

*The freedom of the will: social dimensions*

## I

The topic we have arrived at is Hegel's "social theory of agency," and that topic, given how the problem of agency is usually understood, raises the immediate question of why anyone would think that sociality would have anything at all to do with the problem of agency. So it might be a good idea to back up a bit and get a running start at the problem.

As we have seen several times, that problem is understood in a number of ways; most generally – what distinguishes naturally occurring events from actions (if anything)? (Sometimes the question is: what, if anything, distinguishes responsible human doings from what animals do?) The most prominent approach has it that actions are things done intentionally by individuals, purposely, for a purpose. This is sometimes said to mean: acting from or on or because of an intention, although, as we shall see, this nominalization can be misleading. Or, of the many possible descriptions of some occurrence, it is an action if there is a true description under which it is intentional. This is often taken to mean simply that if you ask a person why he is doing something he can express this intention to explain himself, most often in the form of a reason.<sup>1</sup> He does not (except in extraordinary circumstances) describe why he is acting in the way he might describe what caused his lungs to deteriorate; instead he reveals something about his own relation to his psychological inclinations and aversions; his "evaluative" relation to them, as it is sometimes put.<sup>2</sup> His acting intentionally amounts to his having evaluated what he ought to do, and to be acting in the light of that resolution.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Anscombe (2000), §5. <sup>2</sup> See Taylor (1985c), and Frankfurt (1988).

<sup>3</sup> This evaluation need not be explicit, need not involve periodic episodes of inaction and calm deliberation. The evaluation can become habitual and unreflective and occur in an everyday way, responsive to the world, his own past, and so forth without all such considerations being "taken up" explicitly as such. This sort of everyday "separation" within one's mind, the ability to reflect rather than merely act on one's inclinations, as well as an everyday "identification" or ultimate affirmation of a course of action is quite important for Hegel, as chapter 5 indicated. For an account of

(So animals act purposively but not “for a purpose” in this evaluatively affirmed sense.)<sup>4</sup>

So far, so good. Hegel agrees with this approach. He agrees that without reference to a subject's “take” on what is happening and why, without reference to an inner realm, or a self-relation, we will not be able to identify the class of events that are actions. For example, Hegel explicitly makes the distinction so important in these discussions, between an action of mine and a thing done by me or because of me but not as an action ascribable to me, and so as something done, but unintentionally. He calls this the difference between a *Handlung*, or genuine action, and a mere *Tat*, a thing done by me. (As in the familiar examples, I turned on the light and in so doing also I alerted the burglars. I intentionally turned on the light and so that is my action, but I had no knowledge (nor could I have reasonably been expected to have knowledge) that there were burglars about, so while I did alert the burglars, that is a mere thing done by me; I brought it about but only as a *Tat*. The only way to make this distinction is by appeal to the subject's view of what he is doing and why.)<sup>5</sup>

The next question is what it is to act intentionally, or from an intention. One answer is that such intentions are a special kind of cause, and their being this special kind of cause – psychological states like beliefs and desires – is what distinguishes actions. Actions are uniquely caused by beliefs and desires. Philosophers who believe this usually also believe that only causal explanation is, properly, explanation, and are compatibilists, believe that freedom is compatible with such causal status.<sup>6</sup> Other philosophers also believe in unique causation but they insist that beliefs and desires don't cause actions; I do by “an act of will,” a spontaneous act of

intentions as “plans” that involve putative commitments to just-now-beginning and distant, future goals, see Bratman (1987).

<sup>4</sup> This sort of picture obviously allows for degrees. One can begin acting with a very inchoate and obscure sense of purpose and even more obscure sense of the propriety and desirability of pursuing that purpose. In becoming more self-consciously clear about what one is doing (is after) and why, the meaning of what one does can change as well. Cf. Taylor (1985b), pp. 83–4. Taylor emphasizes the problem of the “medium” of expression obscuring any possible self-transparency, but he does not note that any such medium in Hegel is also extended in time and that it is complexly social, responsive over time to social strains, breakdowns, interactive “negotiations” of a sort (where this is understood in a highly figurative way).

<sup>5</sup> This distinction is made late in Hegel's career, later than the Jena *Phenomenology* anyway (see RP, 217, 219; PR, 144, 146). But even here, having made the *Handlung/Tat* distinction, Hegel does not strictly observe it and uses both *Handlung* or *Tat* to refer to what properly are actions. I will follow him in this imprecision, referring unsystematically either to actions or “deeds,” delineating *mere* “things brought about by me” only when necessary.

<sup>6</sup> The obvious avatar here is Davidson (1980a).

resolve that can cause without being caused. This is the free will party, or incompatibilists or voluntarists or libertarians.<sup>7</sup>

Things get very interesting at this point because Hegel is neither a compatibilist nor an incompatibilist in *these* senses because he does not believe that the relation between inner state and outer deed is a causal one at all, whether natural causal or could-have-done-otherwise causal.<sup>8</sup> He agrees that the subject's attitude is crucial in distinguishing actions as such, and that the attitude at issue is an intention. He agrees that having an intention is a function of having reasons and being able to take up the question about which ought to be compelling, and so that there must be a reason which explains why I ended up doing what I did among many possibilities.<sup>9</sup> The capacity to manage this everyday reflection about practical considerations pro and con in this way is the self-relation crucial to agency, an ability, as Hegel says, both to have and to "stand above" considerations experienced as inclining one towards and away from possible actions.

The thesis now coming into view is that it is this self-relation that cannot be understood apart from social relations; my relation to myself is mediated by my relation to others. What does "mediated" mean here? One sense meant by Hegel is fairly obvious. Practical reasoning is a norm-bound activity (one wants to get the right answer about what one ought to do), and the norms in question are not themselves simply "up to me"; they reflect social proprieties, already widely shared, proprieties functioning as individually inherited standards for such deliberation.<sup>10</sup> Kant thought that there was at least one norm not so inherited and socially mediated (or at least permanently accessible to anyone at any time, even in the face of overwhelming contrary cultivation and socialization): the form of pure practical reason as such, accessible to anyone by abstracting from and putting out of play contingently desired ends, any inherited norms of assessment, and attending only to such a form. It is well known that Hegel denied that such a norm could be either action-guiding or

<sup>7</sup> See Kane (1998).

<sup>8</sup> As argued in chapter 2, he is clearly a compatibilist in *some* sense, since he does not believe that the possibility of freedom requires some exemption from the laws of nature.

<sup>9</sup> That there is a reason which best explains why someone did something does not, though, for Hegel, show that reasons must be causes. So he is not bothered by the fact that phenomenologically it is next to impossible ever to distinguish "the" reason which could causally explain why the act was done.

<sup>10</sup> This is true even when such proprieties are rejected. Only someone unimaginably isolated from the long process of human socialization would be able to avoid considering such a deviation as anything other than a deviation, a defiance of such proprieties.

motivating, and thought that by contrast practical reasoning always involved a responsiveness to social norms; that one deliberated *qua* “ethical being” (*sittliches Wesen*), not *qua* rational agent, full stop.

Secondly all agency requires the assumption of some act-description and some self-ascribing of intentions, and Hegel insists that we must treat the agent’s own description and ascription, given “unabstractability from social context,” as merely provisional. This is the most unusual and original aspect of his account. Hegel takes very seriously the fact that people can be wrong about their self-descriptions (wrong about what doing that “among us” would be), wrong about, or ignorant of, the full meaning, scope and implications of some commitment, and *even* wrong in their self-ascriptions, wrong about their own intentions, and he orients a good deal of his position from this fact. Both aspects are said to be subject to some form of social responsiveness and mediation before the initially indeterminate can become determinate, all such that you would not be doing *that* among us if the act, let us say, were not received as *that*, and you have not executed your intention *successfully* if others cannot ascribe to you both the act-description and the intention you ascribe to yourself.

It is in these senses that Hegel wants to tie together a self- and other-relation, and it is the latter set of concerns, the inner–outer problem, that I want to discuss in the following. There are so many controversial elements in his position that I propose to sketch first the overall contours of that position in section II below, and then in the remaining sections turn to the texts that I think support such an interpretation.

## II

One obvious condition necessary for me to be able to act as a free agent, to recognize my deeds as my own, is that I must be able to know my own mind, know my own standing attitudes, commitments, dispositions, preferences, and so forth, and be able to engage in some sort of reflection about the relative weight of various considerations, assess the degree of my commitment, understand which consideration ought to be acted on in any given situation, and the like. Hegel may not accept the standard picture of individuals exercising an exclusively and uniquely first-personal and self-certifying intra-mental deliberative faculty, but he clearly means to claim that there must be *some* significant independence of the subject from what she is merely inclined to do, that there is no causal or automatic link between the experience of some such motivating inclination

and an action. If actions are a distinct class of events, then explanations of why the action occurred must appeal to such psychological items and the agent's relation to them, and among the many things that happen because of me, if there are some that I can be held responsible for (i.e. if there are intentional actions), it must be in virtue of such an appeal to the at least initially divided "inner" life of the agent and the manifestations of these items in the "outer," publicly accessible world.

Now the unique features of all forms of self-knowledge have been an enduring theme in modern philosophy, and have been taken by many to lead easily into paradox and *aporia*. The situation is no easier in Hegel and is made even more difficult by some extremely unusual things said about self-knowledge and by what he claims about the *inseparability* of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world and, especially, knowledge of and relations to, other agents. Most paradoxically, he even insists on what he calls a "speculative identity" between the "inner" and the "outer" in action. As we shall also see, Hegel is going to make much of a theme quite prominent in contemporary writing on the subject: self-ascriptions of intentions are not to be understood as based on observation; they are not reports of mental items.<sup>11</sup> Such self-ascriptions must be understood to express a resolve, to avow a commitment; they do not report a mental episode or item that could then function as a discrete cause of a body movement. When I express an intention, even to myself, I am avowing a pledge to act, the content and credibility of which remains (*even for me*), in a way, suspended until I begin to fulfill the pledge. But at this familiar point (an asymmetry between first- and third-person claims, or common cause with Anscombe on "non-observational knowledge"<sup>12</sup>), Hegel veers off on his own.

In the first place, it is clear that Hegel is out to re-conceive how we should understand the *temporality* or temporal extension of actions, how to understand their beginning and their realization, how to frame properly what is relevant to the beginning and what to the end or completion of

<sup>11</sup> Again, the wellspring here is Anscombe (2000) and neo-Wittgensteinian doubts about an isolated domain of "the inner" (see §8 and §28). See especially: "All this conspires to make us think that if we want to know a man's intentions it is into the contents of his mind, and only into these, that we must enquire; and hence, that if we wish to understand what intention is, we must be investigating something whose existence is purely in the sphere of the mind; and that although intention issues in actions, and the way this happens also presents interesting questions, still what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does, is the very last thing we need consider in our enquiry. Whereas I wish to say it is the first" (p. 9).

<sup>12</sup> Anscombe (2000), pp. 13–15.

actions.<sup>13</sup> That is, he is asking that we in effect widen our focus when considering what a rational and thereby free agent looks like, widening it so as to include *in* the picture of agency itself a contextual and temporal field stretching out “backwards” from or prior to, one might say, the familiar resolving and acting subject, and stretching “forward,” one might also say, such that the unfolding of the deed and the reception and reaction to it are considered a *constitutive element* of the deed, of what fixes ultimately *what was done* and *what turned out to be* a subject’s intention. (The ultimate goal is to break the hold altogether of the notion of “a moment” of resolve or a moment of causal efficacy.) It sounds a bit strange to try to say that all of that should somehow be considered as more properly *in* the picture of “the subject acting on reasons,” the socially and temporally embedded subject-who-acts and is responded to, but that is the position Hegel is advancing and that I would like to understand better. (When, in the chapter on Spirit in the *Phenomenology*, he is glossing what he takes to have been established earlier on the nature of action, he remarks that the unique nature of the “reality” of action is that

this reality is a plurality of circumstances which breaks out endlessly in all directions, backwards into their conditions, sideways into their connections, forward in their consequences.) (PhG, 346; PhS, 389)<sup>14</sup>

This is all connected with a feature often described as distinctive of Hegel’s account of agency, but not yet, I think, well understood. Actions are *expressive*, not merely the unique results of an agent’s executive powers. What is displayed in what results (and so the initial difficulty in, the social complexity of, determining just what is displayed) is thus as important to Hegel as any putatively unique causal path to those results. Actions both disclose what an agent takes herself to be doing (sometimes *to* the agent, and often obscurely and partially, never immediately) and manifest some implied normative claim to entitlement so to act, all in a way that raises to prominence an interpretive question in any action, even for the agent: what was done and how could it have appeared justifiable?<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> I don’t mean this dimension is absent from Anscombe. See §26 on what she calls the “A–D” order in intentional actions that are parts of a extended temporal series. But Hegel accounts for this extension in a different way.

<sup>14</sup> As the passage goes on, Hegel makes clear that he does not think that an agent must somehow take account of all these various dimensions in order to truly be an agent and certainly not that he can be held responsible for them. But he does insist that some realization of this extent and especially the dimension: “something which is only for others,” is a necessary “moment” of acting consciousness.

<sup>15</sup> Understanding Hegel on action as an “expressivist” account obviously owes a great deal to Charles Taylor’s work on Hegel (Taylor 1975) and to his path-breaking article, “Hegel’s Philosophy of

The answers to such questions do not lie in the mind of the agent any more than answers to similar questions about “what was made” reside in the psychological states of the artist. Hegel’s model wants to shift attention from the causal power of the doer as critical in my ownership of the act to what he refers to as “making the act my own,” that is a recovery of it as one’s own. The nature of agency will be understood in understanding the nature of this recovery; not in understanding some originary causal power.<sup>16</sup> Hence the famous Hegelian *Nachträglichkeit*, belatedness, in any account of both individual and historical meaningfulness.

Such a social picture is playing a major role in Hegel’s objections to a causal or voluntarist theory of acting on reasons since the claim is that no individually conceived agent can be said to have a proprietary or original relation to what she has done, that she does not have something like clear, automatic title to just what it was that was done. The proper act-description partly depends on the established context of deliberation and action (what having this or that practical reason for doing this or that could mean in such a context) and partly on what intention and what act-description are attributed to you by others. If that is so, then no trumping priority can be given to the agent’s own expression of intention; the true content of that intention can be properly identified only by relation to an act-description that will involve many pre-volitional conditions and it will have to be provisional and temporally fluid, unstable across time and experience, as it were. This latter is probably the most counter-intuitive claim yet, because Hegel will not treat intentions as discrete states that can play the requisite causal roles in a standard causal model of explanation, but anyone who agrees with Hegel that there is something misleading in trying to understand freedom by attention to some unique *ex ante* causal power of a singular subject seems led into such a thicket.

By the “true content” of the intention, I mean to refer to the most complicating factor in Hegel’s account, one already noted and to which

Mind” (Taylor 1985b). But Taylor links his interpretation to a Hegelian theory of “Cosmic spirit” and so understands human actions as partly *vehicles* for the self-expression of Cosmic spirit (Taylor 1985b, pp. 83, 87). I have disagreed with this account in Pippin (1989). I also have a much different account of the sociality of action than Taylor’s, as will be clear in this chapter and chapters 7–9. And most importantly, nowhere in Taylor’s treatment does he link the possibility of “recovering” an action as mine with the problems of rationality, legitimacy, and normativity, all of which, I am arguing, are crucial to Hegel’s case. Taylor treats the problem more as a question of hermeneutics, a restriction I don’t think fits Hegel’s texts.

<sup>16</sup> The relation between an agent and a deed is not like that between the foot and a soccer ball when the ball is kicked; the intending agent does not cause bodily motion (*à la* Davidson) in the way the foot causes the ball to move, but is rather to be understood on the model of an artist’s somewhat provisional and somewhat indeterminate “plan” unfolding over time as the art object takes shape.

we shall return in detail. That is, Hegel's account of intentions is oriented from the fact that any treatment of the subject's expression of her own intention must acknowledge that, however privileged first-person authority might turn out to be, agents can still greatly exaggerate both the degree of their own "ownership" of the intention (an experience of making up one's own mind could be evidence of the success of some interested group's efforts to control the way you view the issue), and they can exaggerate the degree of the commitment expressed in an intention; their self-avowal can be as much a fantasy-of-an-intention as a genuine expression of resolve, even though the expression may be sincere. The best authority to ask when you are interested in what someone intends to do may indeed be that person. But being the best authority does not mean being an always reliable authority. I can also sincerely claim that I in fact executed the intention when that is not the case, and I can describe what I did in ways countered by everyone else in my social community. But the first "individuality-qualifying" condition (the factors said to be relevant in what precedes the resolution and action) is also controversial on its own.

The relevance of the actual social world that precedes any individual resolution to any proper explanation of an action is a much better-known aspect of Hegel's position. Partly this depends on claims in Hegel's ontology that contest our usual intuitions about the ultimacy and self-sufficiency of the individual human agent and her isolatable, discrete psychological states.<sup>17</sup> Partly this claim about the explanatory relevance of a range of prior social factors stems from the fact that Hegel has not separated what he considers the objective and subjective dimensions of practical reason, and so has posed the question as: what could actually count as reasons for a subject at a time in a given community to do or forbear from doing something? And this has the historical implication already noted, although certainly not the relativist implications it might seem to have. What could count for Antigone as a reason to act could not *be* what would count in the same way for Cordelia in Shakespeare's play, however sincere and reflectively sophisticated both might be.<sup>18</sup> And

<sup>17</sup> More on this and its political implications in chapter 8.

<sup>18</sup> That there are such objective dimensions to rationality also means that some considerations might be playing a role in an agent's deliberations although the content of those considerations might be in some tension with "full" deliberative rationality itself. A consideration that might have once served as a justification in a society at a time, and for individuals, might cease to play such a role after some historical change. So in Hegel's view persons could be said to become "more" like agents as a result of such an objective change. The character of the considerations that circulate as reasons for others and for individuals are also constitutive features of possible and greater or less agency.



subjectively, it is also important to note the possibility of the consideration actually counting to a subject as justificatory, something we have to stand behind, not just cite or invoke (not just “how we go on”). It is relatively uncontroversial that the degree of justificatory force possessed by some consideration is not something an individual subject grants or discovers by reflective activity alone. So to say that practical reasons must be “actual” to count as reasons is not only to make reference to the objective, historical condition; it is also to say that the considerations must be able to be motivating or “internal” reasons for a subject and cannot be merely or exclusively “external” reasons.<sup>19</sup> They can be said to become such internal reasons only by means of a process of complex socialization.

Indeed, Hegel’s position is even stronger than this, and this for reasons we have already seen in some detail. That is, being a subject or an agent is not treated by Hegel as an ontological or strictly philosophical question, but as an achieved social status such as, let us say, being a citizen or being a professor, a product or result of mutually recognitive attitudes.<sup>20</sup> This means just what it seems to: that different historical communities establish this status in different ways, and there is no truth-maker or fact of the matter they are getting wrong or more and more right. So for Hegel the explanation of the fact that ancient authors do not seem to have what Christian metaphysicians call the will, or that British philosophy of the eighteenth century ties normative distinctions so much to the influence of the passions, or that Kantian moral psychology describes agency as paradigmatically the capacity to obey the dictates of pure practical reason, will all have to be explained in a way that is profoundly historical. This is so even though it is *also* the case that the attribution of such a status can, according to Hegel, be more or less successful or more or less complete. Various elements of the attributed status can involve internal incompatibilities and internally conflicting ideals that must still be overcome. As we shall see, Hegel thinks that there is such a “pragmatic” defect at the core of a modern notion of agency based on ontologically distinct individual centers of unique intra-mental causal powers. He is especially looking for what he considers a diagnosis of the unsustainability

<sup>19</sup> The insistence on the actuality of such reasons (and the exclusion of merely ideal reasons as possible reasons to act) means, I have argued elsewhere, that Hegel has accepted a so-called “internalism” constraint as a condition of the possibility of practical reasons. (In Bernard Williams’ succinct formulation: “If there are reasons for action, it must be that people sometimes act for those reasons, and if they do, their reasons must figure in some correct explanation of their action” [Williams 1981, p. 102].)

<sup>20</sup> One drifts here easily into the language of Robert Brandom’s “semantic externalism,” since it compresses and makes clear so many of the issues.

of such a self-understanding and he proposes as part of that diagnosis an account of the logic behind the notion of inner intentions or resolutions causing external, publicly observable body movements.

### III

But besides these reflections on ontology, on what counts as a satisfactory explanation, and on the objective dimension of practical reasons, Hegel also offers a basic critique of a common modern picture of agency itself, and he offers an alternative picture of the distinct logical structure of agency, what we have come to understand, he claims, as the “inner–outer” relation. This introduces the issue of how the unfolding of a deed in time and for others, after an agent has begun to act, is as essential a dimension of what makes agency agency as what precedes the putative moment of decision. His richest discussion of the issue is in the second half of Chapter Five, on practical reason, in the Jena *Phenomenology*. (The claim is not limited to that section. In his *Encyclopedia Logic*'s treatment of “inner” and “outer,” Hegel's predictable formula is simply: “Hence what is only something inner, is also thereby only external, and what is only external is also only something inner” (EL, 274; EnL, 197, translation altered). We get a bit more detail in the *Phenomenology*. There Hegel argues that our conventional modern understanding of agency makes a distorting error by clumsily “separating” the inner intention from the outer manifestation of the inner, and also in trying to explain the action by reference to the isolated separate intention as prior cause, and it is that case I would like to examine for the remainder of this chapter.<sup>21</sup>

The core claim in this critique is that we cannot determine what actually was a subject's intention or motivating reason by relying on some sort of introspection, by somehow looking more deeply into the agent's soul, or by some sincerity test. “By their fruits shall ye know them,” Hegel often quotes, and he might well have added “*only* by their fruits or deeds.” Only as manifested or expressed can one (*even* the subject herself) retrospectively determine what must have been intended. And of course it seems a bit paradoxical to claim that we can only know what we intended to do after we have actually acted.<sup>22</sup> But there is little doubt that Hegel holds

<sup>21</sup> See the interesting and neglected discussion in Burke (1969) on the paradoxical implications of the language of “motives,” “being moved by,” “moving to act,” and so forth, especially p. 40 on one's being “moved by his being-movedness.”

<sup>22</sup> But compare here Hare (1952) and Davidson (1980b). Cavell (1976) is also quite right to point to the phenomenon where someone interprets what I meant, but I am dissatisfied with the way he

something like such a position. Consider: “Ethical Self-consciousness now learns *from its deed* the developed nature of what it actually did” (PhG, 255; PhS, 283); or, “an individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action” (PhG, 218; PhS, 240).<sup>23</sup>

Or consider formulations, again from the *Encyclopedia*, that go a bit farther:

We are accustomed to say of human beings that everything depends on their essence [*Wesen*] and not on their deeds and conduct. Now in this lies the correct thought that what a human being does should be considered not in its immediacy, but only as mediated through his inwardness [*Innere*] and as a manifestation of that inwardness. But with that thought we must not overlook the point that the essence and also the inward only prove themselves [*sich bewähren*] as such by stepping forth into appearance. On the other hand, the appeal which human beings make to inwardness as an essence distinct from the content of their deeds often has the intention of validating their mere subjectivity and in this way of escaping what is valid in and for itself. (EL, 234; EnL, 164–165, translation altered)

However, as noted, the most concentrated and richest discussion occurs in the Jena *Phenomenology*. In the two last sections of Chapter Five, Hegel attempts a sweeping, internal and quite unusual “phenomenological” critique of the voluntarist position. He proposes to show various ways in which the relation between what the deed means to me, inwardly, as I intend it and given the reasons I take to justify it, can easily come to be experienced by such a subject as in some tension with the way the actual deed plays out, within the external, social world. This tension is also shown to be heightened by the way the deed might be construed by others or resisted by them (resisted interpretively, contesting the claim by the agent about what was done). Since all of this stems from an abstract and, he thinks, ultimately unsustainable strict separation between inner motive and external manifestation, Hegel goes on to investigate how this opposition might be resolved. And he engages in a wide-ranging exploration of literary and historical types used as phenomenological evidence, all unlike anything attempted before in the history of philosophy.

puts something, but have as yet “for myself” no determinate alternative until someone puts it another new way and I can *now* (and only now) say, “yes that’s what I meant, what I intended.” Cf. Cavell’s remark, “it may still seem, for example, that no present or future revelation can show what an earlier intention was” (Cavell 1976, p. 233). Cavell believes that this counter-intuition can be countered, and so do I. It is what I tried to show in Pippin (2000a).

<sup>23</sup> On the connection between this retrospectivity theme and the appeal to literature in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as one way of getting the whole, relevant field or context of agency into view, see the valuable discussion by Speight (2001).

The relevant discussion begins towards the end of “Observing Reason,” when Hegel begins to introduce sweeping claims about agent and action that anticipate the rest of the chapter. The clearest early sign of what he is after occurs after his approval of Lichtenberg’s joke about physiognomy, that the right retort to anyone who says, “You certainly act like an honest man, but I see from your face that you are forcing yourself to do so and are a rogue at heart,” is a “box on the ears.” He goes on,

The true being [*wahre Seyn*] of man is rather his deed; in this individuality is actual [*wirklich*], and it is the deed that does away with both aspects of what is merely intended [*Gemeinte*]: in the one aspect where what is ‘intended’ has the form of a corporeal passive being, the individuality, in the deed, exhibits itself rather as the negative essence, which only is in so far as it supersedes being. Then too the deed equally does away with the inexpressibility of what is ‘intended,’ in respect of the self-conscious individuality. (PhG, 178; PhS, 193–194, translation altered)

The point Hegel is making is a general one about all attempts to qualify an agent’s deeds by appeal to some essence or truth or true self, although it is made here in terms of a contrast between someone’s character as expressed in facial geometry or physiognomy as opposed to what the person actually does. Hegel means here that the actual deed “negates” and transcends that aspect of the intention understood as separable as subjective cause, understood as the mere occurrence of a somatic desire or passion or inclination to act, or understood as physiognomic essence, as well as the idea that one’s real intention can only ever be partly expressed in a deed, and so remains in itself inexpressible, “*unaussprechlich*.” Contrary to both views: “the individual human being *is what the deed is*.” All such that if a person’s deed, also called her “*Werk*,” is contrasted with the “inner possibility” then it is the work or deed that “must be regarded as his true actuality, even if he deceives himself on this point, and turning away from his action into himself, fancies that in this inner sense he is something else than what he is in the deed (*That*)” (PhG, 178–179; PhS, 194).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Hegel admits in this passage that one can perform deeds that are not expressive of “one’s being” even though they are intentional and volitional. He places a great deal of weight, though, on whether the deed is “actual.” In fact, this question of his, “what settles the character of the deed is just this: whether the deed is an actual being that endures” [*Aber den Charakter der That macht endlich aus, ob sie ein wirkliches Seyn ist, das sich hält*] is, to say the least, a non-standard question. He obviously does not mean whether the deed was actually performed (as opposed to fantasized, merely rumored to have occurred, etc.), but something like whether it counts as an expression of me, or as a mere “fancied performance” in the translation, a mere “*gemeintes Werk*,” that “in itself is nothing at all and merely passes away” (“*das in sich nichtig vergeht*”). It is important that what other things you do (whether the deed endures) is a criterion for assessing this, not simply sincerity of avowal. He goes on:

Finally, there is an implication about this position that Hegel eagerly accepts, but that raises a number of difficult questions, most prominently in the “*die Sache selbst*” section. For if there is *no* way fully to determine what an agent intended prior to and separate from the deed, if it’s only and wholly “in the deed” that we can make such a determination, then not only are we faced with an unusual retrospective test of the true intention, even for the agent, it also follows that we cannot specify *the action* wholly by reference to such a separate intention. What *I* take the act to be, its point, purpose and implication, now has none of the trumping authority we intuitively attribute to the agent. In such an account I don’t exercise any kind of proprietary ownership of the deed, cannot unilaterally determine “what was done.”<sup>25</sup> This is, as it were, subject to contestation within some concrete social community, the participants of which must determine what sort of deed “*that*” *would be* in our practices, how our rules apply. My intention is thus doubly “real”: it is out there “in” the deed, and the deed is essentially out there “for others.” In describing agents who pride themselves on “not caring what people think,” and for “having integrity” and for “believing in themselves no matter what the critics say” and so forth, who believe that there is what Hegel calls *die Sache selbst* (an inner essence, inner fact of the matter, true meaning of what was done) determined by my subjective take, Hegel notes,

in doing something, and thus bringing themselves out into the light of day, they directly contradict by their deed their pretence of wanting to exclude the glare of publicity and participation by all and sundry. Actualization is, on the contrary, a display [*Ausstellung*] of what is one’s own in the element of universality whereby it becomes and should become the affair [*Sache*] of everyone. (PhG, 227; PhS, 251)

From the viewpoint of such a Mr. Integrity, Hegel reports, this (the involvement of others) would look like “flies” hurrying along to “freshly poured milk,” busying themselves with another’s business, but Hegel rejects this attitude and insists that with all action “something has been opened up that is for others as well, or is a subject-matter on its own account.” Said another way, you may possess first-person authority about whether you have

The analysis of this being into intentions and subtleties of that sort, whereby the actual man, that is, his deed, is to be explained away again in terms of a being that is only “meant,” just as the individual himself may create for himself special intentions concerning his actuality, all this must be left to the laziness of mere conjecture (“*Müssiggange der Meinung*”). (PhG, p. 179; PhS, p. 194)

See also PR, §124.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. “A man’s intention in acting is not so private and interior a thing that he has absolute authority in saying what it is – as he has absolute authority in saying what he dreamt” (Anscombe 2000, p. 36).

resolved to do something and about what you take yourself to have resolved; but that does not settle the issue of what you have resolved. Avowing what you intend to do still leaves the matter of whether you have truly resolved (or are only fantasizing), the degree of your actual commitment, and what you have in fact decided to do, wide open. Practical attitudes about the future (intentions) require such a distinction and a way of resolving the issue.

In his discussion of moral consciousness, especially moral, subjective self-certainty in the Chapter on Spirit, Hegel, in a clear attempt simply to recall what he takes himself to have established in this chapter, remarks:

The action is thus only the translation of its individual content into the objective element, in which it is universal and recognized, and *it is just the fact that it is recognized that makes the deed a reality.* (PhG, 345; PhS, 388, my emphasis.)

He then recalls the discussion of *die Sache selbst* and distinguishes the difference between the naïve attitude of “the honest consciousness” with the more reflective self-certainty of conscience.

(I note that Hegel has not claimed (and will not claim) that some consideration literally “becomes” one’s intention after one has acted, as if a mental episode “comes to exist” after the deed, or that others “determine” an agent’s intention in this existential sense, all as if there is backwards causation. In the vast majority of cases, one’s prior, determinately formulated intention unfolds and is expressed in actions taken to be just those actions by other agents. It is the possibility of this not happening in this way (or the possibility of an exaggerated avowal of some degree of commitment or some self-serving insistence on a socially rejected act-description) that interests Hegel and which suggests to him that this is an ever present even if rarely relevant possibility and which he takes to show that that there is no privileged role due the agent’s formulation.)<sup>26</sup>

Further, if it counts as a condition of the successful execution of an intention that others apply the act-description to the deed and attribute the intention to me that I attribute to the deed and to myself, what should we say about cases where the two come apart, cases where, say, the socially authoritative view of some deed is “terrorist act,” but it is a massively unjust society, an apartheid state, say, and many agents want to count the act as the legitimate resistance of freedom fighters? There are two Hegelian things to say about this but they are both book-length topics (at least), so I can just mention them. First, Hegel’s picture of the conditions for such

<sup>26</sup> So no retrospective creation of intentions is at issue, and Laitinen (2004) is wrong to suggest that that might be an implication of what I am arguing.

*successful* execution of an intention presumes a social dependence that has objectively come to embody the right relation between such dependence and independence. That is, his account assumes such a realization of *mutually* recognitive attitudes among agents, not the continuation of some version of the Master–Slave dialectic. (In his terms, the philosophy of objective spirit presented in the *Encyclopedia* presumes the historical narrative that legitimates the claim to count distinctly modern institutions as the decisive (if still not fully complete) “realization of freedom.”) Secondly, Hegel wants to argue that in cases like the apartheid one, the unequal positions of the participants can be expected to result ultimately in the normative principles involved losing their hold, creating a kind of crisis, requiring incompatible and so untenable commitments over time, that unreason manifests itself in a unique kind of human suffering, visible in examples that range from Antigone, to Rameau’s nephew, to the beautiful soul. It is part of the task of the *Phenomenology* to demonstrate this ambitious claim, but I cannot pursue that track in this context.

## IV

We are a bit more familiar now with at least the form of the claim that what one might be tempted to count as a determinate, privately owned mental content could be imagined to have a different content merely on condition of altering some external, especially social conditions (from Putnam on water to Burge on arthritis). But the intuitive implications are still odd-sounding. We can put this point in the terms Hegel uses in both the *Encyclopedia* and *Phenomenology* versions of this claim. If I start out to write a poem, I might find that it does not go as I expected, and think that this is because the material resists my execution, my inner poem, and so what I get is a “poorly expressed poem.” On Hegel’s account, this is a very misleading picture. The poem is a perfect expression of what your intention – your resolve to write a certain sort of poem and your conception of such a project – *turned out to be*. To ask for a better poem is to ask for another one, for the formation and execution of another, better plan. If the poem failed, everything has failed. It (the expression of what has turned out to be the intended poem) *just turned out to be a bad poem – not a bad expression of a good poem*. As Nietzsche always insisted, our egos are wedded to the latter account; but the former correctly expresses what happened.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> I mean §13 and the discussion of the “lightning flash” simile in Nietzsche (1988). I try to show the similarities between Hegel and Nietzsche on this point in Pippin (2005d). For Hegel’s appeal to

Even more colloquially, when Marlon Brando's character says to his brother in *On the Waterfront*: "I could have been somebody, a contender," a Hegelian brother might have said: "You *are* somebody. The somebody who wasted his boxing talent by listening to me and taking a fall for a pay off. You have become wholly, explicitly, what you were implicitly. You may regret that you are (were) not someone else, especially not the person you thought you were, but you *have become* the person you are."<sup>28</sup> (Of course the brother's *saying* this has its own "conversational implicature." One would suspect that he is using existentialist rhetoric to excuse his own role, to appeal to his own good intentions as exculpatory. In the actual movie, the Rod Steiger character *is* very much like this.)

While there is a fairly standard sense in which you can be said to learn later aspects of what you intended to do that you did not know *ex ante* – as when you learn later that doing *X* unavoidably requires doing *Y* – the sense of revelation (often of self-deceit) and even surprise stressed by Hegel goes far beyond that. Correspondingly, he is not here just pointing to cases where a complex plan of action requires alterations in what had been planned as effective means, cases where one can say the basic intention remains constant or is reformulated in response to empirical discoveries and new, unexpected turns of events. There is nothing in any of the passages that indicates that Hegel wants to challenge any such commonsensical qualification on "what I intended." When Hegel says that it is the public deed that realizes and reveals what you intended, he leaves open the possibility that you may have been ignorant of what that gesture or expression would mean in this context, may have been ignorant of what was necessary to realize the intention, how much more difficult than intended it turned out to be, and so on, and so in such cases you really did *intend* something that was *not realized*. What he is most interested in are not cases where ignorance of various relevant facts, or unforeseeable contingencies explain why what was done ends up not being what was intended, but cases where I find out that, while I sincerely

the art/expression example, see §140 of the *Encyclopedia* (EL, 274; EnL, 197), a passage that expresses some of his strongest reservations about the inappropriate reliance on a subject's intentions both to explain and to judge an action.

<sup>28</sup> In discussing and confirming the intentionalist fallacy in art (a position similar to the intentionalist theory of action I am describing and its fallacy), Stanley Cavell writes: "Because in what I have been urging, this alternative between 'what is intended' and 'what is there' is just what is being questioned. Intention is no more an efficient cause of an object of art than it is of a human action; in both cases it is a way of understanding the thing done, or describing what happens" (Cavell 1976, p. 230).



tell myself that I intend to achieve *Y*, I come to see that such an intention was “empty,” cannot really count as my intention.<sup>29</sup>

## V

But such formulations at least make it easy now to raise three natural counter-intuitions (among many others), all of which suggest that Hegel’s position is extreme, too radically undermines our intuitions about action and responsibility. We might be willing to admit the irritating frequency of the “But I Didn’t Mean To . . .” dodge used by agents to excuse themselves, the retreat to the inner citadel. “I honestly didn’t mean to insult you by saying you were a coward and a fool; I *meant* to speak the truth to a good friend, to help you, and I hope you take it in that light.” And so forth. And we might be willing to accept the philosophical point that while we can’t identify the deed apart from a description that refers to the intention, such intentions are often indeterminate, provisional, flexible, change “on the fly” as we carry out an action, all altering our sense of what we are doing and what end we are really seeking, and all making implausible any belief–desire, causal model of action, with separable fixed intentions as causes.<sup>30</sup> But we would like to be able to back away somehow sometimes from what actually happens, to insist that what ended up happening, and especially what was understood by others to have happened, cannot always be traced back wholly to me, that I can’t be said to be fully expressed in some deeds, and that “what I sincerely

<sup>29</sup> See Cavell (1976), p. 230, on the case of *La Strada* and whether Fellini can be said to have “intended” the allusion to the Philomel myth.

<sup>30</sup> Searle (2001) has presented a classic voluntarist alternative to the account sketched here. He argues effectively against the causal or “standard” empiricist model by showing in various ways that, except in very unusual cases like addiction, my desires cannot be said to cause what I do. I bring about the action not the desires or pro-attitudes. But Searle takes this to mean that the causal agency of such decisions requires what he calls “gaps” everywhere. There is a gap between inclinations, desires and so forth, and my forming the intention to do *X*. There is a “gap” between having formed the intention and beginning to carry it out. (I can form the intention sincerely and yet still hesitate to begin to act; I must in some independent sense “resolve” to act and begin.) And, most importantly for Hegel’s account, Searle insists that there must be a constant gap between the onset of the action and the continuing attempt to achieve a goal; there must be a continuing “resolve” throughout the course of the attempt. I don’t see what we gain from moving from an inappropriate third-person perspective on the causal efficacy of desires to mysterious gaps, gaps which, compatibilists have always complained, make the explanation of the action, and my experience of its links with me, obscure. Searle’s account is clearly oriented from a deep commitment to the phenomenon of weakness of the will, and he has rightly demonstrated what “gappy” assumptions would be necessary to defend that possibility. From the perspective defended here, though, that demonstration amounts to a *reductio* of the putative “weakness of the will” phenomenon.

intended” is a plausible defense against such imputations. Even in the sorts of cases that Hegel is interested in, we want to say that I can have intentions that fail to be executed (in just the sense Hegel is focusing on) even though they still count *prima facie* or provisionally as “my intentions.” We even think we can say in all honesty: “I truly intend to be polite to him tomorrow, but I know I won’t be”; although that comes closer to the whining self-exculpation Hegel objects to. The failure-to-be-executed example is especially relevant when some unforeseeable contingency intervenes, altering the result in some way that could not have been reasonably foreseen. (In a case where I sincerely intend to do someone some good and set out to, but unexpectedly what I do ends up greatly harming the person, must I say that this “actuality” reveals that my *true intention* was to harm the person? Of course not. There *are* Freudian cases where this might be true, but all Hegel needs here is a distinction between what I did and what happened because of me that does not beg all the questions he wants to raise against the intentionalist or voluntarist account, and as we have seen, he concedes freely the difference between a *Handlung* and a *Tat*.<sup>31</sup>) It will be important to distinguish (for Hegel; he never devotes much space to these distinctions) between obvious cases where what I brought about does not reveal my intention from cases where it reveals an intention denied or in some way avoided by an agent.

And some of the formulations about how the intention can only be detected in the deed, proven in the deed, confirmed by the actual deed, and so forth, seem to suggest something like a verificationist position (the equation, perhaps as a matter of meaning, of the means for determining what something is, with that thing itself), all with its usual problems. In this case, while it might be true that the very best *means* we have for objectively establishing what someone was intending to do, what goal he is after, would be to see what he actually did, those means might still be quite inadequate, however better than any other. They might give us the only picture of what appeal to an inner intention could amount to, but they might at the same time give a very fuzzy, distorted picture.<sup>32</sup>

And, finally, to return to another distinction like the first one above, don’t we want to be able to say that I really and truly intended to pursue *X*, found that it was too hard, that I was weak in my resolve, and so went

<sup>31</sup> In Hegel’s terms, though, if I haven’t actually done something to help the person, perhaps because of stupidity or limited information, we still must say that we do not yet know what your intentions are (were), what you would do were you to realize what *is* necessary to help your friend.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Anscombe, (2000), p. 8.

after *Y* instead? On Hegel's account it seems we have to say that you discover in pursuing *X* what your true intention was, that it was not really to pursue *X*, but "to pursue *X* until level of difficulty *A* was reached, and then to switch to *Y*." Yet, as noted, we seem to want intuitively to maintain the notion of a genuine intention, a weak will and wavering resolve (and so agent regret that one did not do what one truly intended to do), and this would appear to be incompatible with Hegel's speculative "identification" of the inner with the deed, the outer.

Most of these counter-intuitions stem from the same issue raised briefly above: how to explain cases where I did not do what, in my own view of the matter, I intended to do. Our common-sense intuitions about the non-obvious cases suggest that the right account is: I *did* intend the deed, but because of weakness of will, I failed to do so. Hegel's preferred account is: I discovered that I had not in fact resolved to act, at least not with the degree of commitment I assumed. Such a putative resolution must be "tested" to count as a genuine commitment, and I failed such a test. Hegel's notion of the will is simply practical reason, and so his position is more Socratic – there is no weakness of the will. There is only, ignorance, self-deceit and self-discovery.

## VI

All these counter-intuitions (intervening contingencies, verificationist worries, and weakness of will concerns) have something to do with whether Hegel can make any clearer what he means by such an *inner*–*outer* speculative "identity" claim, whether he can especially preserve some intuitive sense of the "inner" in this claim. What would it mean *not* to separate clumsily inner intention as cause and external deed as effect, and yet not wholly to absorb the former into the latter? (And all of this is not yet to mention the considerations advanced in the first part of this discussion: that what Hegel means by "inner" is not intended to localize such possible grounds for acting in isolatable mental states, but also means to tie what becomes salient for an agent to the actualities of the social world in which he or she lives and not simply to the results of individual, reflective deliberation.) What would it mean, given all we have seen about inseparability, to remain true to the "thought that what a human being does should be considered not in its immediacy, but only as mediated through his inwardness [*Innerness*] and as a manifestation of that inwardness" (EL, 234; EnL, 164, translation altered)? (And this insistence on what Hegel calls the "right of intention," my right to have attributed

to me only a limited range of the things that happen, where that range is essentially determined by my subjective take on what I intend to do, could be multiplied. All of this is so even if “my subjective take” cannot refer to temporally prior already determinate intentions, conceived as states causally responsible for actions.)

So before turning to the counter-intuitions as such, we need to note that it is precisely this subjective side of things that Hegel most emphasizes in the *Moralität* section of *The Philosophy of Right*. That is, as already noted, it is here that Hegel most clearly recognizes that there is a difference between an action, “*Handlung*,” a deed that can be attributed to me, and a mere deed, “*Tat*,” something that happened because of me (especially something I may have done voluntarily but not knowingly), but which cannot be attributed to me as something for which I bear responsibility or *Schuld*. (See RP, 218–219; PR, 145–146.) Further, this discussion also clearly shows that Hegel freely concedes that in the execution of some plan, any number of unforeseen and genuinely unforeseeable contingencies may intervene, and what actually happens and what I intended may come apart, and Hegel clearly does not want to hold me accountable, as if this outer contingent event necessarily manifested what I truly, in fact, intended.

That is, as we have already seen, in passages cited previously about the “speculative identity” of inner and outer, Hegel has no intention of *collapsing* inner into outer. That would be in his terms a non-speculative identity claim.<sup>33</sup> That is, “Now in this lies the correct thought that what a human being does should be considered not in its immediacy, but only as mediated through his inwardness [*Innere*] and as a manifestation of that inwardness.” More broadly, this subjective dimension is what Hegel calls “the right of the subject to find its satisfaction in its action” (RP, 229; PR, 149). This principle is of the utmost importance in Hegel’s philosophy, since it amounts to his interpretation of the philosophical significance of Christianity, and therewith it is the foundation for his whole theory of the modern world. So, most famously, for the Greeks, “customs and habits are the form in which the right is willed and done” (VPG 308; PH, 252, translation altered), and “we may assert” of the Greeks “that they had no conscience; the habit of living for their fatherland without further

<sup>33</sup> For reasons given in this section, and in light of the quotations cited, I think Forster goes much too far when he characterizes Hegel’s position on action as “physicalism” or “behaviorism,” although he rightly notes Hegel’s debt to Herder in this section of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. See Forster (1998), pp. 97, 335–8.

reflection was the principle dominant among them” (VPG 309; PH, 253, translation altered),<sup>34</sup> and therefore Greek ethical life “is not yet absolutely free and not yet completed out of itself, not yet stimulated by itself” (VPG 293; PH, 238, translation altered).

It is this dimension of action, what the subject takes himself to be doing and why he considers that he ought to act in such a way, that Hegel calls the “subjectivity that makes up the determinateness of the concept of right,” and so establishes what he calls the Standpoint or Sphere of Morality. In a way typical of Hegel, he clearly wants to do justice to this element of actions (as opposed to mere events), and to try to understand the normative significance of attention to this (partial but still crucial) aspect in our evaluation of action. Within certain conditions, a moral standpoint, a heightened attention to the subject’s view of what she is doing, is appropriate and required. These conditions include the very general and broad entitlement of all to be treated with the dignity appropriate to free beings, beings *with such an inner life*, their own “right of subjectivity” (we ought not to murder or rob anyone for our own gain, whether that person is a member of our *Sittlichkeit* or not; we are not entitled to ignore their claim to lead their own life as they determine it should be led). And the conditions under which such considerations ought to be attended to also include certain objective historical conditions. That is, by contrast with the usual claims for the priority of a common ethical life and one’s social roles within it, “in periods when the historical actuality amounts to a spiritless and rudderless existence, the individual is justified in fleeing from this actuality into his inner life” (RP, 260; PR, 166–167). Of course Hegel also clearly wants to understand the limitations of this context and these conditions. This means understanding what goes on when this one dimension of a properly described action is over-emphasized or relied on too exclusively, as in both his famous appeals to and yet intense criticism of the rule of conscience, “*Gewissen*.” (Already in the Addition to §108, he had noted the limitations of an *exclusively* moral standpoint (RP, 207; PR, 137);<sup>35</sup> in §121 he reminds us not to forget the true identity of “human self-consciousness” and “the objectivity of the deed” (RP, 229; PR, 150), and in §124 he both

<sup>34</sup> See also Hegel’s handwritten notes to §147 of *The Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel again says (astonishingly given characters like, say, Orestes) that “the Greeks had no conscience” (VPR, 2:553).

<sup>35</sup> “Das Selbstbestimmen ist in der Moralität als die reine Unruhe und Tätigkeit zu denken, die noch zu keinem *was ist* kommen kann. Erst im Sittlichem ist der Wille identisch mit dem Begriff des Willens und hat nur diesen zu seinem Inhalte” (RP, 207; PR, 137).

repeats the *Phenomenology's* doctrine and alternate emphasis – “what the subject is, is the series of his actions,” and refers us directly to that book (RP, 233; PR, 151). In fact, read carefully, throughout *Moralität*, Hegel is constantly reminding his audience not to think that the *content* of the intention, however important and ineliminable such a subjective attitude is, can be determined apart from reliance on what was actually manifested in the public social world.)

Hegel then proceeds to spell out the dimensions of this indispensable but still limited point of view, the moral point of view on agency. I have the “moral right” to expect that an action be attributed to me (that I be deemed “responsible”) only in so far as “one recognizes as the existence of this moral will only what amounts inwardly to a purpose” (RP, 214; PR, 141, translation modified). And he goes on to analyze the relation between purpose and responsibility, Intention and Welfare, and the Good and Conscience. (I don't have the space to follow him into this particular jungle, but Hegel's position can be very easily misunderstood if this distinction between a genuine action and something merely done by me is not stressed. We all know that a coerced action should not be counted as a proper action of mine; it is not even done voluntarily, much less intentionally, even if I, technically, produced it. If we live in an extremely repressive society, we might also discount an agent's degree of responsibility, concede that his public actions may not reflect his true “inner” commitments because the public world is objectively such that he is not allowed such genuine expression. On Hegel's account, however, it must also be said that an agent denied such scope for expression may not ever be able to know the “truth” of his subjectively “certain” view of what his commitments/intentions are. Like many of us, he must live in a state of suspension about whether he is actually the potential hero he might take himself to be. But our intuitions can then waver on this point. Direct coercion is one thing and is clearly exculpatory; harsh repression and expected penalties are another and clearly diminish the degree of responsibility; mere social discomfort yet another, until we reach what is simply the unavoidable cost of integrity, when the lack of fit between avowed intentions and action must count as evidence that the avowed commitments are mere wishful fantasies, not intentions exogenously denied expression.)

But I should also note one of Hegel's most important and controversial claims – both the priority and superiority of the standpoint of “ethical life” to that of either “abstract right” or “morality.” That would also obviously be an independent discussion, and I deal with some aspects of it

in chapter 9. What I have tried to emphasize is that nothing in Hegel's treatment of the moral standpoint suggests any tension with the *Phenomenology's* position on the impossibility of "separating" "inner" from "outer" in understanding a deed. The *Moralität* chapter certainly cannot be used as an independent discussion of "Hegel's theory of agency."<sup>36</sup> If it were, Hegel's position would be misunderstood. Hegel is certainly conceding that it does not "correspond to right" to attribute a deed and an intention to someone on the basis simply of what happens and a person's causal role in bringing it about. The moral insistence on the right of knowledge, the right of the "satisfaction of subjectivity" (*Befriedigung der Subjektivität*), and so forth, must be accepted, and that means qualifying both the act-description and the attribution of responsibility in the light of the "mediation of the inner." But there is no tension between the *Phenomenology* account and *The Philosophy of Right*, because Hegel is clearly separating two distinct questions: what role should the expressions of intention (and an agent's act-description) play in a final determination of what was done and who was responsible and to what extent, and, secondly, how can we determine the content of any such intention? The latter involves not only the interpretive task of knowing what doing this or that would mean in our community, but how to understand the relation between what you actually did, and what was thereby expressed as your real intention, regardless of your own avowals. These are obviously not easy tasks and they are subject to much abuse.

If this is correct, it means that something like the presence of the subject in the deed must be understood carefully in order to grasp Hegel's full position. Obviously in this account, sustaining a purposeful activity over time, reacting in ways considered appropriate to obstacles, challenges, unforeseen circumstances, etc. is being treated here as a norm-bound or rule-following activity. Individuals are not formulating intentions (in consideration of such norms) in some solipsistic way, and they are clearly circumscribed in such formulations by a variety of social conventions, proprieties, and so forth. One aspect of the successful execution of an intention has to involve having attributed to you by others the intention that you take yourself to have, and, given the role of the intention in any act-description, by an agreement about what it is you did.<sup>37</sup> And this

<sup>36</sup> This is my disagreement with Quante (1993).

<sup>37</sup> By "successful" here I mean more than that various events actually occurred that an individual can interpret as consistent with and corresponding to that individual's "take" on what ought to happen and what was intended. If this description and ascription are wildly at odds with the way the act is acknowledged and responded to, we approach an alienation that borders on schizophrenia.

criterion presupposes, as the execution of intention unfolds over time, an intentionally sustained sensitivity to such shared understanding and normative appropriateness. You may intend to signal in a meeting that you wish to speak and so raise your hand. But if in that society, raising one's hand expresses that one is communing with one's ancestors and wishes to be left alone, then you did not signal anything and so cannot be said to have realized the intention of signaling. (If an intention is a subjective resolution that can be manifested in a deed, then you cannot successfully intend what cannot be expressed in a deed in that context, although you can imagine what it would be to realize such an expression and in a self-deluded fantasy take yourself to have done so. But you cannot *intend* to become Napoleon. You cannot intend to float three feet in the air, and then blame gravity for thwarting what you truly intended.)<sup>38</sup> And as these passages about the right of subjectivity indicate, *you* also cannot be said to have "actually" manifested a communion with your ancestors. (You didn't know that such a gesture would mean that in such a context.) Or so Hegel wants his inner-outer dialectic to work.

Put one final way, Hegel is clearly embracing the common-sense position that intentions matter a great deal in what may be properly attributable to another as his or her deed and in our evaluations. And he has no problem with the view that such intentions could be beliefs about what outcome will occur if an agent acts a certain way, desires about what outcomes should occur, and perhaps even desire-independent beliefs about what ought to occur. But within the fabrications and fantasies and wish-fulfillments of daily life, we often do not know what we really believe and desire in any of these senses, and won't really know until called on to act.

## VII

I turn now to the counter-intuitions as a final attempt to reach this last underlying question about the subject. First Hegel himself notes the "intervening contingencies" problem, the reasonable excuse that some deed does not reflect or express me because something wholly unforeseen and unforeseeable intervened, could not have been part of what was intended. What ended up happening was not "what I intended." "Fortune (*Glück*),"

<sup>38</sup> Again, this is a potentially confusing aspect of Hegel's position. A person can certainly take herself to have formulated and to be acting on the intention to become Napoleon. But because there is nothing she could do to realize such an intention, she can't actually have intended it.



Hegel notes, “decides as well in favor of an ill-disposed purpose and an ill-chosen means, as against them” (PhG, 222; PhS, 245).<sup>39</sup> He goes on to make clear that he is anticipating the distinction in *The Philosophy of Right* between “what happens” because of me and what can still be said to be my deed. If I am pitching a ball and a great gust of wind suddenly drives the ball inside and it hits you in the head and you die, I did not kill you, even though you died as a result of an action I initiated. What happens no longer can count as a “work” or expression of mine in any sense, neither *Handlung* nor *Tat*, but as something that happened to me, and of course, more importantly, to you. The connection with me, the “work” character vanishes. The same thing could be true of simple miscalculations: she intended to slap him gently, but she inadvertently slapped him hard. But then it (what happens inadvertently) no longer functions to excuse what I did (in respect to your dying I didn’t do anything); there was no “work” or deed of mine responsible, any more than if lightning had struck you as I pitched.<sup>40</sup>

And there can still be ways to connect the deed with me if some of these contingencies were predictable, foreseeable.<sup>41</sup> I can say I wanted (always want) to draw a perfect circle on the board, and that the limitations of material finitude prevented me from realizing my intention.

<sup>39</sup> See also §120Z of *The Philosophy of Right*: “actions in their external existence include contingent consequences” (RP, 225; PR, 148–149). See also his citation, at §119Z, of the proverb, “The stone belongs to the devil when it leaves the hand that threw it” (RP, 225; PR, 148).

<sup>40</sup> See §118 of *The Philosophy of Right*. Hegel here makes clear both that the action, once externalized, is “exposed to external forces which attach to it things very different from what it is for itself, and send it into remote and alien consequences,” and that this distinction does not require identifying my action with what I was strictly causally responsible for. He speaks instead of the action being “shifted,” “moved,” or “displaced,” “translated” (*versetzt*) into “external existence” (RP, 218; PR, 145). In the *Phenomenology*’s treatment of the same theme, Hegel admits that this possibility seems to set up an “antithesis” again between “willing” on the one (pure) hand and “achieving” on the other, just what he had been working to overcome (PhG, 222; PhS, 245). But he adds that nonetheless “the unity and necessity of the action are no less present too” (PhG, 222; PhS, 245). By the “necessity of the action” he means to re-assert that the completed deed *qua* deed can still be said at least partly, still to express “me,” even conceding this contingency. His explanation for this claim in his own terminology is not terribly clear, to say the least. He notes that the work itself (*qua* work of mine, he seems to mean) can be said to “vanish” under the press of these unforeseen contingencies, but he asserts that this “vanishing” is itself “actual and is bound up with the work and vanishes with it; the negative itself perishes along with the positive whose negative it is” (PhG, 222; PhS, 245). This claim is what is supposed to justify the re-assertion in the next paragraph of the fundamental “unity of consciousness with the action” (PhG, 222; PhS, 245). I think he is trying to say that in these unforeseen and unforeseeable intervening contingencies examples, the whole category of action (under the original description) is compromised, so the question of a qualification on an action also “vanished.” There is no “ball striking the head” or “slapping you hard” action.

<sup>41</sup> “Foreseeability” is playing a role in the treatment of this in §118Z of *The Philosophy of Right* (RP, 222; PR, 146).

But how in the world could you have really formulated and acted on such an intention, given even minimal knowledge about, say “folk physics”? The deed and facts about the world show that you could have only intended to draw the best circle you could.<sup>42</sup> You cannot intend consequences beyond your control. You may intend to write the novel that changes American literature and, lo and behold, that may happen. But that happening cannot be said to be a *deed* done by you; what you did was write the novel. (In excuses I try to minimize my involvement by pointing to my limited intention. One can also try to extend the scope of what I did to include more of what happened than is warranted. And sometimes it is hard to say just what the deed displays, how one could even retrospectively determine the true intention and so delimit what may be attributed. There is no methodological way to resolve such questions but Hegel clearly thinks the best place to look in trying to resolve at least the inner question is to what else such an agents does.)

And furthermore, Hegel means to insist yet again on the merely *provisional* character of an agent’s initial formulation of an intention, the fact that he must “learn from the deed, the developed nature of what [one] actually did.” Only on a picture of a separate, already determinate, causally efficacious “intention” would it appear paradoxical to concede unforeseen contingencies and yet to insist on the continuing possibility of some identity between intention and what is actually expressed in the deed. “What I truly intended” can always only be formulated in a highly provisional, and temporally quite sensitive ways. Its content becomes determinate only in the course of an experience over time, as it unfolds in what is now called “intention in action,”<sup>43</sup> and “what I intended to do” *turns out* to be “what I intended to do, *modulo* an unavoidable indeterminacy in the specification of the act’s and so the intention’s content.” This is the concrete or actual intention that replaces the provisional formulation, and which remains fully expressed in the deed. As we have seen several times, Hegel is not denying that individually formulated intentions or resolutions are necessary conditions for something counting as an action, nor is he claiming that all such subjective “takes” on the matter amount to is the behavior itself. He is challenging the possibility of any *ex ante* determinate content for such intentions, and insisting on

<sup>42</sup> Doesn’t what is produced, what can only be produced, reveal the accepted qualification that must have been taken on board in intending to draw, despite whatever sincere protestations one might hear? (“Honest, coach, I never intended that curve ball to hang like that.”)

<sup>43</sup> See Searle O’Shaughnessy (1991) and (2003), Searle (2001), pp. 44–5, and Hornsby on “Acting and Trying to Act,” in Hornsby (1980), pp. 33–45.

the role of the actual deed and on some form of social dependence in ultimately fixing such a content.

This same point about provisionality and temporal extension also renders the verificationism worry irrelevant. That concern – that the intention may be different from what “our best means for revealing it” can make manifest – makes sense only if there is something like such a separate, originally determinate intention to “find,” such that its actual, observable manifestation might be incomplete or misleading. But there is no such hidden intention waiting to be found by some method.

This last point raises a large issue, though. Hegel’s main point about the “inseparability of inner and outer in actions” seems to be both epistemological and metaphysical. The only way to *determine* what you really committed yourself to doing is by means of the “test” of the deed itself. The only way to settle the question of what you in fact did requires an acknowledgement of the dependence of any such description on the conventions of the society and the time. You have not executed an intention successfully unless others attribute to you the deed and intention you attribute to yourself. But there is a larger metaphysical point underlying this as well. The question of the content of the intention and the question of its possibly functioning for an agent as a reason to act in Hegel’s account themselves require as the relevant ontological unit and so unit of explanation a much larger temporally and socially extended “field.” The fact that the content of the commitment comes to be what it *is* only as unfolding in a deed and as taken up by others is what requires the epistemological picture just noted.

And finally there is no particular reason to hold onto the notion of agent-regret as *guilt*, in the form suggested by the criticism, or to accept that the right account of an outcome other than the one I had originally intended is best accounted for by the notion of *weakness* of resolve, rather than by the surprising manifestation that my true intention, given *A*, or *B*, or *C* was really  $\emptyset$ , or that the degree of the commitment was not what was avowed. So disappointment that I was not who I thought I was, a kind of sadness at what in the end *was* expressed “in” the deed, might very well be a better account than the claim that I could have done otherwise. Indeed, the Hegelian regret is a kind that depends on my *not* really having had the option to do otherwise; or at least that counter-factual option, on this view, is like considering the possibility that *I might not have been me*, a fanciful and largely irrelevant speculation, a mere thought experiment. (Put another way, you can declare your intention in a way that turns out to be false without your having lied.)

One might wonder at this point whether it makes all that much of a difference whether one says that a provisionally formulated intention turns out not to have been an agent's actual, motivating intention, or that a formulated intention *was* an agent's intention but that he was too weak to carry it out. It matters a great deal to Hegel, because the alternate formulations assume very different notions of human mindedness. In the former case intentions are not separable from their realizations in action in the same way that our beliefs are not formulable except by responsiveness to truth. (Hegel's language in the *Phenomenology* is about the link, inseparability between certainty and truth.) Richard Moran has called this the "transparency condition" for beliefs.<sup>44</sup> In figuring out what to believe I am just thereby trying to figure out what is true; in reporting what my beliefs are, I am reporting what I take to be objectively true, not what a catalogue of mental items is. In expressing an intention I am expressing what action I mean to come about; if it doesn't come about – *modulo* the intervening contingencies problem – it turned out not to have been my intention, what I truly meant to come about. It would require pages more to nail this point down better, but Hegel's position amounts to a variation on Moore's paradox. Just as it is impossible to say "It's raining outside, but I don't believe it," it is in *that* sense impossible to say "I intend to be polite to him today, but I know that I just won't be able to bring myself to do it."

In sum, in some circumscribed sense Hegel wants to concede the force of what might be taken to be counter-instances but still to object to various exculpatory appeals to the inner citadel. While our intuitions about weakness of the will and genuinely existing inner, but unexpressed content, are powerful barriers to accepting his position, it is worth noting that there *are* common-sense intuitions that align with his position as well. When we hear something like: "I intended to do *X* and so did what I took to be *X*, and I don't care what everyone else thinks, that everyone else counts it as *Y*, or gives it value *Z*," our reactions can easily be "Hegelian." This is a case like Kate Croy in Henry James' *Wings of the Dove*, who insists to herself and her boyfriend that what they are doing is not "deceiving an heiress to get her money," but "helping her experience love in her dying days," that they "never intended to hurt anyone." Hegel is most definitely trying to undermine *this* as a possible account of "what they really did."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Moran (2001).

<sup>45</sup> Nothing Hegel says, though, is meant to undermine the persistence of genuine tragedy in this sense. There *are* sometimes cases where what happens because of me outstrips my initial

We also easily concede that while the meaning of what one does (the event-description appropriate to it) can change over time, this is not necessarily parallel to or functionally related to, what may rightly be attributed to the agent as his deed. The meaning of Truman's dropping the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki will continue to change from later perspectives. But what Truman did has a fixed scope, set by his subjective take, the relevant act-description at the time, and what was reasonably foreseeable. And we tend to be Hegelians when we hear: "I just intended a joke, to give everyone a healthy scare, by yelling fire in the crowded theatre. It's not my fault the silly people panicked and trampled each other to death." Hegel is most definitely trying to undermine this as a possible account of "what you really intended and did."

Finally there might seem to be Hegelian-inspired excuses. "I did not know, could not have known, what I really intended in performing X, so you cannot hold me individually responsible, cannot attribute the deed to me." But this is sophistry and provides a good opportunity for re-iterating something important. As we have seen often, Hegel does not want to lose or eliminate as a critical factor in attributing a deed to an agent the subject's "take" on what is to be done and why (these are his objections to attributing "the murder of his father" to Oedipus). So there is always such a subjective dimension, an intention in anything that can count as a deed. But he objects to the claim that the *content* of that intention is fixed and determinate *ex ante*. Any original formulation is perforce provisional. Many times, most times, the executing of the deed plays out *as* intended and there is no problem. The deed is intentional under some description, and in such cases "intentional" means the subject takes there to be reasons to act in such a way and acts in the light of *those* reasons. But where the act-description and the corresponding intention, plan of action, etc., have to develop over time, Hegel speaks of such situations as often "tests" of a

understanding, but I still must own up to it; it can still be tied to me. But in any fuller discussion of Hegel on such tragedy, his position would have to be distinguished from that suggested by Bernard Williams – it would be simply "inhumane" in some way to "refuse" it, not to acknowledge it as mine. From Hegel's point of view, and given his criticism of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, that is still too much like some pollution claim, unmediated by subjectivity in any sense. Cf. Williams (1994). And it is not the same sense of tragic responsibility suggested by Cavell – the sense in which the artist is responsible for *everything* in the work, in what the work turns out to mean. "It is a terrible responsibility; very few men have the gift and patience and the singleness to shoulder it. But it is all the more terrible, when it is shouldered, not to appreciate it, to refuse to understand something meant so well" (Cavell 1976, p. 237). Hegel's view is more sensitive to the ways in which various differences in historical forms of life alter what seems reasonable or simply unavoidable to ascribe. Williams and Cavell write about this issue without much of this historical inflection. Cf. also the fine discussion in Hösle (1984).

kind with respect to whether you really will do what you provisionally intended. In these cases there still *is* a real intention; but it is only fully manifest in the deed, and *when* displayed, plays its critical role in attributing the deed (i.e. just some dimensions of the deed, not everything that happens) to the agent. The fact that the agent cannot really be sure that she will act as she consciously intends *ex ante* does not affect then, for Hegel, the attributability issue. The agent's cowardly self-deception cannot function as an excuse, and Hegel is not talking about unconscious intentions. Sooner or later if there is an actual deed, that reveals what the agent's intention was and what thereby can be attributed.<sup>46</sup>

## VIII

I turn finally, and too briefly, to an underlying issue: the right way to express the “persistence of subjectivity” in the account I have ascribed to Hegel. The subjective dimensions of Hegel's account of objective *Geist* that we have seen so far are not manifestations of individual beliefs readily available to conscious inspection, although they can be. They can just as well be, and mostly are, deeply implicit, habitual and largely unchallengeable. But they are not *wholly* unchallengeable, and so the clearest manifestations of the kind of subjectivity manifest in such commitments occur when Hegel discusses the actual or imminent breakdown of such proprieties, challenges within normative practices that cannot be resolved in terms of such norms. So Antigone does not just mindlessly “act out” the role of what a sister does. When that role must be integrated with the ethical life of the *polis*, when she is challenged on that basis, Antigone's being a sister has to become “a view” that she *holds* against other possible views, the prudence of Ismene, and the opposition of Creon. It would be easy to imagine a confused Antigone, absolutely certain she must do what a sister must, but bewildered by the opposition of Creon and the hesitance of Ismene, acting only “on faith.” But this is not what Antigone's near-fanatical *assertion* of her role involves. So, it is in such moments of

<sup>46</sup> So, as noted, I can misreport my intention, state it falsely, without lying, but eventually the deed reveals what “of me” *is* in the deed and so what may be attributable. There are cases where an agent acts knowingly and voluntarily but not intentionally (I am, say, part of the means used by another in acting, and I knowingly allow myself to be so used without interfering but cannot be said to have signed onto the deed, as in the pump example at Anscombe 1971, pp. 37ff.), and this does raise complicated issues for Hegel. There are Eichmann-like or “I was only following orders”-like cases, but (I think) Hegel would still count most of those cases as intentional once the “knowing” aspect reaches a sufficient level that voluntary participation counts as signing on (Eichmann). But these can be tough cases.

crisis and breakdown that the character of these roles as commitments can come into view and can require addressing as norms. This doesn't mean that there is always available to subjects a kind of Socratic independence, that a form of "reflective endorsement" is always on offer in a way we can be said to be responsible for not taking up. The subjective and the objective are far more tightly linked than that in Hegel, and it is fair enough already to say that the emergence of such a dimension of subjectivity is itself, also, an essentially objective, historical phenomenon. (As is well known, Hegel treats Socrates himself as a manifestation of an *objective* crisis in the Greek *polis*.)

And we would need a consideration of any number of other examples in Hegel's attempt to form a typological and narrative account of such experiences of dissatisfaction, before his understanding of how this phenomenon of "negation," not finding any more that the external circumstances, roles, and events provide the reasons they once did, is supposed to work. That would require among other things a re-reading of the *Phenomenology* with such a question in mind, but at least we would then be on the way towards understanding a number of Hegel's most influential and important claims: that history (what has been done and what is expressed in what has been done) is not merely illustrative but essential in human self-knowledge; that the principles of a regime, perhaps its constitutional principles, are only provisional expressions of commitments, its actual commitments are expressed in what is actually done (the beginning here of "ideology critique"); the otherwise mysterious but much-cited claim by Hegel that we can only understand human doings and makings when they are over, that philosophy comes on the scene too late, that the Owl of Minerva takes flight only at dusk; and perhaps, above all, why Hegel finds both an ethics of intention and an ethics of consequences so one-sided and unsatisfactory,<sup>47</sup> and how he proposes to defend a concept of freedom that involves neither the inevitable unfolding of who one happens to be, nor the spontaneous initiation of who one wills to be.

## IX

Finally, while the possible counters to Hegel's unusual position are almost endless, a last qualification is in order. I have argued that for Hegel there is a link between the possibility of one's own mindedness and a capacity

<sup>47</sup> See RP, 218–219; PR, 145–146. See also Bennett (1995).

for the public expression of such attitudes, where that means a capacity to be responsive to and capable of engaging what one understands to be how others will take up and respond to what one says and does, and a capacity for actions consistent with and flowing from such mindedness, and so being responsible for such a mindedness and for such actions. This latter is often a possibility created by the play of circumstances beyond one's control; very often it is a matter of seizing opportunities. We need a good deal more detail about the nature of this social responsiveness and coordination and chapters 7 and 8 will try to provide such detail with regard to Hegel's theory of recognition.

Knowing one's own mind, then, turns out to be "having a mind of one's own," which, in turn, must be wrested from others and protected in ways neither indifferent to nor submissive to the demands and interpretations of others, and it means a form of mindedness that one must also be able to express and act out, successfully "realize" in the world. But does this mean, one might ask, that one cannot be said to harbor "one's own" commitments, evaluations, attitudes, and preferences "first-personally," that one has no intention of ever acting on or avowing?

An adequate answer to such a question would have to be very sensitive to the description of the context of any orienting example. So many factors are at play that no general theoretical account of this link may be possible. But in the general example, this sort of enforced secrecy is just what would amount to a subject feeling alienated from her own self. Her being denied permission and opportunity to express and act on any preference or attitude of her own, whether self- or other-imposed, would amount to her having only a spectatorial perspective on her own life, merely observing her own history. Still, one might persist, surely there are examples of hypocrisy, where expressions say one thing and actions signal one thing, but an agent's first-personal or secret attitudes are quite clearly (for herself, in her own mind) different. But the point is that there must be *some* sort of expression, social responsiveness, and action in the world consistent with such attitudes for a description of the agent to be coherent (not that all expressions and actions must be). One can express trust for another and manifest in what one does what look like actions based on such trust while still profoundly mistrusting someone, but it would be paradoxical to the point of incoherence actually to entrust one's fate to another whom one actually mistrusted, rather than seeming to. Indeed, this fact is what is responsible for situations in which hypocrisy can be detected, and why those who suspect it often try to engineer just such "tests."



Finally, none of this denies that one's expressions and actions can come apart from what one genuinely takes to be one's attitudes, evaluations, and the like. But in such cases, all one needs to say here is that something has gone wrong, does not make sense, requires perhaps the assumption of an "unconscious" for it finally to make sense, and that concession (that something would not make sense in such a case) is all that is needed here.

