

Week 6 Notes

**Recognition, Desire, and Mastery**

**Introduction:**

Today I'm going to talk about the *Self-Consciousness* chapter, Chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology*. I'm not going to talk about the whole thing: just its introductory material and the first half, Part (A), titled "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage."

I won't talk about Part (B) on "The Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness."

I do in the book, in the last part of Chapter 10—because it is important to see that the problem he finds in them is they can't normatively support determinate conceptual contents (on their theories). I view this as an important confirmation of my *semantic* reading of Hegel's book.

Note that it has always been an architectonic embarrassment that while the *Consciousness*, *Reason*, and *Spirit* chapters all have 3 parts (even if *Consciousness* divides these up into 3 separate chapters, and *Reason* and *Spirit* do not), *Self-Consciousness* only has 2.

Both of the two sub-parts do have 3 parts.

I think, roughly, that Part (B) is a follow-up to what happens in the meat of the chapter.

In *A Spirit of Trust* I discuss Hegel's *Self-Consciousness* chapter in 3 chapters:

- Chapter 8 on the transition from *organic desire to social normativity*,
- Chapter 9 on the **simultaneous institution of self-conscious individual normative selves or subjects and their communities by reciprocal recognition**, and
- Chapter 10 on the **deformed selves and communities instituted by asymmetric recognitive attitudes** Hegel explores under the heading of "Mastery" (or "Lordship and Bondage").

Though there is a logic to this progression, today I'm going to pursue a different order.

**The heart of Hegel's philosophical contribution here is his account of normative *statuses* as instituted by social normative *attitudes* of what he calls "recognition."**

So that is where I'm going to start.

Then I'll look back to how **individual normative self-consciousnesses and their communities** might have **emerged** from the merely **organic soup of desiring organisms**.

And then I'll look to how the original form in which cognitive practices first emerge is inevitably a defective, asymmetric one, instituting the normative structure of *subordination and obedience*, in which non-normative *power* relations are given a normative shape, from which undistorted normativity has yet to disentangle itself.

This the deformed conception of normativity that understands it in terms of categories (metaconcept) of "pure independence" = Mastery.

I'll understand this as **authority without correlative responsibility**.

But first, let me mention briefly how I am reading this text, in the sense of the method(s) I am using.

Here focus on **three reading strategies**—two models and reading of Hegel's metaconcept of "pure understanding." Their status and function is quite different. Together they begin to show the range of hermeneutic approaches I pursue at various points.

- i) One is a mapping of Hegel's vocabulary onto my own. It both follows his terminology in detail, and in doing so points to features of the text that others have not noticed—specifically, the way "in-itself"/"for consciousness" gets used specifically differently, but with an intelligible common generic structure,
  - first on the side of **consciousness (empirical cognition of objective reality)** and then
  - on the side of **self-consciousness** (the normative side of the **subject**).
- ii) The second is the triadic dialectic model of proto-consciousness. This operates at a *considerable* distance from the text, but I think nonetheless illuminate what does go on there.
- iii) The third is a specific way of understanding the discussion of Mastery, in stages:
  - a) What Hegel calls the "struggle unto death," between individuals whose practical self-conception is of themselves as sovereign desirers, such that what things are *in themselves* is just whatever they are *for* that consciousness.
  - b) The genuine self-constitutive achievement of the victor of that struggle, and why he is incipiently the Master.
  - c) The overgeneralization and misunderstanding of that achievement that leads to the self-conception of pure independence.
  - d) The asymmetric Master/Slave normative structure of subordination and obedience that is instituted by those asymmetric cognitive relations.
  - e) The irony of Mastery.
  - f) The implicit triumph of the Slave, through concrete labor.

## **Part I. Normative statuses and attitudes. From Autonomy to Reciprocal Recognition.**

### A. First Model: Statuses and Attitudes

Begin with the large-scale model that structures my whole discussion, first of normativity, then of intentional agency, and then of the ages-stages of *Geist*.

This is **the distinction between normative attitudes and normative statuses (=norms)**.

It articulates and develops my *normative* reading of Hegel—following my normative reading of Kant’s biggest discovery.

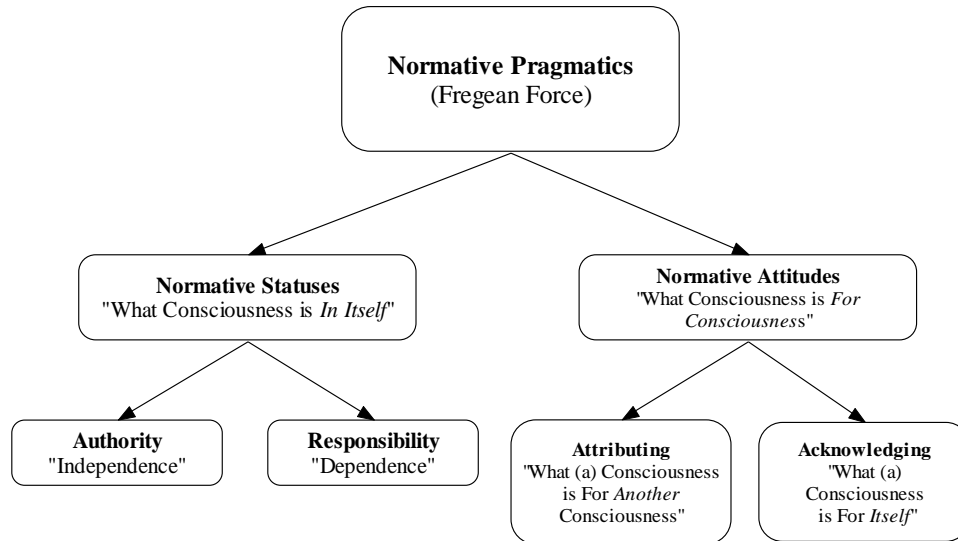
This is one big, deservedly controversial idea, that underlies also the connections I see with American pragmatism and with pragmatism in the wider (Rortian) sense that sees pragmatism as central to both the later Wittgenstein and the early Heidegger.

I read Hegel’s talk of **what things are *in themselves* and what they are *for consciousness***, when those logical-philosophical-speculative metaconceptual terms are applied on the side of **subjects** (and relations among subjects) rather than on the side of objects (our relations to objects in empirical cognition) in terms of **normative statuses and normative attitudes**.

It is already an innovation to point out and emphasize hermeneutically that the same terminology has these **two uses (on the side of consciousness and the side of self-consciousness)**, and to worry explicitly about their relations.

And it is a second innovation to understand the latter in terms of normative statuses/attitudes.

The hermeneutic strategy that takes the form of this model, of this translation, is at the core of my reading of the *PG* in *ST*.



Elements of the model are in bold.

Modeled Hegelian phrases are in quotes.

The point of the “**missing chapter**” of ST, on Early Modern accounts of normativity insofar as they lead up to my Hegel’s, expressed in terms of attitudes and statures, is precisely to show that this normative pragmatic metavocabulary can be of use in understanding what is going on even before Kant and Hegel.

This model tracks Hegel’s vocabulary very closely, in the following way (epitomized in the diagram).

Specifically, on the side of statures, H’s “independence/dependence” (the official topic of the first substantive part, ‘A’, of the Self-Consciousness chapter) I understand in terms of **authority and responsibility**.

This is another crucial interpretive innovation. Even Kojève, who initiated the modern, Marxian/post-Marxian focus on the Lordship and Bondage (Herrschaft und Knechtschaft) section of the PG, did not read things this way, or at this level of detail. In my hands, it becomes the key to understanding lots of the rest of the book: agency and the ages-stages of Geist, including the projected post-modern one.

This leads to a productive and I hope persuasive reading of Mastery (as we shall see) and the traditional normative structure of subordination and obedience (as well as Kantian autonomy, otherwise progressive, but still mired in the practical metaconceptual framework of pure independence).

Note that there is a use “**independent/dependent**” on the side of objects, too. It is of course, different, though related. It is related

**through the two species of rules/necessity/law in Kant**, theoretical and practical. He saw this as the key to **Hume**’s skepticism about two senses of “must”: the way the necessity of laws of nature goes beyond mere statements of fact and the way normative “ought”’s transcend what merely *is*.

which flower as the **alethic/deontic** distinction in Hegel, articulated by what I call “**bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism.**”

And **on the side of attitudes**, we see the distinction within what things are for consciousness, between what *a* consciousness is *for itself* and what *a* consciousness is *for another* consciousness. This gives us a natural connection to specifically *recognitive* relations because to recognize another is for the other to be a consciousness *for* one.

Note that the discussion of what things are in themselves and what they are for consciousness in the *Introduction*—which most readers do not connect with what is going on in this chapter—does not talk about what things are **for a consciousness, but only for consciousness**, generally. This is one of the differences between in-itself/for-consciousness talk on the side of empirical cognition of objects and such talk on the side of the normative constitution of subjects. All this has been invisible to the tradition.

I am concerned through *ST* (including in the “missing chapter” on the history of normative metaconceptions) to show how flexible and expressively powerful this normative pragmatic metavocabulary of status/attitude, authority/responsibility, and for-onself/for-others is.

The two principal pillars of my reading of Hegel’s book are:

**The semantic focus** on conditions of determinateness of conceptual content, which includes:

- i). The metalinguistic reading of categorial concepts
- ii) The method of “semantic descent” for understanding what is said about those metaconcepts, and

**The normative pragmatic metavocabulary of status and attitude**, with its attendant subdivisions:

- i) of statuses into independent/dependent = authority/responsibility and
- ii) of (recognitive) attitudes into what *a* consciousness is *for itself* and what it is *for others*.

**The recognitive theory of self-consciousness as a social product** (a social status), of normative selves and their communities (individuals and universals) as **synthesized** by practical attitudes of reciprocal recognition, shows how to **understand statuses in terms of attitudes** (the modern insight), while leaving room for statuses to transcend the attitudes that institute them.

So far, in discussion the *Consciousness* chapter, we have worked within the first. Henceforth, the second will be doing the main interpretive work.

#### B. From Autonomy to Recognition:

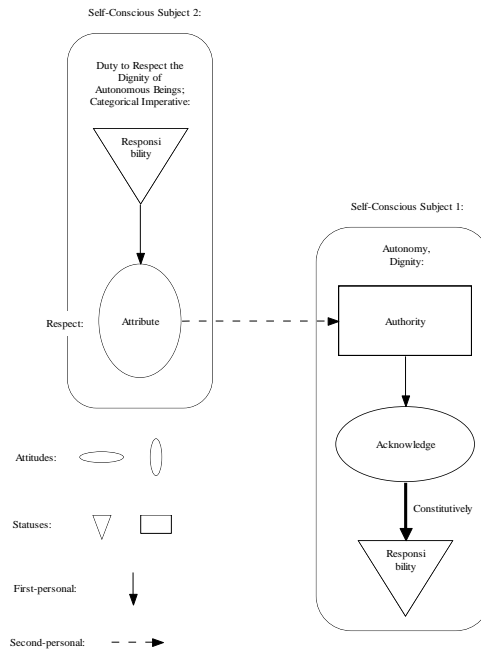
Kant’s conception of normative subjects as autonomous is a conception of them as able to *bind* themselves normatively by their attitudes, to *make* themselves responsible (acquire an actual normative **status**) by *taking* themselves to be responsible (adopting a normative **attitude**). The basic Kantian normative status [BKNS] is a complex, attitude-involving status. For it is the

authority (the complex status) to adopt a certain kind of attitude: an immediately status-instituting attitude, what I am calling an “immediately constitutive” attitude.

**Autonomy:  
The Basic Kantian Normative Status**



**The Social Dimension  
of the Kantian Autonomy Model**

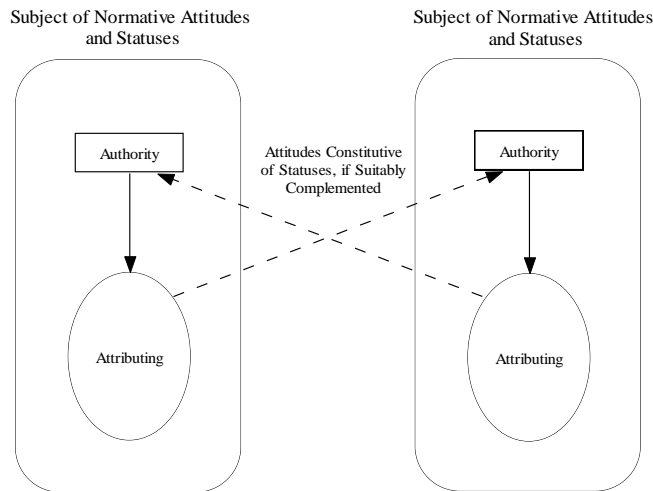


Suppose one accepted the motivations that lead Kant to the conception of the complex of basic attitudes and statuses that is the socially extended BKNS, but thought both that *all* normative statuses are instituted by normative attitudes, and that such institution requires not only the attitude of the subject of the status but also the attitude of some other who attributes it. This latter is the idea that the attitudes of any one individual normative subject can institute normative statuses only when they are *suitably complemented* by the attitudes of others.

Recognition, the recognitive attitude of attributing the authority distinctive of autonomy, is an essential component required to institute that very authority.

These are the thoughts that lead from the Kantian model of *individual* autonomous normative subjects as *immediately* instituting their determinate responsibilities by their attitudes of acknowledging them to the Hegelian model of the *social* institution of normative statuses by attitudes of normative subjects that must be *mediated* by each other's suitably complementary attitudes.

Robust General Recognition  
is Attributing the Authority  
to Attribute Authority  
(and Responsibility)



C. Authority and Responsibility in Reciprocal Recognition:

i) Hegel's bold idea is that when recognitive attitudes take the specific *social* form of *mutual* or *reciprocal recognition*, they institute genuine normative *statuses* of authority and responsibility.

Here are some crucial passages:

Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. [175]

“Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged....The detailed exposition of the Notion of this spiritual unity in its duplication will present us with the process of Recognition.” [PG §178].

“A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it. The 'I' which is the object of its Notion is in fact not 'object'; the object of Desire, however, is only independent, for

it is the universal indestructible substance, the fluid self-identical essence. A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much 'I' as 'object'. With this, we already have before us the Notion of Spirit. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I.'" [PG §177].

[Note that this is the last 'graph of the Introduction, before "A. Independence and dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage".]

"But according to the Notion of recognition this [that a self-consciousness' certainty of itself have truth] is possible only when each is for the other what the other is for it, only when each in its own self through its own action, and again through the action of the other, achieves this pure abstraction of being-for-self." [PG §186].

"Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other, an immediate being on its own account, which at the same time is such only through this mediation. **They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.**" [PhG 184].

"Thus the movement is simply the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses. Each sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both." [PhG 182].

Hegel refers to the recognitive community of recognizing-and-recognized individual normative subjects as "Spirit" [Geist]:

"...this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'. [PhG 177].

ii) Part of this idea is that one becomes a *self* in the specific sense of a *normative subject*, the subject of normative statuses, one who is *bound by norms* (in the sense of being properly subject to normative assessment as to the correctness of one's exercises of authority and acknowledgments of responsibility) by being ***recognized as such by those one recognizes as such.***

This crucial normative status (being a normative self or subject) is accordingly fundamentally a kind of *social* status.



It is already a kind, indeed, the basic kind, of self-*consciousness*.  
There are not *selves* in this sense that are not self-*conscious* selves.  
The consciousness of oneself *as* a self consists in one's practical attitudes of recognizing and being recognized *as* a self.

As such, it is an essentially *social* achievement, a *social* status.

For it is not a matter of one's own attitudes alone. Being recognized is equally essential as recognizing.

*Self*-recognition, recognizing oneself (*as* a self) is the product of being recognized by those one recognizes.

Recognition is *reflexive* ( $xRx$ ) only as a consequence of being *symmetric* ( $xRy$  and  $yRx$ ), because it is essentially *transitive* (if  $xRy$  and  $yRz$ , then  $xRz$ ).

Recognition is *de jure* transitive because of the kind of *authority* it is: the authority to *make* someone a self (confer a *status*) by *taking* them to be a self (adopting an *attitude*, recognizing them), *when that attitude is suitably complemented by their* **recognitive attitudes**.

One's recognitive attitude is "suitably complemented" when they *acknowledge* your recognitive authority, by recognizing you in turn.

Recognizing someone in *that* sense is *de jure* transitive.

This is a ***radically non-Cartesian sense of "self-consciousness."***

It does not happen **between your ears**.

It happens between you and your fellows—those you recognize as "mon semblable, mon frèere."

iii) **Communities** (in this ideal case where recognition is reciprocal) **are synthesized out of recognitive dyads.**

Because recognition is *de jure* transitive, when it is *de facto* symmetric, it is not only *de facto* reflexive—instituting individual self-consciousnesses in the sense of self-recognizers, ones who take themselves to be normative subjects with recognitive authority—it is therefore in fact an *equivalence relation*: **transitive, symmetric, and reflexive.**

That means that **the modal logic of recognition is S5**: the recognitive accessibility relation is an equivalence relation.

So individual self-conscious normative selves and their communities are simultaneously **synthesized by reciprocal recognition.**

This is the "I that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" from the quote earlier.

It is accordingly by adopting recognitive attitudes towards one another that **particular** desiring organisms come to fall under **universals**, in the sense of belonging to recognitive *communities*, and thereby become more than *mere particular* organisms. They become self-conscious **individual selves**.

I take this idea to be at the absolute heart of Hegel's logic and metaphysics.

For it is the model and paradigm of his understanding of the *logical* relations between Particularity, universality, and individuality.

For that what most distinguishes his logical metaconcepts from the traditional syllogistic ones that just look to the classification of *particulars* under *universals*, is the additional notion of *individuality* or *singularity*.

And Hegel's slogan is that individuality is a matter of particulars *as* falling under universals. (*Besonderheit, Allgemeinheit, Einzelheit.*)

One of my complaints about the conception of the *Science of Logic* is that it essential to the way he proceeds there that he abstracts away from this *social* paradigm of *discursive* articulation.

And I think *a lot* is lost by proceeding that way.

#### iv) Authority and Responsibility in Reciprocal Recognition:

It is entirely up to me, a matter of my sole authority, whom I recognize.

But then it is *not* up to me whether I am recognized in turn by those I recognize.

(I can try to do something to earn or deserve it, but is all.)

That is the authority of the other, the recognized candidate recognizer.

I am responsible (for my status) *to* that other.

I have, by my recognitive attitude, granted *their* recognitive attitudes that authority over me.

They only get the authority if I grant it.

So it takes both of us to institute the status.

This is the structure Hegel calls "freedom."

It is not *pure* independence, but a reciprocal equilibrium of independence (authority) and dependence (responsibility).

Compare the saying of Rousseau that inspired Kant:

"Obedience to a law one has set down for oneself is freedom."

For Kant, it is obedience to a law whose legitimate authority one acknowledges.

For Hegel *we* set down the laws (the authorities we are responsible to) for *ourselves*.

But each of us cannot do it for ourselves individually.

Only communal attitudes—in this I-thou, rather than I-we sense—can institute genuine normative statuses.

## **Part II. Desire as Proto-Consciousness**

So what about those merely organic particulars who will raise themselves to the status of norm-governed self-conscious individual *selves* by adopting a suitable constellation of social recognitive attitudes to one another?

What is special about their capacity for *desire* in making possible this momentous qualitative transformation?

Hegel tells us that it *is* desire that matters here, in one of the darker and more gnomic passages, early on in his *Self-Consciousness* chapter.

“**Self-consciousness is desire**” he says [174] about the organic basis on which normativity will be built by recognition.

What we want to understand is the transition from living, and moving, and having our being in the organic realm of *desire* to living, and moving, and having our being in a normative realm of *commitment*.

### **A. Status of the Second Model:**

The status of the second model, the triadic orectic model of (proto-)consciousness, is quite different from that of status and attitude.

It does *not*, and does not pretend to, track Hegel’s terminology and discussion at a granular level.

It is an elaborate model, conjectured or postulated to make sense essentially of *one* passage in Hegel, albeit one he seems to give great weight to himself. (There are in fact a *few* more.)

This is the claim that self-consciousness *is* or at least is rooted in an ultimately to be understood in terms of, *desire*.

I pretty much ignore what Hegel says beforehand about organic creatures. (As I do the *Observing Reason* section that begins the Reason chapter.) I see this as foreshadowing of recognitive communities, in the relations between species and individuals of those species. There is a useful point here, for when we think about the multifarious relations between the organic and the conceptual later on. But this discussion does *not*, I think, set us up to understand the rootedness of self-consciousness in desire.

At most, it would set us up to understand it in *erotic* terms, and there is charm as well as truth in rooting self-consciousness in *love*. But I think it is more illuminating to think of it in *orectic* rather than *erotic* terms. (I am grateful to Robert Pippin for pointing me to this latter Greek-derived term.)

I think something else is needed to interpret this important and underlined claim about self-consciousness and desire.

In keeping with semantic descent, and guided by the parallels between consciousness and self-consciousness articulated by the previous status-attitude model, I look to the discussion of the experience of error in the *Introduction*, and a remark about animals in the *Preface*.

This is basically pure conjecture: the postulation of a model to see what work it can do, what illumination it can bring. The model is not really elaborated from inside the text.

(John McDowell has referred to it as a “paradigm of text-free interpretation.”)

It is brought in from the outside, with a few excuses in the text, to offer a suggestion not so much as to what Hegel might in some sense have had in mind, as to what might be behind this gnomic, enigmatic formula—or, putting Hegel aside, how we might understand an insight as being expressed by it.

I’m asking “What would make this claim—the claim that self-consciousness is desire—true?”

Note that in formal contexts, the traditional way to prove the consistency of a theory is to provide a model for it. Here the issue is not exactly *consistency*. It is to come up with *something* of philosophical interest that could make sense of this claim.

So the status of this conceptual apparatus is quite different from the other, translational mapping, even though both bring in vocabulary that is not in Hegel.

### **B. The Triadic Structure of Orectic Awareness:**

1. Orectic awareness has a tripartite structure, epitomized by the relations between *hunger*, *eating*, and *food*.

2. The three elements are:

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

The three principal relations are:

- d) The attitude must *motivate* the activity, in the sense of *activating* a (more or less reliable, in a sense determined by the assessments in (f) below) disposition to respond differentially to objects.
- e) Responding to an object by engaging in the activity is taking or treating it in practice *as* having a significance defined by the attitude that motivates the activity. This is the *subjective* significance of the object.
- f) The desiring attitude *assesses* the object, implicitly attributing to it an *objective* significance, accordingly as responding to it by engaging in the activity the attitude motivates does or does not satisfy the desire. If it does not, if what the object was subjectively or *for* the animal does not coincide with what it was objectively, or *in* itself, that is, if the activity was not *successful* in satisfying the motivating desire, then an *error* has been committed. In that case the desire motivates *changing* the reliable differential responsive disposition to engage in the associated activity when activated by the desire and stimulated by a range of objects.

### C. Relation to Subsequent Pragmatism:

The story I tell has the advantage of fitting in well with a tradition that will lead on to the **American pragmatists**.

And the story also develops beyond the RDRDs, reliable differential responsive dispositions invoked in explaining one dimension of immediacy—immediacy of origin—of noninferential reports in empirical cognition. That story was at the two-factor, stimulus/response (SR) level. We move up to a triadic conception, taking advantage of the difference between sentient (here, desiring) parrots and inanimate photocells.

The model builds on the *experience of error* (read via semantic descent) in the *Introduction*.

And I think I demonstrate that there is considerable expressive power in the model.

Indeed, we can imagine that psychology might have been better off if this model had been around as a rival to behavioristic S-R models, during the first half of the 20th century. Of course, recollective-reconstructive retrospective hindsight has resources that are not available to the owl before dusk.

For the “triadic orectic model of proto-consciousness”:

**Davidson**, realizing first (already in the ‘50s) that the American pragmatists had suppressed the function of desires in favor of beliefs in understanding their function in producing and rationalizing actions, so that a two-factor belief + desire → intention-action model was needed, **not just a one-factor account in terms of belief**, and then (in the late ‘60s) seeing that what was needed for discursive practice is a **three-factor model, in which belief, desire, and the meaning** of utterances each make necessary functional contributions to understanding behavior, and that those functions are not reducible to one another.

Could usefully count “factors” differently:

Peirce and James looked at relations between action and belief.

They believed, as DD took it, that one could infer the contents of beliefs from what one *did*.

If one put on one’s hat, opened one’s umbrella, stood under an awning, then one believed that it was raining.

Davidson looked first (during his “psychological” stage, away from philosophy, in the ‘50s, before leaving Harvard) at the relations between belief and desire, on the one hand, and action, on the other.

After all, what if one had the Gene Kelly desire, to sing and dance in the rain?

One might still believe it was raining, but act quite differently.

He then looked at the relations between belief, desire, and *meaning*, and the relations of these three to action.

Some of the behavior is uttering sentences, and what beliefs *and* desires one attributes depends on what those sentences mean (or what the utterer *thinks* they mean).

So there are really *three* factors that one needs to infer from actions, not just one or two.

(Davidson somewhere describes his own development this way, but I think it is not sufficiently appreciated that he fits into the history of pragmatism in just this way. This should be mentioned

in my account of “pragmatism after the linguistic turn”, as one reason Rorty found Davidson so compelling. )

In something like that way, I am suggesting how one could **move beyond the Skinnerian, operant-conditioning, two-factor stimulus-response (SR) behaviorist model**, whose home language-game is learning theory, **to a three-factor model of desire, activity, and significance.**

#### **D. On to Recognition**

To understand *recognition*, the tripartite structure of orectic awareness must be applied *twice*:

- It is the structure of the whole thing: “Self-consciousness is desire.” [§174]; recognition is a form of orectic awareness.
- The *significance* attributed to an object, what it is *for* the organism exhibiting the orectic awareness in question, is to be orectically aware: **to be something things can be something for**. That is, the *significance* attributed by engaging in a responsive *activity* and assessed by the motivating *attitude* must itself exhibit the tripartite structure of orectic awareness.

The tripartite structure of orectic awareness (TSOA) tells us that the two big questions that must be answered are these:

- What *activity* is it that institutes this significance (namely, having the TSOA)? That is, what is it that one must *do*, how must one *respond* to something, to count thereby as *taking* or *treating* it as exhibiting the TSOA? What is to the TSOA as *eating* is to *food*?
- What *desire* or other *attitude* is it that motivates that *activity* and *assesses* the *success* of taking something *as* having the orectic significance of being a TSOA, i.e. being something things can be something *for*? What is to the TSOA as *hunger* is to *food*?

Two suggestions:

- We may call what I must *do*, **the activity** that I must engage in, in order thereby to be ***taking or treating something in practice as something things can be something for***, “**recognizing**” that other creature. Recognizing others is attributing to them the practical significance of exhibiting the tripartite structure of orectic awareness: taking them to be takers, subjects for whom things can have a practical significance relative to a desire and mediated by an activity.
- The desire or *attitude* that is the third element completing the TSOA whose attitude is recognizing and whose *significance* is exhibiting the TSOA is a ***desire for recognition***: the desire that others take or treat one in practice as a taker, as something things can be something *for*, as one whose *attitudes* (orectic or normative) institute of *significances*.

### **Part III: Mastery**

This section of the book was really important to Marx, but without the 1844 Manuscripts being available, this was perhaps harder to see.

It was revived for us in the remarkable seminars he gave in Paris in the '30s.

[Kojève here.]

Perhaps tell story and show pics of Alexandre **Kojève**.

Seminar in the mid-'30s (published as his book on the *Phenomenology* in late '40s) attended by:

Maurice **Merleau-Ponty**,

Jacques **Lacan**,

Georges **Bataille**,

Not Sartre, but Simone **de Beauvoir**,

Raymond **Queneau**,

André **Breton**,

Raymond **Aron**, and

Éric **Weil**.

#### Introduction:

Remarks on the concept of pure independence and what is wrong when authority and responsibility are not suitably balanced.

The case of institutional engineering and middle management.

#### A) The Struggle Unto Death

1. First move is the “struggle unto death” between two desiring beings, each conceiving of himself implicitly, according to categories of pure independence. Each is committed to the ideal that things are *in themselves*, whatever they are *for it*.

This is a matter of normative *attitude*, of what things are *for* each of the consciousnesses involved.

Each is committed to the attitudes of the other (if any) being irrelevant to determining what things, including the index consciousness, are in themselves.

They take their own attitudes to be *immediately constitutive* of what things really are.

This is a conception that does not admit that there can be any other such consciousness:

“There can be only one.”

That is why there must be a *struggle*.

2. Q: Why a struggle “unto death”? What does *death* have to do with it?

A: Because each one not only *has* the self-regarding attitude of pure independence, but *identifies with it*.

Here is my account of Hegel's notion of identifying with an attitude (with something things are for one):

**One identifies with an attitude insofar as one is willing to sacrifice for it.**

*What* one sacrifices is something one already is *in* oneself, a *status*.

What one sacrifices *for* is an *attitude* paradigmatically a claim of authority, or the acknowledgment of a responsibility.

3. To begin with, what one actually *is* is a desiring organism (something things can be something *for*).

“It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as vanishing moments, that it is only pure being-for-self.” [PG §187]

By risking one's life, one shows that one identifies (“unto death”) with what one is *for* oneself—that what one is *for* oneself is an *essential* element of what one is *in* oneself.

4. Being willing to risk one's life for something is adopting a distinctive kind of practical attitude toward it. I have suggested thinking of that attitude as *identifying with* what one is willing to risk and if need be sacrifice one's life for. The claim is that adopting that attitude has a particular effect. It changes one's status, making what one risks or sacrifices *for* an *essential* element of what one really is.

That is to say that **identification is a kind of taking oneself to be something that is also a making of oneself to be something**. In the case of identification, what one is *for* oneself immediately affects what one is *in* oneself. It is an attitude that is *self-constitutive*. The self that is constituted by what I will call “existential identification” (we will see that there are other varieties) is an *essentially self-conscious* self, in the sense that its attitudes—at least its existentially identificatory attitudes—are an essential component of what it is in itself. Those attitudes institute a special kind of normative status.

What is it that one must *do* in order properly to be understood as thereby *identifying oneself* with some but perhaps not all elements of one's self-conception? The answer we are given in *Self-Consciousness* is that one identifies with what one is willing to *risk* and *sacrifice* for. Hegel's metonymic image for this point concerns the important case of making the initial transition from being merely a living organism, belonging to the realm of Nature, to being a denizen of the normative realm of Spirit. The key element in this index case is willingness to risk one's biological life in the service of a commitment—something that goes beyond a mere desire.



By being willing to risk one's life for something, one *makes* it the case that the life one risks is *not* an essential element of the self one is thereby constituting, while that for which one risks it is. An extreme example is **the classical Japanese samurai code of Bushido**. It required ritual suicide under a daunting variety of circumstances. To be samurai was to identify oneself with that ideal code of conduct. In a situation requiring seppuku, either the biological organism or the samurai must be destroyed, for the existence of the one has become incompatible with the existence of the other. **Failure to commit biological suicide in such a case would be the suicide of the samurai, who would be survived only by an animal.** The animal had been a merely necessary condition of the existence of the samurai (like the presence of oxygen in the atmosphere, which is important to us, but with which we do not just for that reason count as identifying ourselves). No doubt even sincere and committed samurai must often have hoped that such situations would not arise. But when and if they did, failure to act appropriately according to samurai practices would make it the case that one never had been a samurai, but only an animal who sometimes aspired to be one. One would thereby demonstrate that one was not, in oneself, what one had taken oneself to be, what one was for oneself. The decision as to whether to risk one's actual life or to surrender the ideal self-conception is a decision about who one is.

Self-consciousness can be thought of to begin with as consciousness of one's self—a matter of being *for* oneself what one is *in* oneself.

In the idiom I have been employing, this is to have one's normative *statuses* appropriately reflected in one's normative *attitudes*. It is to acknowledge the responsibility and authority one actually has.

We might think of this as ***theoretical self-consciousness***.

The self-constitutive achievement of existential identification makes visible a complementary dimension of ***practical self-consciousness***. For in this case, statuses reflect attitudes, rather than the other way around. It is by practically *taking* oneself to be a certain kind of self, identifying with one rather than another element of one's statuses and attitudes, that one *makes* oneself into a different kind of self, alters one's status. What one is *in* oneself (a status) is *responsible to* (in Hegel's terms, dependent on) what one is *for* oneself, one's practical attitude of identification.

5. Hegel says the result of the struggle is  
...[T]wo opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is master, the other is servant. [PG 189]

B) The Metaphysical Irony of Mastery, the Paradox of Fate

6. This practical recognitive conception is radically defective—and so, accordingly, are the self-conscious normative selves or subjects it shapes. At base, what is wrong with the subordination-obedience model is that it systematically **mistakes power for authority**.

This is, to be sure, a fundamental mistake about the metaphysics of normativity. But the mistake is not merely theoretical. It is practical, as well.

It leads to deformed social institutions and deformed self-conscious individual selves. Those institutions are deformed in fact, not just in their self-understandings.

This mistaking of power for authority has a relatively intricate fine-structure, according to Hegel.

a) Defining Error of Mastery:

First, it is characteristic of self-consciousness with the structure of Mastery to understand itself as being, in itself, “pure independence.” That is, it conceives itself as exercising **authority unmixed and unmediated by any correlative responsibility**, which is normative “dependence.”

b) The Master’s Overgeneralization:

- i. The victor takes it that by *taking* himself to be an immediately and transparently constitutive taker in the way he has—that is by existentially identifying with his claiming that status by risking his life, and by having come through the life-and-death struggle victorious—he has immediately and transparently *made* himself be such a constitutive taker, and so has successfully instituted that status. That is what the master is *for* himself, and he takes his victory to have successfully transformed that status from being the merely *virtual* object of his attitude (the original second-order desire) to being *actualized* as the status that is what he is *in* himself.
- ii. Though he is wrong about what he has achieved, the victor in the life-and-death struggle is not *simply* deluded. He *has* substantially transformed himself by staking his life, by existentially identifying with his practical self-conception. In so doing he raised himself above being in himself simply a desiring living being. For he succeeded in making himself *essentially* self-conscious, someone such that what he is *for* himself is an essential component of what he is *in* himself. As such, he is subject to a distinctive new kind of self-development. For changing what he is *for* himself changes what he is *in* himself. As an essentially self-conscious being, he is now an essentially *historical* being. The act of practical self-identification, he performed was *constitutive*. It was a self-taking that was a self-making. In this special case and in this sense, the master is right to think of himself as a constitutive taker.
- iii. His existential identification with his practical self-conception as an immediately, transparently constitutive taker was not only constitutive, it was in a sense *immediately* constitutive. For its effect of making him into an essentially self-conscious creature—a

distinctive kind of self-creation as a self-creator—did not depend on his self-recognitive attitude being suitably complemented (hence mediated) by the attitudes of others. It is something he did, a status he achieved, all on his own, independently, as an exercise of his power (on its way to being his authority). By his practical identificatory attitude alone, by his being willing to risk and if need be sacrifice his life rather than relinquish his desire that his desires be constitutively sovereign, he pulled himself up by his own bootstraps from the swamp of merely biological being into a nobler status.

iv. But his self-constitutive attitude was not *transparently* constitutive. For the status he actually achieved, being essentially self-conscious, is *not* the virtual status that was the object of his desire. What he desired to be was not essentially self-conscious, but immediately, transparently constitutive: for what things actually are, in themselves, to be just whatever they are for him, what he desires them to be. Things are to have the status he desires them to have, simply *because* he so desires, simply *because* of his attitudes. In making himself essentially conscious he has *not* made himself into such a transparently constitutive taker—one who can *make* things so simply by *taking* them to be so. Though he succeeded in doing *something*, immediately and constitutively making himself essentially self-conscious by adopting the attitudes he does, the master is wrong to think that his victory succeeded in satisfying the desire with which he identified, the desire that motivated the struggle in which he risked his life.

Result:

In effect, in understanding the significance of his victory in terms of Mastery, the victor in the life-and-death struggle has misunderstood what he has actually succeeded in doing. He has overgeneralized his genuine achievement, which was making himself essentially self-conscious in himself by his practical attitude of existentially identifying with what he is for himself. What he successfully made himself be in himself—the status his attitudes instituted—is not all of, but only a part of, what he was for himself. **He has immediately instituted a status by adopting an attitude. But that status falls far short of the sort of sovereignty he desired his attitudes to have.** In misunderstanding his achievement, the master misunderstands himself.

c) Recognitive Categorial Mistake:

The *metaphysical irony* of the sort of self-hood the Master institutes.

This is what in earlier works Hegel calls “the causality of fate.”

Here is the irony of Mastery: the master has not only made himself essentially self-conscious, he has achieved a genuinely *normative* status—crossing the boundary between the merely living and the genuinely normative. The master-servant relation is a genuinely normative structure of subordination and obedience. And it is so *because* it is what the master denies it is: a *recognitive* relation, in which recognitive attitudes are suitably complemented (albeit asymmetrically), so as

to institute normative statuses (albeit defective ones). The master and the servant agree on what each one is. That is the suitable complementation. They are both wrong, about each other and about themselves. That is the defect.

**The master is the master only insofar as he is recognized as the master by the servant.**

The servant exercises recognitive authority over the master, who is normatively dependent upon, responsible to, the servant for his status—which is a *normative* status just because and insofar as it is instituted by recognition.

But the master does not recognize the recognitive authority of the servant. His self-conception is one of pure independence, in which all authority is vested in him. The servant is practically conceived as purely dependent, merely responsible.

A vivid example of the pathology at work in the form of self-consciousness that consists in practically conceiving of oneself according to the categories of Mastery is a kind of psychological distress that is a common affliction of **celebrities**, for instance in entertainment or politics. It is compounded of these elements.

- First, such subjects revel in the feeling of superiority over ordinary, non-celebrated people that they take their status to establish and consist in. Their celebrity status is understood both as epistemically witnessing or testifying to that superiority and as ontologically constituting or instituting it.
- Second, they identify with that status. They take that superior, distinguished status to be essential to what and who they really are, in themselves. It is the basis of their self-esteem, articulating what they are for themselves.
- Third, they despise the mass of inferior, undistinguished, talentless ordinary people, by contrast to whose lesser status their own is defined. An integral part of the status the celebrity identifies with is the right to look down on those of lesser status.

Even slightly self-reflective celebrities adopting these attitudes towards the status they identify with are liable to detect the tension those attitudes stand in with the fact that **it is precisely the attitudes of those despised, inferior masses that make them celebrities in the first place.** That status is conferred precisely by the masses' admiration, their *recognition*, their *celebration* of the celebrated ones. It is instituted by their practical attitudes of buying tickets, devoting leisure hours to reading about and appreciating, voting for, admiring the celebrities in question.

So one is made what one is by being so-taken by people one has no respect for, whose judgment one dismisses, whose *authority* one in no sense acknowledges. In short, one is made what one is by being thought wonderful by people one does not believe can tell what is wonderful, people to whose opinions one attributes no weight, people one takes to have no *right* to assess such things. One's status is instituted by attitudes one does not take to have any authority.

d) Pragmatic Categorical Mistake:

As “pure independence,” the Master cannot acknowledge the responsibility of his *attitudes* to normative *statuses*: the status-dependence of normative attitudes that was, Hegel thinks, a genuine insight of traditional forms of normativity (Geist), albeit one that was expressed in deformed, because one-sided, practical conceptions of normativity in terms of the model of subordination and obedience.

e) Semantic Categorical Mistake:

The Master has a conception of normative *force*, in Frege’s sense of the pragmatic significance of statuses and attitudes—what one is *doing* in becoming authoritative or responsible, and in attributing and exercising authority or attributing and acknowledging responsibility—that leaves no room for the contrast and division of labor between such force and the determinate conceptual *content* of either normative states or attitudes. This is the form of complaint that binds together the treatment of all the forms of self-consciousness conceiving itself according to categories of Mastery. There is no intelligible *semantics* (account of content) that is compatible with the *pragmatics* (account of normative force, status, and attitude) to which they are committed.

C) The Structure of Subordination and Obedience: Lordship and Bondage

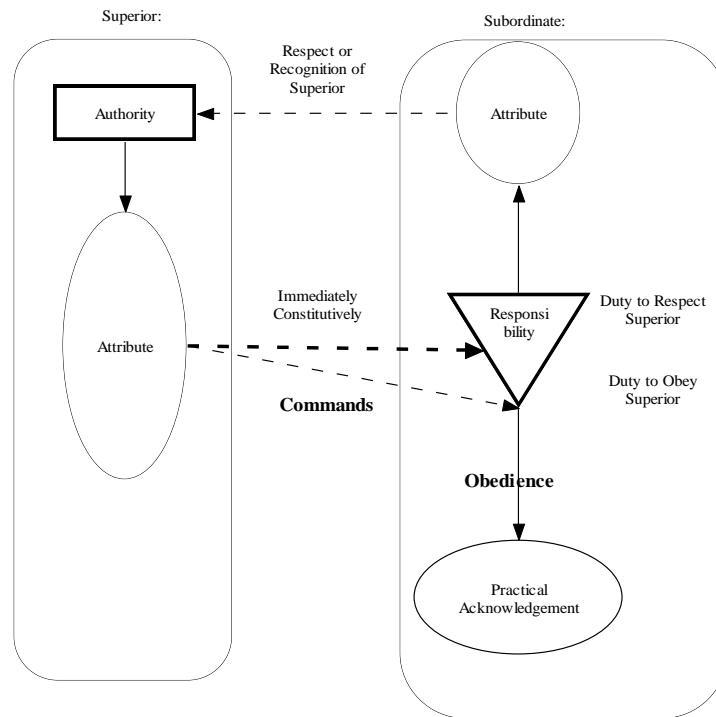
Hegel thinks that although the transition from the traditional normative structure of subordination and obedience to the modern Kantian normative structure of autonomy was an altogether progressive one, he thinks that autonomy is still a version of the ideal of pure independence. It is the latest form of mastery, and has not yet made the transition from pure independence to genuine freedom that he envisages.

One thing it has *lost* is that in spite of its promising social dimension of *respect*, the autonomy picture is still basically individualistic.

The subordination-obedience picture was at least thoroughly *social*, even though in a metaphysically defective form of sociality.

For it divides the *authority to command* characteristic of the Master and the *responsibility to obey* characteristic of the Slave *socially*—between two *different* subjects.

**Subordination-Obedience  
Model of Normative Statuses and  
Attitudes**



The fundamental problem here is that *all* the *authority* is on the side of the Superior, and *all* the *responsibility* is on the side of the Subordinate.

The superior is practically understood as having no responsibility correlative with his authority and the subordinate is practically understood as having no authority correlative with his responsibility.

This is not only practically *unstable*, as we have seen, Hegel argues in his critique of Mastery that it is a fundamentally defective metaphysical structure of normativity.

D) Slave, Through Labor, is the Subject of All Future History

7. Master and Slave are for themselves and for each other what they are for the Master. But both are wrong: the Master to his detriment, and the Slave to his advantage.

8. Advantages of the Slave:

- a) Desire is *abstract* and *ideal* for the Slave. He must act on desires he does not *feel*.
- b) Experience of cognitive error and practical failure mean Slave is the source of determinate contentfulness, and concrete practical capacities.

9. This is what sets up the *narrative, expository* transition to the consideration of intentional agency in the *Reason* chapter.

“Reason is practical agency” [*PG* 24].

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