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Shapes of Active Reason: The Law of the Heart, Retrieved Virtue, and What Really Matters

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Hegel's examination of "the Actualization of Rational Self-consciousness through itself" (*PS* 193–214/M 211–35) is the second of three major sections of his chapter on "Reason." Thematically this section is closely related with the first sub-section of the subsequent third major section of "Reason," viz., "The Animal Kingdom and Humbug, or what really matters" (*PS* 214–28/M 236–52). Accordingly, the present chapter considers these sections together.

Hegel never tires of telling us that his work is a "system," a whole which can only be fully understood in its entirety; anything less, he insists, would not amount to *Wissenschaft*, "science" (or, more generally, rigorous theory). Even though saying it's so doesn't make it so, it still means that any interpreter of Hegel has to take that claim seriously. Nonetheless, Hegel does not make it easy. Each part of the system seems to demand coming to terms with some other part, and it is easy to despair of ever isolating the sense of any particular part.

The "Reason" chapter itself comes on the scene as the result of a puzzling transition. After the rather abstract discussions about "consciousness," Hegel turns to his social account of "self-consciousness," which results in the establishment and subsequent failure of relations of mastery and servitude between two individuals (obviously abstracted out of all their social relations, something Hegel stressed in his lectures on the subject; *Enc.* §432). Out of that, however, comes an obviously historically informed discussion of the ancient doctrines of stoicism and skepticism, an account of the anguish of Christianity in its early and mediaeval forms (as the promised savior failed to return for the final judgment), followed by an abrupt transition to an entirely new chapter, titled simply, "Reason," which itself begins with what can seem like some kind of once-over-lightly discussion of idealism in the philosophies of Kant and Fichte.[1] It then supposedly makes a necessary transition to an even longer chapter, titled "Spirit."

The puzzling nature of the "Reason" chapter has, however, a deeper rationale. First, the chapter advances the rather ambitious thesis that all individualist accounts of authority encounter a *partial* failure, which propels them to more social accounts. Second, it sets the stage for Hegel's equally ambitious thesis that we best understand the failure of individualist accounts only if we understand the role of reason in history, specifically, once we understand that when history is understood from the point of view of ourselves as self-interpreting animals, what turns out to have been at stake in history is the very nature of normative authority itself.[2] Third, this chapter advances the view that we have over historical time learned better how to mark what counts as normative authority, and that understanding what this requires of us amounts to "spirit's coming to a full self-consciousness," which is best characterized as an "absolute" point of view. This in turn leads Hegel to one of his most ambitious proposals of all, namely, that the best way to understand how a norm has its grip on us is to be found by looking at how accepted, "positive" norms *lose* their grip on us, which in turn leads him to his various phenomenological proposals that we examine such norms as they are *at work*, or are "actual," *wirklich* (as Hegel says), in various *practices*, which in turn leads to his thesis that reason itself must be also understood as social, and that in a very complicated, "dialectical" way, we hold ourselves responsible to the *world* only in holding ourselves in certain very determinate ways responsible to *each other*.

Hegel calls such practices "shapes of consciousness," which are themselves parts of more general practices which he calls "shapes of spirit," or what he sometimes called in his pre-*Phenomenology* writings "forms of life."[3] A "shape of spirit" is a social unity of *norm* and *fact* that shapes how people understand themselves and, equally importantly, how they envision their social existence (that is, how they see themselves as fitting together with others, what they can reasonably expect things go on among them and their fellows, how those expectations are to be normally met) and, crucially, a conception of what the *world* is like that makes those norms *realizable* (or not).[4] Equally crucially, such a "shape of spirit" constitutes an only partially articulated background understanding of this fusion of norm and fact; typically, a shape of spirit cannot be understood as a collection of beliefs but as a deeper orientation that is prior to and presupposed by explicit beliefs, giving the agents living in it a kind of unarticulated fluency which, as Hegel puts it, "consists in having the particular knowledge or kind of activities immediately to mind in any case that occurs, even, we may say, *immediate in our very limbs*, in an activity directed outwards."[5]

Modern individualism itself is such a "shape of consciousness," a picture of normative authority with its own characteristic fusion of norm and fact which therefore appears to those *within* that set of practices as a way in which the individuals in the practice see it not in fact so much as a *practice* at all but more as just the way things are: They see the world as constituted so that within it there are rational, reflective individuals who give and ask for reasons from each other; since they paradigmatically do that with great success in science, those individuals must therefore either already be doing that or be striving to do that in the practical

world, and nothing but ill will, superstition, excess timidity, fear, or corruption could prevent that conception from being fully realized.

A word of caution: It is all too tempting to understand this as the view that in applying norms, extending them, specifying them in different ways, or criticizing them, we are always operating with a set of background "assumptions" which are "presupposed" in our various activities of claim-making and criticism, and that the goal of philosophical criticism is to make such presuppositions explicit so that they can be subjected to criticism. Hegel's point is different: The way in which we operate with a background understanding of the way in which the normative and the factual combine itself often involves various *contestations* about how to state just what the norm *is*, what it *means* in concrete cases, what exactly is to count as *falling under* the norm (or the concept) and how far the *scope* of certain entitlements goes. Moreover, since the understandings *at work* in these kinds of practices are almost always relatively inexplicit about these matters, it is a mistake to think of the orientation they give us as always capable of being exhaustively expressed in fully propositional terms, as "presuppositions" we could state and link up with other propositions. Indeed, the very propositional articulation of these orientations, which makes what is going on explicit in one way as opposed to another and which thus inevitably rules some things in and some things out, is often exactly *what* is contested. Particularly in cases of breakdown (which interest Hegel the most), there is no clear consensus on just what the norms *concretely mean* in the sense that it is unclear just how they are to be *taken*, or articulated, by the participants to be meaning this or that (cf. Travis 2003). In such contested situations, the participants are often themselves at odds on how best to state, or make explicit, what they are doing, about which kinds of commitments form genuine entitlements and which do not, or what constitutes the ideal or "central case" at issue. Such appeals cannot be solved by appeal to "criteria," and "settled intuitions" about the meaning will vary; there is, moreover, no contextual way of resolving the disputes that can be neutral with regard to all the competing parties.[6] In the cases that draw Hegel's attention the most – those in which a shape of normative authority is losing its grip on people – there are instead increasingly contested maneuvers about just how one best states the ideal case and what it implies.

In fact, one of the reasons why Hegel thinks that philosophy follows the Owl of Minerva is that it is almost always only after the fact that we can say with any definitiveness just how the contest was in fact finally resolved in the minds of the participants, and what it finally *came to mean* for them; and it is only after the fact that we can note whether what it finally came to mean for them marks any kind of normative success or failure – that is, whether the attempt to state the norm in "this way" and not "that way" marked, for example, only the disguised establishment of a form of coercive social power or an advance in our understanding of normative authority.

We can frame Hegel's theses against the following background. The full realization of the appeal to reason in human interactions demands that we think through what might be called the "missing antinomy" in Kant's work in practical philosophy: On the one hand, we are always completely socially constituted and our

normative status is derivative from that; and on the other hand, we are free, self-originating sources of claims that no claim of social utility may override.[7] Contemporary disputes between communitarians, "identity theorists," and liberals may be seen as the ways in which this antinomy is at work in the basic practices of modern life.

Hegel begins his discussion with the most basic problem lying on the surface of any naive form of individualism: On the one hand, for the individual to be a modern individual, he must have a critical distance from his norms and must therefore in some sense elect his norms for himself by relying only on his own resources; but, on the other hand, such a choice made from within that kind of void is already itself meaningless because without any norms to bind one in the first place, there can be no meaning to "binding norms" at all.

Modern individualism is thus compelled, in Hegel's dialectical terminology, to seek its "ground" in an "other," in something other than an otherwise unconstrained act of choosing or electing. Modern individualism is thus pushed to working with some kind of conception of there being "constitutive standards" such that there are some set of non-chosen norms that "just mean" or "constitute" the activity in question, such that failure to abide by these norms simply counts as not engaging in the activity in question.[8] The most obvious metaphor to capture that view is, of course, that of a game; the rules of the game (whether that of chess, baseball, or English) constitute what counts as playing that game. This has the advantage of providing a clear-cut notion of normative judgment and obligation: a norm is always relative to some set of rules, and to say that one is obligated to do something is just to say that there is some set of rules from which it follows that one ought to do it. Such views are familiar in a wide variety of contemporary discussions, ranging from discussions about how one must simply accept certain categorical demands in order to be an agent at all, all the way up to discussions of legal positivism as resting on "master rules of recognition."[9] The idea in discussions of agency is that the "master rule" is definitive, constitutive of agency itself, such that in refusing to follow such a rule, an agent condemns himself to some kind of incoherence or even to ultimate failure in his own agency itself.

If so, then there must also be other necessary, non-chosen conditions for agency such that conforming to them would be conforming to a necessity that is *one's own*. To make it one's own, however, one cannot simply adapt oneself to a foreign necessity and "identify" with it. That would at best be a Hobbesian solution to the individualist dilemma (illustrated in Hobbes's famous metaphor of freedom as water freely flowing downhill).[10] On Hegel's reading, the emotionalist and sentimentalist reformulations of the experience of early modern Europe took this to its next logical step. The necessity must be one that corresponds to what is required to be a rational *individual*, such that in following out the demands of some ethical imperative that makes a claim on *you* as the individual person *you* are, you are doing something of great normative importance which is definitive of you as the individual agent *you* are. This view leads to the related conception of the claims of reason reaching their terminus in something like the "law of the heart," which is both a *law* (binding on all) and a matter of *personal commitment* (since it is of

the "heart"). The person who obeys the law of *his* "heart" – one thinks perhaps of the line famously attributed to Luther, "Here I stand, I can do no other" – is therefore not obeying a whim but rather a binding, universal norm. However, the norm consists in the *individual* seeing where rational necessity takes him by virtue of relying only on his own resources, and there are certain material claims that put constitutive constraints on what can be rationally willed. Thus, for modern rational individuals, such subjection to the "law of the heart" seems to be the highest form of freedom since it involves subjecting yourself to a law that is both rational, that is, universal, and that is "your law." In following that law, the necessity pushing you is thus *your own* necessity.

Surprisingly (at least at first), Hegel turns to literary examples to provide the general frame for working out this view. The turn to literature is not simply a way of using literary works merely as illustrations of general principles – that would make them extrinsic to the argument – but as necessary in light of the deeper Hegelian view that we understand the true meaning of our most basic conceptions of normative authority only when we understand how they are *worked out* and *realized* in our practices, and that literature gives us a better sense of how that goes than does a more traditional theoretical alignment of principles to each other.[11] Thus, Hegel relied on several literary sources to frame his discussion of the law of the heart, in particular, Schiller's play, *The Robbers*, with its main character of Karl Moor, who, as a result of a personal injury against himself, rebels against the inhumanity and injustice of the existing social order, thus giving his personal wrong a universal significance.[12]

Nonetheless, as a "shape of consciousness" the follower of the "law of the heart" is familiar to modern sensibilities. In one mode, he or she is content with the existing order, secure in the knowledge that it is, despite its other flaws, in keeping with the demands of reason as fixed by our natural assent to certain virtues (such as benevolence, affability, humanity) and the way in which the conventional rules of society encourage and reward those natural dispositions; in another mode (such as that of Karl Moor), he is the figure of protest, the person who sees natural human benevolence being crushed or perverted by some unjust regime. In yet a third mode, a more detached philosopher caught in this picture might even attempt to come up with a philosophical account of such views; he would take the law of his heart, or, as we would now say, his "settled intuitions" about his "deepest commitments" and then see what followed from them, how they might be consistent with each other, what kinds of alternative accounts of those "settled intuitions" and "deepest commitments" would be ruled out, and so forth. Hegel, on the other hand, thinks he can show that all such appeals to "deepest commitments," "settled intuitions," to "our rules," or even to the rules given by an "ideal community" all themselves rest on something like the idea that (1) there is a constitutive standard for what counts as "the reasonable" and (2) that such a standard dogmatically rules out alternatives, claiming, in effect, that they are trying to do the equivalent of "not playing the game."

The agent following the "law of the heart" thus does not claim to be stating simply an idiosyncrasy on his part, a kind of wish list for the world that would

best suit *him*. He is staking a claim as to what reason, the "universal" requires. However, as the statement only of the "law of *his* heart," *his* "settled intuitions," or "deepest commitments," his is only a *singular* claim competing against other claims made by other "hearts" that, for their part, also rest on "settled intuitions." Indeed, what is most distinctive about the "law of the heart " is its status as both a *singular* claim (a statement about one's own "settled intuitions") and as a claim to *normative*, "universal" status.[13] This holds even in the conservative case of the "law of the heart," where the existing order is almost exactly to one's liking, where what gives that order its binding force is that it agree with *one's own* deepest commitments; but, nonetheless, where the existing order does not comply with one's own deepest commitments, it follows that (at least without some further story) there can be no binding normative force to the rules that de facto make up that order as a "positive" order (that is, one that rests on some positive "master rule" or set of rules).

As Hegel notes, one can refine the picture; one might, for example, add all kinds of constraints about how the individual has to "reflectively endorse" any constraint for it to be binding, but the fact remains that its binding quality depends on its being *accepted by the individual* as being in accord with *his* deepest commitments. What interests Hegel the most in such a view is not simply the alienation that inevitably accompanies such a view (since it is always a matter of contingent fact whether the existing order fully complies with one's deepest commitments, and it is rare when it does so completely and without residue) but the way the view takes shape when the existing order is dramatically out of kilter with one's deepest commitments. As not merely an idiosyncratic wish but a demand of reason itself, the "law of the heart" must lay claim to the necessity to reform or abolish the existing order where it fails to meet the unconditional demands of "our deepest commitments." If it in fact finds that most people accept the existing order as more or less in conformity with what they take to be right and true (to be in conformity with *their* own deepest commitments), then it has to explain this away; in the extreme case, it must attribute this to some kind of subversion of the true order of things which somehow has masked, disguised or lied about the alienated, unjust reality with which it is so manifestly confronted.

At the extreme, as Hegel points out, such a view is one step away from a certain type of madness. Faced with the resistance or recalcitrance of those whom one wishes to liberate, who even seem sometimes to side or identify with their "oppressors," and who oddly seem to be unable to see the rational, compelling nature of one's views, one finds oneself not merely at odds with the world but also slightly unhinged. If, as Hegel says, madness is the substitution of unreality for reality, then at its outermost limits, the "law of the heart" provides a good example; in place of the reality confronting all the Karl Moors of the world, there is the counter-reality added by the same Karl Moors, in which all those others are duped, in which the regime's propaganda has been all too successful, or, as Hegel remarks, alluding to some views at large in the revolutionary eighteenth century, there is a widespread social deception "completely fabricated by fanatical priests and by gluttonous despots together with their lackeys, who, by lowering themselves to

abjection, seek to compensate themselves for their own humiliation by humiliating and oppressing those below them" (*PS* 206.9–11/M 226).

The failure of the reformer to gain the assent of those he wishes to save – part of a larger, necessary failure of the "law of the heart" to gain a foothold in the hearts and minds of others – thus logically turns into a kind of cynicism about the "way of the world" (itself the title of a play by William Congreve, first performed in 1700) in which the person originally moved by the "law of the heart" comes to the view that, in the last analysis, it is not the claims of justice that move men's hearts; what instead moves them is their own self-interest, fairly narrowly conceived. If it is to preserve anything about itself, the "law of the heart" must therefore come to terms with the "way of the world," in which the rules of play are not those of justice and morality but those of strategy, tactics, and game-theory; the only appropriate response to the cynicism of the "way of the world" and, so it seems, the only genuinely moral response, is therefore the individual cultivation of one's own virtue. Consequently, emerging from that picture in the early eighteenth century was a renewed fascination with the virtue of the ancients and a program to "retrieve" it, interpreted as a way of finding one's true agency in the sacrifice of self-interest for a more beautiful cause.

This shape of consciousness, which Hegel simply calls "virtue," took itself to have learned from the experience of the failed and embittered Karl Moors of the world; on that view, the failure of the "law of the heart" lay in its one-sided assertion of the individual as *opposed* to the social order; "virtue," however, protests that *true* self-interest, the genuine way to realize one's agency, is not that of bending the social order to the dictates of "one's settled convictions," but that of shaping one's "heart" so that it is ready to be of service for the common good (when that good is *truly* conceived by virtue, not by the game-theorists of the "way of the world"). The agent of virtue, to be sure, is just as concerned with expressing his deepest commitments, but those deepest commitments involve (in a way that seems paradoxical at first) a commitment to sacrifice one's own interests (again, narrowly conceived) in favor of the common good, since the constitutive standards of agency require this; genuine virtue therefore consists in training and using one's various capacities so that this constitutive standard of agency and goodness will be fully realized.[14] The "way of the world," on the other hand, is a state of affairs of limited benevolence and narrow self-interest in which the actors, without knowing it, deprive themselves and others of what is really in their own interest, which is that of being better versions of what they only defectively are, such that those who play the "game" according to the rules of the way of the world are misusing the very capacities that could otherwise be put to genuine use in the pursuit of virtue.

The problem with virtually all such conceptions of *retrieving* virtue, so Hegel thought, is that it rests on a confusion of what was *really at work* in ancient conceptions of virtue – what was *wirklich*, in Hegel's terminology – with what *can be at work* in modern individualism. Ancient virtue was based in a conception of the *polis* as divided into various social roles that specified in very determinate ways how the human good was to be realized by this kind of person in that kind of situation;

and it made sense only where it could also be reasonably believed that the social whole was itself a unity that spontaneously led itself to harmony when each person fulfilled the duties of their role. Thus, one major obstacle to all such efforts at the "retrieval" of ancient virtue is that the form of life in which ancient virtue was rooted had itself collapsed under its own weight; it was a harmonious social whole only by virtue of suppressing the claims of individuality which it itself provoked and this, its strongly "communitarian" basis, became undone by the forces of individualism it itself generated.[15] Thus, the modern appeal to a "recovery" of ancient virtue has to see it as revivifying something which is already there in human nature but which has become corrupted by something else (capitalism being among the usual culprits): Virtue, so it was thought, requires allegiance to the common good, but this is an allegiance which modern market societies have turned topsy-turvy. Thus, the campaign to retrieve virtue has to campaign against such individualism that itself rests on a form of the very individualism it combats, since it appeals to the individual, relying solely on his own resources, to experience his greatest personal fulfillment in its sacrifice for and to the common good. Hegel's use of the Don Quixote image to characterize the followers of the Earl of Shaftesbury, a prime proponent of that view, is as satirically intended as was Cervantes's novel; there were, after all, no knights in the ancient world; they are a more recent – indeed, Christian – invention. The "honor" of the knight is restricted to his person, not to the *polis*, and injuries to honor can equally well be substantial and justified or just idiosyncratic and petty.

The view put forward by Shaftesbury and the like held that in fact nature had so constituted us such that only a virtuous sacrifice of *narrow* self-interest before the dictates of the common good could even count as following out one's *true* self-interest. Arguing against that view were those who (like Bernard Mandeville in his *The Fable of the Bees*) held that in the modern world of market relations, private vices (or what might look like narrow self-interest) actually lead to public benefits. In fact, the dispute over what were the supposedly constitutive standards of agency ended up being decided in favor of the moderns (represented by Mandeville), not by virtue of philosophical arguments so much as by the triumph of the modern way of life over what turned out to be only an empty challenge to it.[16]

As Hegel notes, it is not that virtue had to give way and admit that the way of the world is a wicked path; in fact, the redrawing of the spheres of virtue and vice that the modern market societies were creating themselves were not as bad as even they made themselves out to be. Individualist agency, having failed to live up to the "constitutive standards" imposed on it by an "other" (by the very nature of "being an individual," by the nature of the "heart," or just by "nature" itself), now takes itself to be *giving itself* its own standard – *as an individual*. Its choices must be, so it seems, criterionless, and its actions must therefore have "the appearance of the movement of a circle, which, freely moves itself within itself within a void . . . and is fully satisfied in playing a game within itself and with itself" (*PS* 215.18–20/M 237). Normativity all the way down, so it seems, means that there is no starting point, no primordial norm fixed from without, and that the agent

simply has to *give himself* his criterion for action in the very process of acting itself (a picture of agency that bears more than a passing resemblance to Sartre's famous example of the man who must decide whether to care for his mother or join the resistance).

Of course the problem of beginning, as Hegel notes, is thereby rendered acute, since at first, so it seems, there is nowhere to begin when one is confronted with such a fantastical demand for self-bootstrapping. However, the individualist picture has at least one plausible answer in reserve.[17] Even if there are no constraining metaphysical "constitutive standards" determining the rational content of any action, there are nonetheless the *factual* constraints of the individual as the specific individual he is, and thus he must begin with his own facticity, his own "thrownness" – begin with whatever interests he just finds himself to have, whatever talents he just happens to possess, and in the circumstances in which he just happens to find himself.[18] (Hegel's term for this is the individual's "original determinate nature," an unwieldy description, as are many of Hegel's choices of technical terms.)

Hegel calls what such an individual brings about in his actions his "work" (*Werk*), with its double meaning of something like an artistic or literary product and its more quotidian meaning where it simply denotes the results of what one has done (as in "that has the stamp of your handiwork all over it"). An individual's "work" therefore is the expression of who he is by virtue of what he has chosen to express as his own combination of interests, talents, and circumstances. Like the followers of the "law of the heart" and the "knights of virtue," such an individual is also concerned to express his deepest commitments but now in such a way that the expression makes a claim which demands recognition for its validity in a wholly particularist way. It is not the expression of a rebellious attitude to society (as it was with Karl Moor), nor that of a quixotic "knight of virtue" tilting at Mandevillean windmills, but somebody concerned to give voice to *himself*, to give expression to *what really matters to him*, and to be recognized and accepted for it. (I have argued elsewhere [Pinkard 1994, 119–21] that one such model for this kind of character is Rousseau in his *Confessions*.) What emerges from actions of that type bears the stamp one's own handiwork and, as such an *expression*, is supposed to *embody* one's deepest commitments. The problem, of course, is that with such "works," the same kind of issues arise as with more distinctly artistic works. Criticizing a *work* as, say, sentimental, can only be a criticism if there is something wrong with being sentimental; to say that your works are "sentimental," therefore, seems to be saying that, as expressions of you, you are sentimental, and that seems to be a criticism of you, not just your works.

On one version of this account, that would be going too far. If there are no standards other than the one the individual fashions for himself in the contingent circumstances of his own "thrownness," and if the individual has genuinely sought to bring to light those commitments he finds himself with, then the criticism of such works is beside the point since the charge of "sentimentality" would be made only from somebody else's standards. As Hegel rather sardonically notes, this is not complete relativism; there are claims to there being universal

standards at work here; it is just that it is universally demanded that individuals are to express their deepest commitments, directly and honestly – one could even add, *authentically* – and that criticism can at best, so it seems, only involve charges of dishonesty or hypocrisy, not of whether those deepest commitments themselves are bad.[19]

On Hegel's view, there is a kind of logic to this form of individualism which pushes it in fairly recognizable directions. If the individual and what he is *an sich*, "in itself" (that is, what are his deepest commitments) are supposed to be displayed in his undertakings and deeds, then *he* is, as it were, the norm, the "universal," for those deeds and undertakings, and they in turn are supposed to be judged according to how well they have expressed those commitments. The demands of reason demand that such works be recognized for what they are and claim to be, not for what they cannot be. However, all such acts involve deeds, or "works," and such works are to be found in a public space where, like it or not, they are subject to, or at least open to, the judgments of others, who in turn by the very logic of such individualism need not be constrained to judge it only in terms of its expressive quality; those others can, for example, find in the work something that helps them put a shape on their own idiosyncratic interests or help them spin out their own variations on their own expressive acts. What bears the stamp of one's own handiwork therefore can mean more than just what it said about oneself; it can take on other meanings entirely depending on the contingencies of the public space and the others one shares it with.

What bears the stamp of one's own handiwork is thus a "vanishing," as Hegel describes it.[20] What seems to be a personally expressive deed is taken by others as something else. But if what counts *absolutely* are one's deepest commitments, and one's deeds and handiwork only incompletely or inadequately express those commitments, then the *absolute* importance of those deeds itself vanishes. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? That one lacks the talent for adequate self-expression is itself a contingent fact; that one is surrounded by compatriots who lack the talent or means to render a proper judgment on one's deeds is equally as contingent. That one might have chosen the wrong expression, as it were, which then led others to see one's acts as insulting, when, you assure them, nothing remotely like that was in your intention – all these could seem to be contingent matters, and the charges of dishonesty, hypocrisy, or ineptitude are always ready to fly. Hegel might well have been describing the scenario that contemporary politicians in Washington carry out almost as if reading from a script. First, they are caught short on something distasteful they said; then they deny having said it; when that is proven, they wail that it was taken out of context; when it is shown that it was not taken out of context or could not have been so taken, they solemnly declare that it was a mistake, an error in judgment, that it was not meant *in that way*, that such a thing does not express their deepest commitments, that anybody who knows them would know that; and then there's the final step, virtually never that of directly apologizing for the statement but of apologizing for any hurt that *might* have been caused on the part of somebody *misunderstanding* what it was that they *really* meant.

In light of all that, Hegel says that the next step in such modern individualism is that of a kind of normative self-withdrawal, a "reflection into self," an affirmation that one is not *just* expressing one's deepest commitments, but that in one's own self, in one's own *act of committing* oneself, one is doing one's best in the more existential sense (itself derivative from an older religious sense) of committing oneself to *what really matters* in these affairs. With this "reflection-into-oneself," that is, into the importance of the *commitment* itself, there is now, as Hegel puts it, a "vanishing of the vanishing," and what emerges out of the vanishing importance of the "work" is something more like the *authentic* individual, the "true concept," as Hegel calls it, of modern individualism, whose own handiwork may vanish but whose commitment to what really matters remains steadfast.[21] That reflection-into-self brings with it a radical split between inner and outer, between subjectivity and the way one makes one's appearance in the social world, a move which in turn introduces its own twists and turns until such modern individualism begins to sag under its own weight. The problem with such authenticity, after all, is that it repeats in a more subtle form the problems of the individualism that gave rise to it. It claims to be concerned not primarily with expressing itself but rather with *engaging itself* with *what really matters*, *die Sache selbst* (as Hegel calls it), and only then giving expression to that commitment.

Indeed, once individuals begin to mark off what each *intends* (or *means* to say) as radically or sharply set off from what each actually *does* (or really *says*), there then arises a different kind of social space in which a certain *theatricality* comes to dominate; each actor makes a claim to be concerned with this or that, and in staking that claim simultaneously judges the reaction of the audience to see how well he is doing, with each member of the audience reciprocally doing the same; each actor in the "play" begins to operate therefore with the suspicion that the whole affair really is just a "game" with its own odd rules in which all actors deceive others and are themselves being deceived, each acting out the realization of the line usually attributed to Groucho Marx: "Sincerity is the greatest thing in the world, so if you can fake that you've got it made" (cf. Sennett 1977).

That, however, threatens to bring the whole house down; what holds the "game" together is the conception that one really is supposed to be attending to what really matters, not just playing a game of pretending to do so. However, just as the actors of the "way of the world" (in *The Fable of the Bees*) were not half so bad as they made themselves out to be, it turns out that there is a truth still to be realized in this form of theatrical individuality. First, in Hegel's terminology, the theatricality of modern agency implicitly acknowledges that our being-for-others is crucial to our agency; without others, there is no audience for the role being played; and, second, the theatricality of modern life takes it that the standards for agency are themselves, after all, "roles" and are therefore self-legislated, not simply prescribed by the meaning of the terms we use nor by the metaphysical structure of the world. However, if it is all *just* theatricality, then all that can really matter is our "reflection into ourselves," our normative withdrawal of the most significant part of our lives, our deepest commitments, from that public space. We then at

best become the "managers" of our interests (or even the "managers" of our lives, outfitted with self-help books and up-to-date technologies of communication).

The *meaning* of these practices thus at first seems to teeter between that of a necessary failure in our attempts to reach any genuine conception of what really matters (at least in terms of reasons that are good for others) and that of an alienated, almost nihilist conception to the effect that it really is *just* a "game" and that the only thing that really matters is who convinces whom, that is, who wins the game. Nonetheless, in playing out our roles in our managerial function – to the extent that we still commit ourselves to what really matters – we are still making claims on others, and if we are to go beyond just playing the game (in which the participants "find themselves deceiving themselves and deceiving each other reciprocally"; *PS* 226.17–19/M 250), if we are to be *really* concerned with "what really matters" (and not just pretending to be, or not just taking our own contingent success at bringing others to whatever view we happened to have landed on to be the only thing that really matters), then we have *required ourselves* to play *that* game under the constraints of and according to the demands of giving and asking for reasons from each other.

Embedded in this idea of theatricality and managerial expertise, there is after all something to the idea of authenticity, of working at getting it right about one's deepest commitments both in the sense of their being *expressive* of who one is and their being *congruent* with what really matters in life. Part of the reformulation hinted at but not determined by that practice (which continually finds itself teetering between two bad extremes) is to be found in Kant's conception of the moral will in the *Groundwork*, where the theatrical *role* is replaced by the self-legislated *rule*; or, in Kant's well-known formulation, "the will is therefore not merely subject to the law, but is so subject that it must be considered as also *giving the law to itself* and precisely on this account as first of all subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as instituting)" (*Groundwork* 4:431).[22]

To be sure, Kant's own formulation at first looks as if it just repeats the paradoxical nature of individualism that preceded it.[23] To avoid that, Kant amended it in *The Critique of Practical Reason* where he there characterized it as an expression of the "fact of reason," namely, that in playing, as it were, the "game" of giving and asking for reasons, one cannot step out of the normative realm to see if the "game" is itself in order; one always finds oneself *already* obligated by the act of looking for justification in the first place.[24]

If the conditions of agency are neither fixed by the "meanings" of the words nor by some prior, metaphysical structure of agency, then the "constitutive standards" of agency must themselves be legislated; but since they cannot be legislated individually (and indeed in one clear sense cannot be *legislated* at all), they are therefore the "substance," the social space within which the agents engage in their activities. The metaphor of the *game*, so appropriate to theatricality, itself now vanishes with reference to giving and asking for reasons. The "role playing" of modern theatricality, the *game*, thus ultimately has to become the *practice* of giving and asking for reasons, in which the various goods and reasons for belief and action – *what really matters* – are themselves *not* legislated by individuals

as individuals. If what really matters, the *Sache selbst*, are indeed our deepest commitments, and if we are to be true to ourselves as being true to those commitments as *intelligibly* demanding our allegiance, then we are in turn required to abandon the idea of self-sufficiency in its individualist shape. The individual simply does not have the resources within himself to give shape to his agency, not because those resources are external to him and always out of reach, but because the development of modern individualism has reached the point (by 1807, so Hegel perhaps naively thought) where modern life is ready to acknowledge the truth to which it had implicitly committed itself once it had set foot on the path towards the modern ideal of individualism in the first place: *We are never self-sufficient agents*; our agency itself is a kind of social norm, indeed, one that has developed into its Kantian formulation by virtue of the very determinate failures to hold onto a conception of itself as shaped by some "other" (the constitutive standards of agency, the meanings of the terms, the metaphysical structure of agency, the rise of modern theatricality); we are who we are only within the social space instituted by the agents engaged in the practice of giving and asking for reasons, and the idea of the *individual* is *itself a social norm*, something each of us *can be* only if others *are* also individuals in that sense; and, so it turns out, that the notion of a "constitutive standard" for agency itself is a historically developing norm.

What emerges from the passage of individualism to its truth in sociality is a series of "shapes of consciousness," or characters, that are each defeated in their own terms. Yet, these characters, despite being *defeated* characters, still emerge over and over again in modern life, "shapes" that modern life seems condemned to repeat.[25] The *social* ideal of being an "individual," of taking the inward turn (an *In-sich-gehen*, as Hegel calls it), is itself possible only within a social space of certain types of very determinate *dependencies*; and part of the complexity of that social space is that it fashions within itself an idea of self-reflection and of being an independent origin of ethical and epistemic claims which itself encourages the kind of cropped picture of the *individual* as the original source of the social space instead of fostering the more intelligible picture of the "individual" as a *constitutive moment* of the shape such social space has assumed in modernity. The modern "individual" emerges out of a "reflection-into-himself" from out of that social space; and having emerged from it, the "individual" now becomes an essential participant in the self-sustaining of a modern, self-reflective culture.

Modern life had moved along a path that found its penultimate culmination in modern Kantian individualism; what was *at work* in all the contestations of meaning along that path was a conception of *Geist* as the sociality of reason, a conclusion, so Hegel thought, that we could only draw at the end of that path. But was it necessary to enter that path in the first place? Nothing in the development of modern individualism would answer that question. To answer that, so Hegel thought, one had to start again at the beginning, which in 1807 he still took to be the ancient Athenian *polis*. He wrote two longer chapters in the *Phenomenology*, "Spirit" and "Religion," detailing why the path from Athens to Paris to Berlin had to take the shape it did. But this is a story for subsequent chapters.

Notes

1 For discussion of this section, see above, chapter 4. – *Ed.*

2 This was the guiding theme in my book *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (1994). This point is also made especially forcefully by Robert Pippin in a variety of places. In an otherwise very sympathetic assessment of Robert Brandom's reading of Hegel, Pippin (2005a) takes Brandom to task on exactly this point: The issue is not that of "administering" norms so that we correct the errors in the ways our ancestors took them but the nature of normative authority itself. Although the point was made by Pippin in his earlier work, it comes to the forefront especially forcefully in his *The Persistence of Subjectivity* (2005b). (This theme is central to Hegel's analysis of *Antigone*; see below, chapter 8. – *Ed.*)

3 In his early, pre-*Phenomenology* writings, Hegel often used "life" in contexts where he would later prefer the term "spirit," and he would speak of a "shape of life" in a way that foreshadowed his later preference for a "shape of spirit." In "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," he more or less equated a "shape of life" with a "form of life": ". . . while the group's love must always have retained the form of love, of faith in God, without becoming alive, with exhibiting itself in specific forms of life (*Gestalt des Lebens*), because every form of life can be objectified by the intellect and then apprehended as its object, as a cut-and-dried fact. The group's relation to the world was bound to become a dread of contacts with it, a fear of every form of life (*Lebensform*), because every form exhibits its deficiency (as a form it is only one aspect of the whole and its very formation implies fixed limits), and what it lacks is a part of the world" (MM 1:403/Hegel 1975b, 287–8). All translations are by the author.

4 In his later, post-*Phenomenology* usage, Hegel calls this the "Idea," characterized as the unity of concept and reality. In one sense, Hegel thus seems to accept the Rawlsian distinction between ideal theory and non-ideal theory. For Rawls, ideal theory assumes that everyone acts in terms of the ideal (according to what he calls strict compliance) and that the ideal is realizable in the existing social and historical conditions. That would correspond at one level with Hegel's conception. Non-ideal theory deals with how the ideal is to be implemented in conditions where people do not act in terms of the ideal and where there are various complicating factors (racial discrimination, class bias, and the like) that prevent the ideal from being realized. On the other hand, there is another level at which it is simply not clear how much Hegel's scheme would agree with Rawls's scheme; for Hegel, the ideal must be actual, be at work in the life of the people for which it is an ideal. It is not enough that it be *realizable*, but that it be substantially already *realized*, even if the reality of the situation does not fully measure up to the ideal.

5 *Enc.* §66, emphasis added. Hegel continues: "In all these cases, immediacy of knowledge not only does not exclude mediation, but the two are so bound together that immediate knowledge is even the product and result of mediated knowledge" (ibid.).

6 These issues recall Hegel's concern with the Pyrrhonian Dilemma of the Criterion and Trope of Relativity; see above, pp. 2–6, 60–64. – *Ed.*

7 Kant certainly never put it this way, although one might see hints of it in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, where he divides the basic "determination" of humanity into three categories – animality, humanity, and personality. "Humanity" is our constitution as social where we judge ourselves only in comparison to others, and "personality" has to do with our ability to act according to the dictates of pure practical reason (*Rel.* 6:26–8/22). (Resolving this antinomy is central to Hegel's new theory of subjectivity in the *Phenomenology*; see below, chapter 13. – *Ed.*)

8 This is a common picture (e.g., Korsgaard 2002; Stern 2001).

9 See Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1997). Lance calls his alternatives the "attributive" conceptions of normativity (where for something to be a norm is to follow from some accepted set of social rules) and "transcendental" conceptions of normativity (as to what the real norm is). The reference to "master rules" is, of course, taken from Hart (1961). (Lance's use of "transcendental" to characterize his own views is, it seems to me, misplaced, but that is another story for another time.)

10 Hegel took himself to have come to terms with such Hobbesian readings in the chapter preceding this one, where he discussed other naturalist conceptions of intentions, activities, and freedom with regard to psychological laws and the great naturalist pseudo-sciences of his day, physiognomy and phrenology. (See above, chapter 5. – *Ed.*) The citation from Hobbes is from *Leviathan*, Chapter XXI, "Of the Liberty of Subjects": "Liberty and necessity are consistent: as in the water that hath not only liberty, but a necessity of descending by the channel; so, likewise in the actions which men voluntarily do, which, because they proceed their will, proceed from liberty, and yet because every act of man's will and every desire and inclination proceedeth from some cause, and that from another cause, in a continual chain (whose first link is in the hand of God, the first of all causes), proceed from necessity."

11 This thesis is well argued by Speight (2001).

12 See Speight's discussion. Hegel is reputed to have said in his lectures of Schiller's play: "A similar example is Schiller's [*Robbers* where] Karl Moor is enraged by the entire civil order and the whole situation of the world and mankind in his day, and his rebellion against it has this universal significance" (*Aesthetics*, 1224/MM 15:557).

13 "Because that autocratic divine and human order is separated from the heart, it is to the heart a *mere semblance* which ought to lose what is affiliated with it, namely, power and actuality. In its *content*, that order may contingently coincide with the law of the heart, at which point the law of the heart can acquiesce in it. However, it is not lawfulness purely as such which is the essence to the heart. Rather, it is the consciousness *of itself* in such lawfulness, its consciousness that it has therein satisfied *itself*" (*PS* 203.19–23/M 222–3).

14 "The good, or the universal as it here comes on the scene, are what are called gifts, abilities, powers. It is a mode of the spiritual in which the spiritual is represented as a universal; it requires the principle of individuality to bring it to life and movement, and it has its actuality in this, its individuality. This universal is well used by this principle insofar as it is deployed in the consciousness of virtue, and it is misused by it as far as it is deployed in the way of the world" (*PS* 210.8–14/M 231).

15 "Ancient virtue had its own determinate, secure meaning since it had its *basis, itself rich in content*, in the *substance* of the people, and it had an *actual, already existing good* for its purpose. Hence, it was also oriented neither against actuality as a *universal topsy-turvy invertedness* nor against the way of the world. However, the virtue which has been just considered has left that substance behind, and it is a virtue with no essence, a virtue merely of ideas and words which have dispensed with that content" (*PS* 212.34–213.1/M 234). (About the ancient world, see below, chapter 8. – *Ed.*)

16 "The way of the world is victorious over what constitutes virtue in opposition to it. It is victorious over that for which the essenceless abstraction is the essence. However, it is not victorious over something real but merely over the creation of distinctions which are no distinctions, over this pompous talk about what is best for humanity and about the oppression of humanity, this incessant chattering about sacrifice for the good and the misuse of gifts" (*PS* 212.23–28/M 433–4).

17 "But he thereby seems not to be able to determine the *purpose* of his activity before he has taken the action. However, at the same time, since he is consciousness, he must prior to the action have the action itself as *wholly his own*, i.e., the *purpose* in front of him. The individual who sets himself to act therefore seems to find himself caught in

a circle in which every moment already presupposes the other; it thus seems that he is incapable of finding a beginning for his actions because he only becomes acquainted with his originary essence, which must be his purpose, *from his deed*, but, in order to act, he must have *the purpose beforehand*. However, precisely for that reason, he has to begin *immediately* and, whatever the circumstances may be, without any further reservations about *beginnings*, *middles*, and *ends*, set himself to act, since both his essence and his nature which exist-*in-itself* are beginning, middle, and end all rolled into one" (*PS* 218.10–21/M 240).

18 "As *beginning*, the individual's nature is present in the *circumstances* of action, and the *interest* which the individual finds in some particular thing is the answer already given to the question: Whether he should act and what is here to be done? For what seems to be a merely given actuality is in itself his originary nature, which merely has the semblance of that of *being* – a semblance which lies in the very concept of a self-estranging activity but which, as *his* originary nature, is articulated in the *interest* which his originary nature finds in it" (*PS* 218.21–27/M 240).

19 "In contrast with this purely unessential distinction of quantity, *good* and *bad* would express an absolute distinction; but this does not happen here. Whatever would be taken one way or another is in the same way something the individual goes in for, an individuality's self-presentation and self-articulation; and for that reason, all of it is good; and one could really not say what would be supposed to be bad here. What would be called a bad work is the individual life of a determinate nature realizing itself in the work. It would only be debased into a bad work by the comparative thought that is itself empty since it goes beyond the essence of the work, which is to be a self-articulation of individuality, seeking and demanding who knows what" (*PS* 219.20–30/M 241).

20 "But if we look at the content of this experience in its completeness, then that content is the *work which is vanishing*. What *sustains itself* is not the *vanishing* itself, but rather it is the vanishing itself which is both actual and bound up with the work, and it vanishes with the work. The *negative*, together with the *positive which* is *its negation*, itself *perishes*" (*PS* 222.27–31/M 244).

21 "In this way, consciousness reflects itself into itself from out of its transitory works and affirms its concept and certainty as *the existing* and the *persisting* vis-à-vis the experience of the *contingency* of the act" (*PS* 223.8–11/M 246). He then adds: "Therefore, in the *thing that matters* as the permeation of individuality and objectivity which has itself objectively come to be, the true concept of self-consciousness has in the eyes of self-consciousness come to be, that is, self-consciousness has arrived at a consciousness of its substance" (*PS* 223.35–38/M 246).

22 Translation amended. In particular, I rendered "davon er sich selbst als Urheber betrachten kann" as "of which it can regard itself as instituting" rather than translating "*Urheber*" as "author." (More literally, it would be rendered as "instituter" but that seemed more awkward.)

23 Because it requires an individual to have a prior law in order non-arbitrarily to legislate for himself and since this prior law (as non-self-legislated) could in no way obligate him, it would thus render the legislation useless.

24 To Hegel's ears (and those of Fichte) that seemed more like a restatement of the problem than a solution, since, left at that, the "fact" either just restates the paradox or falls back into the idea that our wills are constrained by some "other," the metaphysical structure of practical reality. (Kant's tests of the categorical imperative are examined in chapter 7. – *Ed*.)

25 "Since these moments cannot yet possess the meaning of having been fashioned into purposes which stand in opposition to that lost ethical life, they are here valid just in their naïve, natural content, and the aim towards which they press is the ethical substance. However, since our time lies closer to the form those moments take when they appear after consciousness has forsaken its ethical life and when, in searching for that

ethical life, it repeats those forms, the better representation of those moments may be in the forms appropriate to our own time" (*PS* 197.24–30/M 216).

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