is* right—then the notion that I am genuinely *bound* (that I have *bound* myself) has no application. That is to say that in order to be intelligible as determinately contentful, my autonomous (meta-)authority to bind or commit myself, to make myself responsible (a matter of the normative force of my attitudes to institute statuses), must be balanced by some authority associated with the content, with what I have become responsible *for*.

Hegel's reciprocal recognition model stems from the idea that, accepting the overarching Enlightenment commitment to the attitude-dependence of normative statuses, the way to make sense of the independent, counterbalancing (meta-)authority associated with the content to which I commit myself or for which make myself responsible is to have that authority administered by others, *to* whom I make myself responsible, *by* authorizing them to *hold* me responsible for the content I have exercised my authority to make myself responsible for. I suggested that this idea makes sense if we think about the paradigm of discursive (conceptually contentful) norms as *linguistic*

norms. What I do is intelligible as binding myself by the norms associated with the concept copper when I use the word ‘copper,’ because in doing so I subject myself to normative assessment as to the correctness of my commitment (for instance, about the temperature at which a particular coin would melt) according to standards of correctness that are administered by metallurgical experts.

The reciprocal recognition model of normative bindingness preserves cardinal features of the autonomy model it seeks to develop and succeed. What any subject is actually responsible for depends essentially on that subject’s own attitudes—though the attitudes of others now play an equally essential role. Authority and responsibility are fully co-ordinate, and the attitudes of all the recognized recognizers are jointly sufficient to institute normative statuses. And from an engineering point of view, the social account provides a good solution to the demand for relative independence of what one is responsible for from the attitudes that make one responsible for it. Nonetheless, there are a number of important questions concerning the nature of conceptual contents that are left open by this social model of normativity as instituted by practical attitudes of reciprocal recognition. In the context of the story as I have been telling it in these here, the most general question is: How is the Hegelian social-recognitive form of the autonomy model of what one must do in order to count as thereby binding oneself normatively (adopting a normative status) related to the prior Kantian story about synthesizing an original unity of apperception (a normative self or subject of normative statuses) by rational integration?<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> One way of thinking about the relations between synthesis-as-rational-integration and synthesis-as-reciprocal recognition is to ask how we understand the significance of the expository transition from *Force and Understanding* to *Self-Consciousness* in the *Phenomenology*.

That Kantian story, which I told in my Chapter One, pursues a distinctive pragmatist order of explanation. It starts with an account of what one must *do* in order to take responsibility for a claim or a plan—to make it one’s own—that understands it as rationally integrating such a commitment with one’s other theoretical and practical commitments. It then elaborates an account of the nature of the conceptual contents one becomes responsible for on the basis of that notion of what it is to invest them with normative force so understood. For the ampliative and critical dimensions of the activity of rational integration by which apperceiving normative subjects are synthesized require that the conceptual contents that are integrated stand to one another in relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility. This overarching pragmatist explanatory strategy in turn imposes constraints on the way different dimensions of conceptual or intentional content are thought of as related to one another. We saw how (at least the form of) the vertical, representational dimension of content could be made intelligible in terms of the horizontal, expressive dimension—that is, how the notion that one is talking or thinking *of or about* objects could be made sense of in terms of the relations of material inferential inclusion and material incompatibility exclusion among claimable contents of the form *that-p*. Couched in the vocabulary Frege will later introduce, this is a semantic strategy of explaining reference in terms of an antecedent notion of sense, which itself is derived from a particular way of understanding normative force.

What becomes of all this when the autonomy model of normative bindingness is elaborated into the reciprocal recognition model, as I suggested in Chapter Two? At this

point we have visible *two* pragmatist stories about how to get from force to content. For both the Kantian rational-integrative and the Hegelian social-recognitive models specify what sort of thing one must *do* in order thereby to count as binding oneself by conceptual norms. But how should they be understood as related to one another? And what sort of understanding do they make possible of the determinate contentfulness of the conceptual norms which the pragmatist order of explanation wants us to understand in terms of those practices, processes, or activities?

2. **It is by placing both within a larger *historical* developmental structure that Hegel fits the model of the synthesis of an original unity of apperception by rational integration together with the model of the synthesis of normative-status-bearing apperceiving selves and their communities by reciprocal recognition so as to make the discursive commitments instituted thereby intelligible as determinately contentful.** The process by which the commitments undertaken by members of a discursive recognitive community—and with them the concepts that articulate and constrain what counts as successfully integrating them—change and develop over time Hegel calls “experience” [Erfahrung]. In that process the various deliverances of sensuous immediacy—commitments practitioners acquire non-inferentially, by observation<sup>26</sup>—are rationally integrated into a continually evolving whole unified by the exclusion of materially incompatible contents and the inclusion of material inferential consequences. Understanding the sense in which such development can be *expressively progressive*, in the sense of putting into claimable, thinkable form more and more of how things really are, then underwrites a distinctive and original account of aspects of

---

<sup>26</sup> And on the practical side, inclinations they immediately find themselves with,

semantic content that have not been addressed in my discussion of the previous models. It is that story that I want to tell in this chapter.

In Chapter One, I pointed to some features of conceptual contents—their standing to one another in relations of inclusion and exclusion, that is, material inferential consequence and incompatibility— that are presupposed by the process of synthesis as rational integration. For the contents of the concepts one applies in judging and intending must be understood as exercising a kind of *authority* over that process, which is accordingly responsible to them in the sense that those relations among contents determine standards of correctness according to which the integration of commitments is assessed as more or less correct or successful. In Chapter Two, I claimed that the social model of normative bindingness (the force of normative statuses) as instituted by attitudes of reciprocal recognition makes room in principle for an account of the authority exercised by conceptual contents to constrain the process/practice of rational integration that respects both the *attitude-dependence* of normative statuses and the requirement that the authority of conceptual contents to which a knower and agent makes himself responsible by applying concepts in judging and intending be sufficiently *independent* of the attitudes of that very knower-agent to make sense of the notion that in applying those concepts he has *bound* himself, made himself *responsible* to them, adopted a normative status. But we have *not* seen how the reciprocal recognition model makes intelligible the availability of determinate conceptual contents to the normative subjects who are rationally integrating their commitments. A striking constitutive feature of that model is the thorough-going *symmetry* of authority and responsibility that it sees as integral to the

institution of those normative statuses. Applied to the case at hand, this means that the reciprocal recognition model requires that the authority of conceptual contents over the activities of practitioners (their responsibility to those contents) be balanced by a reciprocal authority of practitioners over those contents, a responsibility of those contents to the activities of the subjects of judgment and action who apply them. And that is to say that Hegel is committed to understanding the practice of acknowledging commitments by rational integration as a process not only of *applying* conceptual contents, but also as the process by which they are *determined*.

I think it useful to think about this move in connection with a later one in the philosophy of language that (not at all coincidentally) has the same structure. Carnap told a two-phase story about meaning and belief, language and theory. He thought of the activity of fixing meanings as in principle prior to the subsequent activity of endorsing claims or forming beliefs that could be expressed in terms of those meanings. First one settles the language, determines the meanings or conceptual contents associated with various expressions, and so how the world would have to be for claims formulated using those expressions to be true. In this phase, the language-user has complete authority. Then one looks at the world to see which applications of those concepts, which of the claims that can be expressed in the vocabulary one has introduced, are true. Here the whole authority lies with the world, which determines what theory couched in those terms is true. Quine objects that while this two-stage procedure might make perfect sense for introducing *artificial* languages, it is completely unrealistic when applied to *natural* languages. In that case, we cannot neatly separate the two aspects of language-use that

correspond to Carnap's two-phase picture. For here we cannot appeal to some expressively stronger metalanguage in which to stipulate or otherwise fix the meanings of our expressions in advance of using them. All there is fix those meanings *is* our *use* of them. And what we use them to do, the kind of doing that is their use, is making claims<sup>27</sup> and inferences—in effect, making discursive commitments and rationally integrating them. For natural languages, and the thought conducted in them, that activity of rational integration must accordingly be able to be understood not only as consisting in the process of *applying* concepts by using expressions to make judgments, but also as the process that *determines* what concepts are expressed by those locutions: what fixes the determinate content and boundaries of those concepts.

Carnap had followed Kant in seeing the prior determination of conceptual contents as a condition of the possibility of applying those concepts in judging—which, we have seen, is intelligible only as part of the activity of synthesizing a unity of apperception integrating such commitments into a rational whole. Hegel proposes a transformation of Kant's picture that corresponds structurally to Quine's replacement of Carnap's two-phase picture with one that sees only two functions of or perspectives on a unified, ongoing discursive practice. In this respect, Hegel stands to Kant as Quine stands to Carnap. (Those who do not understand history are destined to repeat it.)

3. How could one understand the process of *applying* concepts in judgment, and their rational integration with one another by extracting consequences and extruding incompatibilities, as also being the process of *determining* the contents of those concepts,

---

<sup>27</sup> And undertake practical commitments, but for simplicity, I'll focus on the theoretical side here.

including their relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility? Here again I think it is useful to think of an analogy that is not one that Hegel himself appeals to. Consider the development of concepts of English and American common law. Unlike the creatures of statutory law, there are no explicit original definitions or initial principles laying down circumstances and consequences of application for these concepts. All there is to give them content is the actual applications that have been made of them over the years. They are case law all the way down.

The judge must decide, for each new case, *both* what to endorse—that is whether or not to take the concept in question to apply to the situation as described—and what the material incompatibility exclusions and consequential inclusions articulating the content of the concept are. And for *both* these tasks the only raw materials available are provided by how previous cases have been decided. It will help to think of a simplified, stylized version of this process. Cases consist of a set of facts specified in an antecedent, non-legal vocabulary. The task in each case is to decide the applicability of some distinguished legal vocabulary (such as “strictly liable” or “contractually obliged”). The judge in each new case makes a decision, to apply or not to apply the legal concept in question, given the facts of the case. For each such decision, the judge may be conceived of as supplying also a justifying rationale. That rationale can be thought of as having two parts. First, it points to and privileges some respects of similarity and dissimilarity between the case at issue and the facts of other, previously decided, cases involving the application of the same legal concept. It might rationalize applying the concept in the present case by pointing to other cases that shared some descriptions of the facts with this

one, in which the concept was applied, and pointing to differences from some prior cases in which application of the concept was rejected. The cases selected are normatively privileged by the current judge as *precedential* with respect to the present case, and the respects of similarity and dissimilarity to them that are cited delineate implicit rules of inference from the applicability of non-legal concepts in specifying the facts of the case to the applicability of the legal concepts. Second, the rationale can appeal to the explicit rationales associated with these precedential decisions. In this process, each new decision, with its accompanying rationale, including a selection of precedents, relevant considerations, and rules of inference and incompatibility, helps to determine further the conceptual content of the legal term whose application is up for adjudication.

In engaging in this kind of practice, participating in this kind of process, the judge is performing what is recognizably a kind of synthesis by rational integration. For his selection of precedents, privileging of respects of similarity and difference, and construction of an explicit rationale for a commitment *is* the integration of that commitment with the commitments undertaken by the adjudicators of previous cases. On the ampliative side, the judge is extracting material inferential consequences from their commitments—at least according to the accompanying rationale. And on the critical side, the judge is rejecting prior commitments that would be materially incompatible with the current decision—by *not* treating those decisions, or the considerations they turn on, as valid or binding precedents. But it is clear how what the judge is doing is *also* intelligible as *developing* and *determining* the conceptual contents (thought of now in

terms of relations of material consequence and incompatibility) that in turn constrain the process going forward.

What kind of structure of authority and responsibility is exhibited by a process like this? One might first be struck by the fact that the legal concepts that develop in this way are, as the point is often put, “judge-made law.” There is nothing to them that is not the cumulative result of judicial decisions to apply or not to apply the concepts in particular cases. The deciding judge exercises authority both over the content of the legal concepts being applied, and, thereby, over future judges. For in selecting the prior cases he treats as precedential and the features of the facts he takes as salient in making the decision and providing a rationale for it, the judge both further determines the content of the concept and provides potential precedents and rationales to which future judges are responsible.

But that description shows that there is also a sense in which any deciding judge is *responsible to* the content of the concept whose applicability is being assessed, by being responsible to the authority exercised by the commitments of the prior judges whose decisions are available to provide precedents and rationales. For the justification of a judge’s decision can appeal only to the authority of prior decisions, and to the conceptual content those decisions have conferred on or discovered in the legal term in question. Here the current judge is responsible to the *conceptual content* (semantic responsibility) expressed by the legal term, *by* being responsible to the *commitments* of previous judges (responsibility to, acknowledgement of the authority of the *attitudes* of

*others*), in accepting the *task*-responsibility (the responsibility to *do* something) to synthesize a rational (including consequences and excluding incompatibles) *contemporary* unity *by* integrating the commitments of *past* judges. *Stare decisis*, the authority of precedent, is a matter of how the relations of material consequence and incompatibility that have actually been endorsed (normative attitudes) determine what one is actually responsible for (normative statuses).

In offering a rationale, a justification for a decision, the judge presents what is in effect a rational reconstruction of the tradition that makes it visible as authoritative insofar as, so presented, the tradition at once *determines* the conceptual content one is adjudicating the application of and *reveals* what that content is, and so how the current question of applicability ought to be decided. It is a *reconstruction* because some prior decisions are treated practically as irrelevant, non-precedential, or incorrect. It is a *rational* reconstruction insofar as there is a standing obligation that the commitments, considerations, and implicit relations of material inclusion and exclusion that are embraced by a rationale as precedential, salient, and implicit must fit together with the new commitment that is the decision being made, so as to constitute the very sort of rational unity Kant saw as the ideal or standard normatively governing the synthesis of an original unity of apperception. The rationale is an account delineating the boundaries of the authority of the conceptual content associated with a legal term, determined by the attitudes of the prior judges' precedential decisions and rationales, to which the current judge is responsible, in the sense that that content sets the standards for normative assessments of the correctness of that judge's decision.

Here is my first major claim: **This sort of practice or process of sequential rational integration of new commitments into a constellation of prior commitments institutes normative statuses of authority and responsibility according to the model of reciprocal recognition.** This is how the model of synthesis of a unity of apperception by rational integration, which I discussed in Chapter One, is combined with the model of the synthesis of normative subjects or selves and their communities by mutual recognition, which I discussed in Chapter Two. In our example, each deciding judge recognizes the authority of past decisions, and the contents they institute and acknowledge, over the assessment of the correctness of the decision being made. That judge also exercises authority over future judges, who are constrained by that judge's decisions, insofar as they are precedential. But the currently deciding judge is also responsible to (and held responsible by) future judges, who can (by their practical attitudes) either take the current decision (and rationale) to be correct and precedential, or not. For the current judge actually to exercise the authority the decision implicitly petitions for recognition of, it must be recognized by future judges. And if that precedential authority *is* recognized by the later judges, then it is real (a normative status has been instituted by those attitudes), according to the model of reciprocal recognition. Both in acknowledging and in claiming the authority of precedent, the judge is implicitly acknowledging the authority also of future judges, who administer that authority. For they assess whether the new commitment has been appropriately integrated with prior commitments, and decide on that basis whether to acknowledge it as authoritative, as normatively constraining future commitments in that they must be integrated with it. So

each judge is recognized (implicitly) as authoritative both by prior judges (the ones whose decisions are being assessed as precedential or not) and (explicitly) by future judges (the ones who assess the current decision as authoritative, that is precedential, or not). And each judge recognizes the authority both of prior judges (to whose precedential decisions the judge is responsible) and of future judges (on whose assessments of the extent to which the present judge has fulfilled his responsibility to the decisions of prior judges the present judge's authority wholly depends). Because the future stands to the present as the present does to the past, and there is no final future, hence no final authority, every judge is symmetrically recognized and recognizing.

4. In making a decision, a judge undertakes a commitment. The model of reciprocal recognition explains how that attitude, together with the attitudes of others, institutes normative statuses of authority and responsibility intelligible as commitment. The sequences of successive rational integration of new commitments with previous ones exhibit this historical structure of reciprocal recognition. What we now need to see now is how that fact that makes sense *also* of a dimension of symmetric authority over and responsibility to *determinate conceptual contents* for *both* specific cognitive attitudes of attributing and acknowledging commitments *and* the normative statuses those attitudes institute. One of Hegel's key ideas, as I read him, is that in order to understand how the historical process of *applying* determinately contentful concepts to undertake discursive commitments (taking responsibility for those commitments by rationally integrating them with others one has already undertaken) can also be the process of *determining* the contents of those concepts, we need a new notion of determinateness.

What we might call “*Fregean* determinateness” is a matter of sharp, complete boundaries. For Frege, each concept must be determinate in the sense that it must be semantically settled for every object, definitively and in advance of applying the concept epistemically, whether the object does or does not fall under the concept. No objects either both do and do not, or neither do nor do not, fall under it. I’ll discuss this representational dimension of conceptual content in the next section. The dimension of conceptual content that is made intelligible in the first instance by the synthetic activity of rational integration, we have seen, is articulated by relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility. What corresponds to Fregean determinateness for conceptual contents specified terms of these relations is that for every potential material inference in which any judgment that results from applying the concept figures as a premise or conclusion, it is definitively settled semantically, in advance of any actual applications, whether or not it is a good inference, and similarly for the relations of material incompatibility that hold between those judgments and any others. Here the sharp, complete boundaries that must be semantically settled definitively are those around the sets of materially good inferences and materially incompatible sets of sentences.

Hegel associates the demand for conceptual contents that are definite in this sense with the early modern tradition that culminates in Kant. It is the central element in the metaconceptual framework Hegel calls ‘*Verstand*.’ He proposes to replace this static way of thinking about the determinateness of the *relations* that articulate conceptual contents with a dynamic account of the *process* of determining those contents, which he

calls ‘Vernunft.’ Roughly, he thinks that *Verstand* is what you get if you assume that those applying concepts always already have available the contents that would result from *completing* the process of determining those contents by sequential rational integration exhibiting the historical structure of reciprocal cognitive authority and responsibility. He is very much aware of the *openness* of the use of expressions that is the practice at once of applying concepts in judgment and determining the content of the concepts those locutions express. This is the sense in which prior use does *not* close off future possibilities of development by settling in advance a unique correct answer to the question of whether a particular concept applies in a new set of circumstances. The new circumstances will always resemble any prior, settled case in an infinite number of respects, and differ from it in an infinite number of respects. There is genuine room for choice on the part of the current judge or judge, depending on which prior commitments are taken as precedential and which respects of similarity and difference are emphasized.<sup>28</sup> After all, in the absence of any prior governing statute or definition, all there is to the content of the concept in question is what has been put into it by the applications of it that have actually been endorsed or rejected. Prior uses do not determine the correctness of all possible future applications of a concept “like rails laid out to infinity,” as Wittgenstein would later put the point.

---

<sup>28</sup> This way of putting things highlights the features of the situation that encourage the temptation to think that the judge is totally unconstrained by the tradition. But to emphasize the fact that the judge is obliged to *privilege* some respects of similarity and dissimilarity, out of this wide-open field is not yet to say that every way of doing so is as good as every other, given the tradition of prior authoritative privilegings constituted by previous judgments. Of course, judgments of better and worse in this regard, as in any other, are a matter of the attitudes of some actual participants in the practice—in this case, later judges.

5. So is Hegel's idea that we can take conceptual contents that turn out to be *indeterminate* in the Kant-Frege sense—because no amount of prior use settles once and for all and in principle which of all possible future uses are correct—and just *call* them 'determinate,' in his new sense? He does in the end want to do that, but not in the immediate, stipulative, ultimately irresponsible way that would have, as Russell says, "all the advantages of theft over honest toil." Instead, he takes on the hard work needed to entitle himself to a move of this shape. For, first, he wants us to step back and ask a more basic question: what *kind of fact* is it that prior uses constrain, but do not settle, in the Kant-Frege sense, how would be correct to go on? His answer is that what is correct is a matter of a normative status, of what one is and isn't committed or entitled to, responsible for, and what would authorize such commitments. On his account, that kind of fact is a social-recognitive fact—one, further, that is instituted by a process with the distinctive *historical* version of the structure of reciprocal recognition. Second, he uses that structure to fill in the details of a structurally new notion of determinateness, in which the Kantian *Verstand* conception takes its place as merely one recognitive moment in a larger whole.

For that to happen, the Kantian account of rational integration of new commitments into a synthetic unity with prior commitments must also be recontextualized as merely one aspect of a more general rational integrative-synthetic activity. For the original account appeals to fixed, definite relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility, construed as given, settled in advance, and determinate according to the *Verstand* framework. What Hegel adds is a *retrospective*

notion of *rationaly reconstructing* the process that led to the commitments currently being integrated (not just the new one, but all the prior ones that are taken as precedential for it, too). This is a kind of genealogical justification or vindication of those commitments, showing why previous judgments were correct in the light of still earlier ones—and in a different sense, also in the light of subsequent ones. Hegel calls this process “Erinnerung,” or *recollection*.

A good example of it is the sort of Whiggish, triumphalist, rationally reconstructed history of their disciplines to be found in old-fashioned science and mathematics textbooks. Such a story supplements an account of what we now know with an account of how we found it out. What from the point of view of our current commitments appear retrospectively as having been wrong turns, dead ends, superseded theories, and degenerating research programs are ignored—however promising they seemed at the time, however good the reasons for that were, and however much effort was devoted to them. What is picked out and presented instead is a trajectory of cumulative, unbroken progress—of discoveries that have stood the test of time. It is a story about how we found out what the real boundaries of our current concepts are, hence how they ought properly to be applied, by finding out what really follows from what and what is really incompatible with what. Hegel thinks that our activity of telling stories like this is reason’s march through history. It is the way we retrospectively *make* our applications of concepts (have been) *rational*, in the sense of responsive to discursive norms, by finding a way concretely to *take* them to be rational, in that sense. For in rationally reconstructing the tradition concept users retrospectively discern conceptual

norms that are determinately contentful in the Kantian *Verstand* sense, as having been in play all along, with different aspects of their boundaries (relations of material consequence and incompatibility) discovered by correct (precedential) applications at various critical junctures in the development of the tradition.

We can think of the way the theoretical metaconceptual role played by the Hegelian notion of recollection is related to the Kantian idea of rational integration in either of two ways. We can think of Hegel as adding a complementary, recognitively dual notion alongside rational integration. *Integrating* is taking *responsibility*, making a commitment, by petitioning future concept-users to be recognized; *recollecting* is asserting *authority*, vindicating an entitlement, by recognizing past concept-users. Together the two make up a cognitive whole. But we can also think of the basic Kantian idea that what one needs to *do* to count thereby as having undertaken a discursive commitment, taken responsibility for a claim or judgment, is rationally integrating it with other commitments as being broadened and extended by the Hegelian move, so that the rational unity that must be synthesized (the “original synthetic unity of apperception”) comprises the whole developmental process by which one arrived at one’s current commitments, and not just the current time-slice of that on-going enterprise. The new kind of rational unity requires not just that one have extracted the inferential consequences of one’s commitments and extruded the incompatibilities from among them, but also that one have shown how the process by which those commitments arose out of their predecessors was a rational one. The retrospective justificatory responsibility is not only to exhibit the doxastic commitments one now acknowledges as fitting together

rationally, but also to exhibit the concepts applied in those judgments—the material inferential and incompatibility commitments that articulate their conceptual contents—as the products of a rational process.

6. The new *Vernunft* conception of determinateness that Hegel proposes is an essentially *temporally perspectival* one. Looked at *retrospectively*, the process of *determining* conceptual contents (and of course at the same time the correct applications of them) by applying them appears as a theoretical, epistemic task. One is “determining” the conceptual contents in the sense of *finding out* which are the right ones, what norms really govern the process (and so should be used to assess the correctness of applications of the concepts in question), that is, finding out what really follows from what and what is really incompatible with what. A *recollective reconstruction* of the tradition culminating in the current set of conceptual commitments-and-contents shows, from the point of view of that set of commitments-and-concepts, taken as correct, how we gradually, step-by-step, came to acknowledge (in our attitudes) the norms (normative statuses such as commitments) that all along implicitly governed our practices—for instance, what we were really, whether we knew it or not, committed to about the melting point of a piece of metal when we applied the concept copper to it. From this point of view, the contents of our concepts have always been perfectly determinate in the Kant-Frege *Verstand* sense, though we didn’t always know what they were.

Looked at *prospectively*, the process of *determining* conceptual concepts by applying them appears as a practical, constructive semantic task. By applying concepts

to novel particulars one is “determining” the conceptual contents in the sense of *making it* the case that some applications are correct, by *taking it* to be the case that they are. One is drawing new, more definite boundaries, where many possibilities existed before. By investing one’s authority in an application as being correct, one authorizes those who apply the concept to future cases to do so also. If they in turn recognize one in this specific respect, by acknowledging that authority, then a more determinate norm has been socially instituted. From this point of view, conceptual norms are never fully determinate in the Kant-Frege *Verstand* sense, since there is always room for further determination. The conceptual norms are not completely indeterminate either, since a lot of actual applications have been endorsed as correct by potentially precedent-setting judgments. All the determinateness the content has is the product of that activity.

So are the contents of empirical concepts *determinate*, in the Kant-Frege *Verstand* sense, as the retrospective epistemic perspective has it, or *indeterminate* in that sense, as the prospective semantic perspective has it? Hegel thinks that if the only metaconceptual expressive tool one has available to describe the situation is that static, nonperspectival *Verstand* conception of determinateness, the answer would have to be: “Both”—or, just as correctly: “Neither.” That those two answers do not make any sense within the metaconceptual framework of *Verstand* just shows the expressive impoverishment and inadequacy of that framework. What we should say is that concepts have contents that are both determinate and further determinable, in the sense provided by the dynamic, temporally perspectival framework of *Vernunft*. Do we *make* our concepts, or do we *find* them? Are we authoritative over them, or responsible to them? Hegel’s model entitles

him to answer: “Both”. For both aspects are equally essential to the functioning of concepts in the ever-evolving constellation of concepts-and-commitments he calls “the Concept.” Authority and responsibility are co-ordinate and reciprocal, according to the mutual recognition model of normativity that is Hegel’s successor to Kant’s autonomy model. And when such a structure of reciprocal recognitive attitudes takes the special form of an historical-developmental process, the contents of those attitudes and the statuses they institute can be considered from both prospective and retrospective temporal recognitive perspectives. Those perspectives are two sides of one coin. Hegel’s *Vernunft* metaconception of determinateness is articulated by the complementary contributions of these two different aspects of one unitary process. That it is a *rational* unity, at each stage and across stages, is secured by the fact that new commitments are undertaken by a process of rational integration in the new, broader sense that includes justifying those commitments by recollective rational reconstruction of the tradition that produced them (in addition to the critical resolution of incompatibilities and ampliative extraction of inferential consequences, which Kant had already acknowledged).

If we revert for a moment to the jurisprudential example of judges at common law, with which I introduced the historical form of reciprocal recognition, we find a striking expression of the unhelpfulness of thinking about conceptual contents according to the *Verstand* model. A classic debate in jurisprudential theory pits two views against one another. According to one, the law is what some judge takes it to be. A statement of what is legal (a normative status) is a matter-of-factual *prediction* about what a judge would decide (the judge’s normative attitude). Extreme forms of legal realism, within the

scope of this legal positivism, in addition insist that what the judge says is typically determined by non-legal reasons or causes. Legal decisions are brought about causally by such factors as “what the judge had for breakfast,” as the slogan has it (and more realistically, by his training, culture-circle, and reading). On the other side is a view according to which the judge’s job is not to *make* the law, but to *find out* what it already is (whether that is understood to be a matter of what norm the statutes or the precedents really institute, or of what natural law dictates, or any other conception). On the Hegelian view, both of these are literally “one-sided” (mis)conceptions. The former sees only the judge’s authority, but not his responsibility, and the latter sees only his responsibility, but not his authority. What is needed is an account that does justice to both, to their essential interrelations with each other, and to the way the process of which both are aspects determines conceptual contents. Hegel’s new notion of determinateness is constructed as a response to just these criteria of adequacy.

7. The pragmatist order of explanation, which we have seen in play throughout, seeks to understand discursive *content* in terms of the rational *activity* of normative subjects—to explain the *contents* of their commitments, what they in that special and derivative sense make themselves responsible for, in terms of a more basic notion of what they are responsible for *doing*. By this point in the story, that activity is being considered in the broader sense that includes both the rational *integration* of *new* commitments and the rational *recollection* of *old* ones. The aim is to understand the relations that articulate conceptual content in terms of that kind of multifaceted process. I have said something about the Janus-faced, historically perspectival Hegelian *Vernunft* conception of

determinateness of conceptual content, as regards the relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility. But these remarks address only one dimension of conceptual content: the one that in Chapter One I called the “expressive” dimension, ‘that’-intentionality. Another methodological aspiration that Hegel shares with Kant, as I read them, is to use the understanding of claimable contents in this sense (which, according to the pragmatist methodological commitment, is to be derived from thinking about what normative subjects *do* to take responsibility for such contents) in turn to explain the *representational* dimension of conceptual content: ‘of’-intentionality. We saw how this worked for Kant: how at least a formal concept of representational purport, of treating one’s claims as *about* objects, could be made intelligible in terms of the activity of rational integration constrained by relations of material inference and incompatibility. I want to close by saying how I think the corresponding Hegelian story about reference and representation goes.

In keeping with what I have presented as Kant’s axial insight, representation, too, is understood in ultimately *normative* terms. What is represented is what exercises a distinctive kind of *authority* over representings of it. Representings as such must be understood to be *responsible* to what they represent; what is represented must provide a standard for normative assessment of their *correctness*, as representings. The explanatory task is to understand this special kind of representational normativity: the way what is said or thought is responsible for its correctness to what the subject thereby counts as talking or thinking *about*, in the normative sense of its being semantically or

intentionally authoritative, its providing the standard for a distinctive kind of assessment of correctness.

In keeping with the overarching Enlightenment commitment to the *attitude-dependence* of normative statuses such as authority and responsibility, we need to understand what constellation of normative attitudes can *institute* the distinctively representational kind of authority and responsibility. What do knowing and acting subjects have to *do* in order thereby to count as having *deferred* or *accorded* authority over the correctness of their commitments to what they then in this distinctive normative sense count as making commitments *about*? More particularly, we want now to see how Hegel's *social* rendering of the attitude-dependence of the normative, in terms of the model of reciprocal recognition, and his account of how *historical* processes that exhibit that recognitive structure in virtue of incorporating the dual perspectival structure of prospective rational integration and retrospective rational recollection, can be understood as instituting a distinctively *representational* kind of normativity—as providing the standard for the assessment of a distinctive kind of correctness.

We do *not* need to move to this dimension of conceptual content in order to understand the idea that our judgments are *constrained*, that their evolution is subject to *friction*. For in the empirical, as opposed to the juridical, case, practitioners are trained to acquire some normative attitudes *immediately*, that is, *non-inferentially*. Under the right circumstances, properly trained observers are reliably disposed to respond to perceptible states of affairs by acknowledging commitments to corresponding perceptual judgments.

The *Verstand* framework is not in a position to understand how there can be genuine *constraint* by norms (hence *friction* that constrains rational integration, going forward) unless the norms already instituted are *determinate* in the sense that they *necessitate* (one sense of ‘determine’) one rational unity rather than another. (Compare the jurisprudential theorists who think that if the law as previously instituted-determined does not *dictate* one unique result, then the only alternative is to understand judges as just making it up, unconstrained.) But this is a mistake. Like any other judgments, immediate perceptual judgments amount to petitions for recognition. The authority they claim may or may not be recognized by being incorporated in later rational integrations. But they exert constraint or friction just by making that petition for recognition. They help determine what one ought to be committed to, and in that sense increase empirical determinateness.

We have already in play a conception of the *sense expressed* by declarative sentences: what one thinks or says in endorsing such a sentence. That conception understands conceptual contents as articulated by relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility among those contents. Besides that, as it were *horizontal*, dimension of conceptual contents, we are now seeking to underwrite the *vertical* dimension that depends on relations between those contents or senses and their referents in the world: what one is talking or thinking *about* in virtue of endorsing those claimable senses or contents. Hegel thinks that the representational relation between senses and the referents they normatively answer to for their correctness can be understood in terms of the prior notion of the sort of content judgments must possess in order to be eligible for integration into a rational unity of apperception, when we think

about how those contents are shaped by an integrative process that includes symmetric, ultimately *recognitive* relations, both of *prospective* rational synthesis and of *retrospective* rational recollection and reconstruction of the tradition that determines them. To do that, one must make a further move.

Frege thinks of the senses we grasp in thought and their referents in reality as two different *kinds* of things—as denizens of different ontological realms. It is a central part of Hegel’s idealist strategy to take them to be things of the *same* generic kind. The conceptual contents of our thoughts are articulated by material consequential and incompatibility relations they stand in to one another. (Hegel calls these relations of “mediation” and “determinate negation.”) But facts and objective states of affairs, too, stand in consequential and incompatibility relations to one another (and objects, we have seen, are to be understood in terms of the roles they play in those relations).<sup>29</sup> The fact that the coin is metal is a consequence of the fact that it is copper. And that same fact objectively rules out the possibility that it is an electrical insulator. The principled parallel between the *deontic* modal relations of inclusion and exclusion that articulate our thought on the subjective side, and the *alethic* modal relations of inclusion and exclusion that articulate the world on the objective side, which I discussed at the end of Chapter One, define a structural conception of the conceptual according to which thought and the world thought about can both be seen to be *conceptually* structured. This *conceptual*

---

<sup>29</sup> In fact, for reasons he discusses in the *Force and Understanding* chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel is more holistic than this. In his preferred idiom, he does not talk about facts or states of affairs on the objective side, or about the determinate thoughts expressed by individual judgments on the subjective side, but only about the conceptually articulated wholes of which they are features. This holism is an important part of Hegel’s picture, but I have chosen to suppress it in the interests of expository simplicity in focusing on other aspects of his views.

*realism* about objective reality is, in the context of the other metatheoretic commitments we have been considering, just a consequence of *modal realism*: taking it that objective states of affairs really do necessitate and rule out one another. I hope it is clear at this point that, given the conception of the conceptual in play, seeing the objective, as well as the subjective realms as alike conceptually structured does not entail any claims about the causal “mind-dependence” of objective reality: of represented things on the activity of representing them. I have discussed elsewhere the crucial difference between seeing the *concept* of objective reality depending for its *sense* on our understanding of the rational activities of knowing subjects, on the one hand, and seeing the *referents* of that concept as depending on such activities, on the other. The idealism in play here is decisively of the former sort.<sup>30</sup>

Hegel’s single-sort ontology of semantics takes both what things are *for* consciousness and what they are *in* themselves to be conceptually articulated. He thinks that any two-sort ontology that does not acknowledge this crucial generic similarity will be dualistic. (Slogan: “A dualism is a distinction drawn in such a way as to render unintelligible crucial relations between the distinguished items.”) For it will underwrite a kind of semantic skepticism, according to which it is unintelligible that we should know how things actually are. On the single-sort approach, the content of my thought that these are my hands can be the fact itself—the two differing only in that the one has, as it were, deontic force, while the other has alethic force. (“A fact is a thought that is

---

<sup>30</sup> In Chapter Six of *Tales of the Mighty Dead* [Harvard University Press, 2002]: “Holism and Idealism in Hegel’s Phenomenology.”

true.”<sup>31</sup>) On the other hand, Hegel also thinks that to assume that we know in advance of applying concepts epistemically in experience which relations of consequential inclusion and incompatibility exclusion articulate the contents of our concepts is to fall into a kind of semantic dogmatism. The solution is to focus on the process of experience by which all of our commitments, including those that address the relations among concepts, rationally and empirically develop. It is in terms of that historical process that we are to understand

- i) the conceptual form of facts and objects—what makes them *intelligible*, what makes *knowledge* of them possible, the reason that what they are can be *said* of them,

on the one hand, and

- ii) the objective content of claims and concepts—the way they answer to how things are and what there is as a standard of correctness, what makes it possible for them, when all goes right, to express genuine knowledge *of* something,

as two sides of one coin, each of which can only be understood in terms of the other. In the traditional (*Verstand*) conception, the distinction between appearances and reality, phenomena and noumena, is ontological, global, and absolute. In the conception Hegel is developing (*Vernunft*), the distinction is perspectival, local, and relativized. What it is

---

<sup>31</sup> This is, of course, Frege’s slogan, in “The Thought.” It depends on using ‘thought’ to mean *thinkable*, not *thinking*. In a way it is misleading for me to use Frege as the two-sorted foil for Hegel here. For Frege, what contrasts with thoughts (which are in the realm of sense) is objects-and-concepts (which are in the realm of reference, and are more like Tractarian facts. For Frege it is *not* the case that the world we are talking and thinking about consists of *facts*. For it does not, as it does for Hegel, consist of thinkables (not even true ones). For Frege, facts are facts *about* objects in the very same sense in which thoughts are about objects. The view I am associating with Hegel would take the sense in which facts are about objects to be secondary, derivative from and parasitic on the sense in which thoughts are. A more contemporary formulation would be that facts are about objects *only* in the sense that the sentences that express them contain singular terms that refer to objects.

(doubly) local and relativized to is a stage in the development of the whole constellation of discursive commitments, as retrospectively viewed from another such stage.

Within the scope of that unitary ontology of sense and reference, Hegel is addressing the question: What do we have to *do* thereby to be taking or treating the conceptual contents (senses), which we understand by grasping their material consequential and incompatibility relations to one another, *as* subjective *appearances of* some underlying objective *reality* to which they answer for their correctness *as* appearances of *it*? His answer is that the idea of noumena, of things as they are in themselves, the reality that appears in the form of *phenomena*, can be understood practically in terms of a distinctive role in a recollectively rationally reconstructed historical sequence of phenomena. One of the senses in which what he presents is a *phenomenology* is that he starts with an account of phenomena (what things are for consciousness) and seeks to reconstruct the notion of noumena (what things are in themselves) out of the resources it provides. The result of the most recent rational integration into the constellation of one's prior commitments of some new commitment (perhaps arrived at non-inferentially by observation, or inferentially by extracting new consequences from prior commitments) is intelligible as one's commitments as to how things really are, objectively, in themselves—as being what one takes to be not just an appearance of that reality, but a *veridical* appearance, one in which things appear as they really are—when it is accompanied by the right kind of rational recollection of the process of experience that produced it. The right kind of recollection is one that picks out a trajectory through the previous results of one's actual integrations that is *expressively*

*progressive*. That is, it must exhibit a history that both culminates in one's current view and has the form of the gradual making *explicit* of what can now retrospectively be seen all along to have been *implicit*. Doing that is showing for each previous episode (of those that are selected as, as it were, precedential, as revelatory of what one now takes always already to have been there) how that set of commitments can be seen as a partial, and only partially correct revelation of things as they are now known (or at least taken) to be. That is, one must show how each of the recollectively privileged prior integrations made *progress* towards one's current constellation of commitments—both in the judgments that are endorsed and in the consequential and incompatibility relations taken to articulate the concepts applied in those judgments. **In taking one's current commitments as the standard to judge what counts as expressive progress, one is taking them as the reality of which previous constellations of endorsements were ever more complete and accurate appearances.** That is the lesson that the normative understanding of the representation relation teaches: what is represented is what serves as a standard for assessing what thereby, in this normative sense, counts as a representing (an appearance) of it.

Another way of putting the point is that the way the idea of reference of appearances to an underlying reality that they represent—the idea that they are appearances *of* some reality that was always already there, objectively (in the sense of being independent of the attitudes that are its appearances)—arises and is secured *for* consciousness itself is through the experience of *error*: through the realization of the untruth of appearances, as Hegel puts it. Prior error is acknowledged *internally* in each

rational integration by engaging in the activity of repairing incompatible commitments (as prior ignorance is acknowledged by embracing a new consequence). And using one's current commitments as the *external* standard for assessing which such prior developments and adjustments were *successful* is treating it as presenting the reality, how things are in themselves, that all the others were more or less adequate appearances of. A successful recollective reconstruction of the tradition shows how previously endorsed constellations of commitments were unmasked, by internal instabilities, *as* appearances, representing how things really are only incompletely and partially incorrectly, but also how each such discovery contributed to filling in or correcting the picture they present of how it really is with what they were all along representing, by more closely approximating the actual consequential and incompatibility relations of the concepts and making more correct applications of them. So they were not *mere* appearances, in that they did genuinely reveal something of how things really are. Exhibiting a sequence of precedential concept applications-by-integration as *expressively progressive*—as the gradual, cumulative, making explicit of reality as revealed by one's current commitments, recollectively made visible as having all along been implicit—shows the prior, defective commitments endorsed, and conceptual contents deployed, as nonetheless genuinely appearances representing, however inadequately, how things really are.

There is hard, concrete work involved in the retrospective semantic enterprise of recollectively turning a *past* into a *history* of this sort, just as there is in the prospective epistemic enterprise of integrating new commitments by extracting consequences and

repairing incompatibilities.<sup>32</sup> For the provision of a rational genealogy vindicating one's current commitments is constrained by the requirement that it suitably connect the judgments and conceptual relations previously endorsed with those currently endorsed. Hegel is trying to think through, as rigorously as the metaconceptual expressive tools he has managed to make available permit, the consequences of understanding meaning or conceptual content as articulated by non-monotonic, seriously multipremise material inferential and incompatibility relations, in the context of the realization (which we latecomers to the point associate with Quine, and he associated with Duhem) that those relations depend on the whole context of collateral discursive commitments. Because the material consequential and incompatibility relations both involve multiple premises and are non-monotonic, one can always take any such relation that was previously endorsed to have been all right in its context of collateral commitments, but to be infirmed by the addition of new information in later ones. Any such refinement of conceptual content itself involves a substantive commitment on the part of the one recapitulating the process of arriving at one's current constellation of commitments (including the conceptual contents that articulate them). And those commitments may themselves be found wanting by future recollecting assessors. A recollective rationalization of an integration is a petition for specific recognition, which like all such, may or may not be successful in the eyes of those to whom it is addressed.

---

<sup>32</sup> As this formulation indicates (in the context of my prior claims), *both* retrospective *and* prospective perspectives are now visible as having *both* semantic *and* epistemic aspects. This structure is Hegel's successor-conception to the Kant-Carnap picture of an antecedent activity in which semantic contents are (fully) determined, followed by a separate, subsequent activity of epistemic activity in which those contents are confronted by and applied in the world.

The retrospective, recollective form of reason (the owl of Minerva that flies only at dusk, reason's march through history) constructs a sunny, optimistic, Whiggish perspective that reveals, amid the random, contingent charnel-house of our earlier discursive muddling, the emergence of an unbroken record of progress towards truth, understanding, and correct representation of how it is with the real world we turn out all along to have been thinking about and acting in. This is what Hegel means when he talks about "giving contingency the form of necessity." But it is important to remember that in the empirical case (whether we think of high theory, as when Newton's dynamics succeeds Descartes's, and Einstein's Newton's, or simple cases of discovering the straight stick in the water only to appear bent) as in the juridical, a later recollective story may substantially disagree with an earlier one. It may treat some quite different episodes as progressive and precedential, quite different material inferences as good, different constellations of claims as incompatible. The moment of *finding*, discovering how things already were, which shows up from the perspective of each recollective reconstruction of a tradition is balanced by the moment of *making* that shows up when a new constellation of commitments must be integrated, and a new recollectively instituted tradition discovered to vindicate them. From the prospective perspective of new integrations driven by newly acknowledged commitments and consequences, and the emergence of new incompatibilities, the process of determining conceptual contents is characterized by discontinuities, caesurae, radical reassessment of old commitments, and the unraveling of previous progress. The open-endedness and determinability of conceptual contents lives in the spaces between successive recollective stories. Here we see the crookedness and

zig-zags that recollective rationality must then make straight: the creative *doings* that it must make look like *findings*.

At each stage, the author who retrospectively extracts an expressively progressive trajectory through past integrations as a vindication of the current synthesis of commitments as not only synchronically, but diachronically rational exerts a distinctive kind of *authority* over the activity of past integrating recollectors, precisely by distinguishing some of them as correct and progressive, and rejecting others. But by the same token he makes himself *responsible* to the precedential authority of that previous activity, which supplies the only rationale available for his own. And that authority of the past over the present is administered on its behalf by future rational genealogists, who will pass judgment on the extent to which the current integration-and-recollection has fulfilled its responsibility to the prior tradition, and hence deserves to count as expressively progressive with respect to it. This structure of reciprocal authority and responsibility is the historical form of *recognition*, which institutes at once both a distinctive form of *community* (a *tradition*) and individuals exhibiting determinately conceptually contentful normative statuses: commitments representing how things objectively are. Recognition now shows up in its proper form, as a *process* providing the context within which we can understand the semantic *relations* that articulate the determinate conceptual contents of discursive commitments. This conception is recognizably a development of and a successor to Kant's story (retailed in Chapter One) about how the relations of material consequence and incompatibility function and

become intelligible in the context of the *activity* of rational synthesis-by-integration of a transcendental unity of apperception.

Hegel thinks that each appearance, each actual constellation of commitments and conceptual contents, will eventually turn out to be inadequate. The inexhaustibility of concrete, sensuous immediacy guarantees that we will never achieve a set of conceptual contents articulated by relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility that will not, when correctly applied, according to their own standards, at some point lead to commitments that are incompatible, according to those same standards.<sup>33</sup> No integration or recollection is final at the ground level. (Hegel does think a finally adequate set of philosophical and logical metaconcepts can be achieved. The *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic* each presents a kind of retrospective rational reconstructive recollection of what Hegel takes those narratives to vindicate as *the* set of metaconcepts that are necessary and sufficient to make explicit the process by which ordinary determinate empirical and practical concepts develop and are determined.) Still, one should not draw skeptical conclusions from the fallibilist meta-induction this observation invites, should not see the course of empirical cognition as a “path of despair.” To do that is to focus one-sidedly on just one of the reciprocal cognitive perspectives. It is to ignore the retrospective recollective perspective, which is *reason* imposing the form of *necessity* on *contingency*, *making* the process rational and expressively progressive by engaging in the practical labor of concretely *taking* it to be so. And it is the exhibition of the sequence of subjective appearances as a structured

---

<sup>33</sup> I expand on this point in my “Sketch of Program for a Critical Reading of Hegel: Comparing Empirical and Logical Concepts” *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus*, Vol 3, 2005, pp. 131-161.

history comprising elements that function in that tradition not as not *mere* appearances, but as appearances that are genuinely, if only darkly, revelatory of objective reality. It is the *historical* dimension of consciousness that makes its *referential* dimension intelligible.<sup>34</sup>

8. In Chapter One I introduced Kant's founding insight into the normative character of intentionality: his idea that what distinguishes judgements and intentional actions from the performances of merely natural creatures is that judging and acting are things we are in a distinctive sense normatively *responsible* for. I described his account of what one must *do* to take discursive responsibility (to acknowledge a commitment), as rationally integrating it with other such commitments, along both ampliative and critical dimensions. I attributed to him two additional large, orienting methodological commitments. One is to a pragmatist order of explanation, which moves from an account of *pragmatic force* to one of *semantic content*, understanding the conceptual contents one becomes committed to or responsible for in terms of what one becomes responsible for *doing* in judging. What one becomes responsible for doing, I said, is rational integration. That requires concepts to be articulated by the relations of material inferential

---

<sup>34</sup> Hegel's diachronic approach also provides the raw materials for a genealogical-semantic account of a concept that is otherwise quite hard to understand: the Kantian notion of a *bare*, that is unconceptualized, sensuous intuition of a particular. For this concept can be made intelligible as what is supposed to be common to all the conceptual presentations of it—not just as presented in *one* retrospective rational reconstruction of an expressively progressive tradition, but *across all* the successive rational re-writings, both those so far produced and those yet to come. Within each rational genealogy of a currently integrated constellation of commitments, what is common to the sequence of conceptualizations presented as ever-more-adequate representations is what they are thereby taken to represent: what is implicit in them all, becoming ever more explicit over the course of the expressively progressive trajectory of thought that has been traced out. That is just the conceptualization in which the process (so far) culminates. As such, it is no bare intuition, but something fully conceptualized, presenting it as a “this-such.” What gives us a grip on the concept of a bare, unconceptualized sensuous intuition (something *merely* immediate) is thinking of something as common and constant across *all* the *different* retrospective, expressively progressive rational genealogies, present and future. (I am grateful to Paul Redding for this thought.)

consequence and incompatibility that they stand in to other such contents—corresponding respectively to the ampliative and critical dimensions of the activity of rational integration. The other methodological commitment is to a semantic order of explanation that moves from this account of judgeable contents (what I called “expressive, ‘that’-intentionality”) to an account of the representational dimension of conceptual content (what I called “‘of’-intentionality”). Extracting these themes from Kant, and abstracting from his other collateral commitments, I tried to show how all these fit together.

I have ended by saying something about the form in which Hegel endorses all of these Kantian commitments, and showing how his in many ways quite different story grows out of and builds on Kant’s. In Chapter Two, I described the recognitive model of the social institution of normative bindingness and normative statuses such as responsibility, authority, and commitment. This is what Hegel proposes as a successor to Kant’s autonomy model of the attitude-dependence of normative statuses. The new theory is called for by appreciation of the complementary requirement of the relative *independence* of conceptual contents from the attitudes of endorsing or committing oneself to them. We saw how the social model of reciprocal recognition leads Hegel to a distinctive linguistic, expressive version of Kant’s idea of freedom as consisting in constraint by discursive, which is to say rational, norms.

In this chapter, I have sketched how Hegel’s way of working out the pragmatist order of explanation turns on complementing Kant’s prospective notion of rational integration with a retrospective notion of rational recollection, and how that leads to a

description of a distinctive *historical* process that exhibits the norm-instituting structure of reciprocal recognition. By offering a certain kind of rationally reconstructed genealogy, recollective activity in a distinctive way vindicates a set of determinate, ground-level commitments—in the sense of clarifying their contents, explaining the advent of those commitments as the outcome of a rational process, and justifying them.

I mentioned two other important structural moves that provide the context for Hegel's account of the *representational* dimension of conceptual content. He rejects the Kantian two-phase account, which requires that concepts be given determinate contents by some process distinct from and antecedent to the process of applying them in making ordinary empirical judgments. And he rejects the Kantian two-sorted ontology, which distinguishes how things are for consciousness (representings, phenomena) and how they are in themselves (represented, noumena) as different *kinds* of things, the appearances conceptually articulated and the realities they represent not (a recipe, Hegel thinks, for epistemological and semantic skepticism). Finally, I closed by indicating how in the context of those further metatheoretic moves, the dual perspectival *historical* account of discursive practice—of what one must *do* in order to take rational responsibility for applications of concepts in judgment—makes sense of the representational dimension of conceptual content.<sup>35</sup> The new notion of *reason*, expanded to include both integration

---

<sup>35</sup> Hegel's story retains the rational-integrative activity in terms of which (at the end of Chapter One) I explained the form of objective representational purport: what one has to *do* in order thereby to be purporting to represent objects. Added to that story about triangulating on objects by rejecting incompatibles and extracting consequences is the story about rational recollection, which explains what one needs to do to be treating commitments as appearances answering for their correctness to an underlying reality they represent: retrospectively carving out a trajectory that distinguishes some rational integrations as expressively progressive. We could say that the first account explains what it is to take or treat one's commitments as about *objects*, and the second what it is to take or treat them as *about* objects, in the sense of answering for their correctness to how it is with what there really is.

and recollection, is the centerpiece of an account of what discursive practitioners must *do* in order to be intelligible as granting authority over the correctness of what they say and think (in a sense of ‘correct’ corresponding to a distinctive normative dimension of assessment they institute by those very practical attitudes) to an objective reality they count thereby in this normative sense as representing or talking and thinking *about*.

The story I have told in these first three chapters aspires to be an exercise of reason in that sense. I have tried to show how some of Hegel’s commitments can be understood as the result of rationally integrating some of Kant’s commitments, by extracting consequences, and taking on new commitments so as to resolve incompatibilities. My highly selective engagement with the thought of both takes the form of a rational recollection: picking out an expressively progressive trajectory that takes us from Kant to Hegel. Further, we are now in a position to appreciate that the whole enterprise amounts to a more comprehensive retrospective, recollective rational reconstruction and reappropriation of the thought of both—one that aims at recovering and displaying (making explicit) a complex set of interlocking ideas, sometimes only implicit in their texts, which makes clear the relevance of this aspect of their thought to significant contemporary philosophical issues and debates. The tradition I have retrospectively picked out (and given a rationale for) by selectively privileging some ampliative and critical moves as precedential, expressively progressive developments, has at its core concern with how conceptual *content*, in various senses, can be understood

in terms of its role in discursive *activity* more generally.<sup>36</sup> I think that a variety of specific lessons that are valuable for our own thinking about this topic today emerge when we carve out this line of thought from the myriad contingent collateral commitments with which it is entangled in the original presentations. And I think, hope, and trust that there are deeper and more general philosophical lessons we can find in the way this tradition embeds these relatively narrow and technical semantic concerns in the broader context of considerations provided by larger philosophical topics such as those I have indicated in the titles of these first three chapters: norms, selves, concepts, autonomy, community, freedom, history, reason, and reality.

---

<sup>36</sup> I am encouraged by the extent to which important aspects of the tradition I have reconstructed here can also be found in the work of various influential neo-Kantians, particularly Cohen and the later Windelband. But that is another story.