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Self-comprehension and Personhood: An
Examination of the Normative Basis of Hegel's
Political Philosophy

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PhD Social & Political Thought

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December 2015

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or different form, to this or any other university for a degree.

Signature

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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PhD SOCIAL & POLITICAL THOUGHT

**SELF-COMPREHENSION AND PERSONHOOD: AN EXAMINATION OF
THE NORMATIVE BASIS OF HEGEL'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

SUMMARY

This thesis defends a novel interpretation of the normative foundations of Hegel's mature social and political philosophy. It argues that autonomous agency is grounded in a drive to comprehend ourselves, which gives us an aim to which we are inescapably committed as agents. It argues that this aim ultimately makes it rational to cultivate and act out of a feeling of "ethical love", which is a positive evaluative attitude towards the goods of other individuals that, in turn, implies a commitment to the social and political institutions Hegel outlines in his theory of *Sittlichkeit*, or ethical life. Ethical love is the ultimate way in which individuals make themselves comprehensible to themselves; ethical life is the way in which they express that love. It is for this reason that acting autonomously ultimately requires participating in such institutions. I suggest that this interpretation avoids some of the shortcomings of alternative approaches to this matter.

Chapter 1 introduces the notion of autonomous agency as underpinned by a drive towards self-comprehension. In chapter 2, I argue that this drive operates both with respect to our individual identities (our "characters") and developmentally, over time, in that agents characterised by this drive are led ultimately to conceive of themselves as "persons", in Hegel's technical sense: as agents who are rationally compelled to *recognise* others. In chapters 3 and 4, I show that there is a tension between these two aspects of our identities, and that Hegel's theory of objective mind is effectively the working out of this tension.

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Abbreviations

Works are either cited by paragraph number (§) or by page number, with the German pagination given first, then the English, separated by a “/” (except where noted below). “A” = *Anmerkung*, “Z” = *Zusatz*. I have often modified existing translations, occasionally substantially. Where a text has no existing English translation, translations are my own.

Works by G.W.F. Hegel

Werke	<i>Werke in 20 Bänden</i> , ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969-1971). Cited by volume.
BPhG	<i>The Berlin Phenomenology</i> , ed. and trans. M.J. Petry (London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1981).
EG	<i>Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse 1830, Dritter Teil: Die Philosophie des Geistes, Werke 10.</i> <i>Hegel's Philosophy of Mind</i> , trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, revised by M.J. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
EL	<i>Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse 1830, Erster Teil: Die Wissenschaft der Logik, Werke 8.</i> <i>The Encyclopaedia Logic (with the Zusätze): Part I of the Encyclopaedia of philosophical sciences with the Zusätze</i> , trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991).
EN	<i>Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse 1830, Zweiter Teil: Die Naturphilosophie, Werke 9.</i> <i>Hegel's Philosophy of Nature</i> (3 volumes), ed. and trans. M.J. Petry (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1970).
GW	<i>Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie</i> , in <i>Jenaer Schriften 1801-1807, Werke 2</i> , 287-433. <i>Faith & Knowledge</i> , trans. Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977).
HTJ	<i>Hegels theologische Judendschriften</i> , ed. Herman Nohl (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1907). <i>Early Theological Writings</i> , trans. T.M. Knox and Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948).
NP	<i>Texte zur Philosophischen Propädeutik</i> , in <i>Nürnberger und Heidelberger Schriften 1808-1817, Werke 4</i> , 9-302. <i>The Philosophical Propaedeutic</i> , trans. A.V. Miller, ed. Michael George and Andrew Vincent (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986).

- PG *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Werke 12.*
The Philosophy of History, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956).
- PhG *Phänomenologie des Geistes, Werke 3.*
Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). (Cited by German page and English §).
- PR *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse, Werke 7.*
Outlines of the Philosophy of Right, trans. T.M. Knox, revised and ed. Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- PRV19 *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983).
- PRV21 *Die Philosophie des Rechts: Vorlesung von 1821/22*, ed. Hansgeorg Hoppe (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005).
- VÄI *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I, Werke 13.*
Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art Volume I, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1-426.
- VÄII *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik II, Werke 14.*
Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art Volume I, 427-611, and *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art Volume II*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- VG *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1955).
Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
- VGPI *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I, Werke 18.*
Lectures on the History of Philosophy, vol.1, trans. E.S. Haldane (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).
- VGPII *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie II, Werke 19.*
Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy, vol.2, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983).
- VGPIII *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III, Werke 20.*
Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy, vol.3, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances and Simson (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983).
- VL *Vorlesungen über die Logik: Berlin 1831*, ed. Udo Rameil with the assistance of Hans-Christian Lucas (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001).
Lectures on Logic: Berlin, 1831, trans. Clark Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

- VNS *Vorlesungen über Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft: Heidelberg 1817/18*, ed. C. Becker, W. Bonsiepen, F. Hogemann, W. Jaeschke, Ch. Jamme, H.-Ch. Lucas, K.R. Meist, H. Schneider (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1983). *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right, Heidelberg 1817-1818*, trans. J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson (London: University of California Press, 1995).
- VPG27 *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes: Berlin 1827/1828*, ed. Franz Hespe and Buckhard Tuschling, with the assistance of Markus Eichel, Werner Euler, Dieter Hüning, Torsten Poths and Uli Vogel (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994). *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827-8*, trans. Robert R. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- VPRIII *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion Teil 3: Die vollendete Religion*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1995). *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion Volume 3: The Consummate Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart, with the assistance of H.S. Harris (London: University of California Press, 1985).
- VRIII *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818-1831*, vol. 3, ed. Karl-Heinz Ilting (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974).
- VRIV *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818-1831*, vol. 4, ed. Karl-Heinz Ilting (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974).
- WLI *Wissenschaft der Logik I, Werke 5*. *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1969), 1-385.
- WLII *Wissenschaft der Logik II, Werke 6*. *Hegel's Science of Logic*, 389-844.

Introduction

In this introduction, I situate the interpretation of the normative foundations of Hegel's social and political philosophy advanced in this thesis amongst those given in the existing literature, and say a few words about the interpretive parameters adopted in this study.

1. Autonomy and ethical life: a few approaches

Perhaps the central task for any interpretation of the normative foundations of Hegel's social and political philosophy is to offer a convincing explanation of how Hegel can simultaneously place such a great emphasis on the value of freedom or autonomy—my actions really counting as *mine*, in the fullest possible sense—whilst at the same time holding that agents ultimately express their autonomy through participation in the central institutions of modern social and political life: the bourgeois nuclear family, a competitive market or “civil society”, and the state. With respect to his account of autonomy, Hegel's thought belongs in a tradition that starts with Rousseau and continues with Kant and Fichte. At the same time, Hegel also, famously, argues that the operative idea of autonomy, especially in Kant and Fichte, ends up being fatally empty. How, then, does Hegel's account of autonomy manage to avoid such emptiness? How is it that autonomous agents are committed to willing the fairly rich array of institutions one finds in Hegel's theory of ethical life? Call this the *Sittlichkeit* question.¹

¹ For this way of setting up this central interpretive problem see especially Alan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch.1; see also Dean Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11-12; see also Robert Pippin's discussion of Hegel's “priority of ethical life” thesis, in Robert B. Pippin, “Hegel's Ethical Rationalism”, in his *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 417-450.

Many recent commentators have addressed themselves, implicitly or explicitly, to this question. I have learnt a great deal from these authors, but the view I have come to ultimately dissents from all of them. As I proceed in the chapters that follow I shall have things to say about specific points of disagreement, but here I wish to set out, in broader brushstrokes, the way I see my view as sitting amongst these other interpretations.

One line of interpretation, perhaps the dominant one in recent years, argues that the reason autonomous agents must assent to the institutions of *Sittlichkeit* is that these institutions are the indispensable means to autonomous agents developing into autonomous agents in the first place, and that, because this latter end is something to which agents are necessarily committed, they must will these means.² The central institutions of modern society secure these conditions in various ways, but Hegel's most original contribution here is taken to consist in a variety of keen insights into the various sorts of education or acculturation (*Bildung*) necessary for individuals to achieve the kinds of subjective capacities and dispositions that allow them to be autonomous in the first place.³ The underlying thought here is that autonomous agents do not burst onto the scene fully formed: they need, for instance, to have progressed through a certain regime of discipline (in the context of their upbringing by their parents) to allow them to achieve the kind of reflective relationship towards their desires and inclinations that is necessary if they are to exercise any degree of autonomous agency; they need to develop a sense of their independence, which is fostered through their holding private property;⁴ they need to have been brought up in the context

² The thought, then, is that "[Hegel's] argument rests on an unspoken principle much like Kant's principle of rational willing: Whoever rationally wills an end is rationally committed to willing the requisite means or conditions for achieving that end" (Kenneth Westphal, "The basic context and structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 234-269 (247)). See Robert Pippin's discussion of what he calls the "social conditions view". Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 252ff.

³ See e.g. Frederick Neuhausser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (London: Harvard University Press, 2000), ch.5.

⁴ Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, ch.5. Frederick Neuhausser argues slightly differently that it is the system of

of a loving, trusting family if they are ever to be the sorts of trusting, patriotic citizens that are necessary for a well-functioning society overall; and so on. In various ways, these institutions inculcate us with the capacities, dispositions and self-understandings necessary in order for us to be autonomous agents at all; and because we must will the end of developing our own autonomy, we must will the institutions of *Sittlichkeit*.

This view gets a great deal right. It is true that Hegel views the institutions of *Sittlichkeit* as having these kinds of educative, acculturating functions, and that these functions are part of what makes *Sittlichkeit* rational. However, there are two problems with this general line of interpretation as a response to the *Sittlichkeit* question.

First, it involves a great deal of what are really empirical claims—psychological, social-psychological—about which conditions conduce to the development of various kinds of subjective capacities and dispositions.⁵ This is not necessarily a shortcoming, and, indeed, many of Hegel's claims have a great deal of apparent (at least folk-) psychological plausibility. Still, it does mean that Hegel's justification of the institutions of *Sittlichkeit* would stand or fall on the outcomes of various empirical psychological investigations, and this would clearly be a weakness for what is, after all, intended as a philosophical account of the normative foundations of social and political institutions. Moreover, it would be difficult to show that these, and just these, institutions are really *necessary* in order to develop these subjective capacities and dispositions, rather than being simply *sufficient*. For instance, there are surely various ways in which children could receive the kind of discipline necessary for them to develop the requisite relationship to their inclinations and desires other than in the context of the bourgeois nuclear family.

Second, this interpretation cannot explain why my allegiance to the social order should not cease just as soon as I have developed the kinds of subjective capacities

generalised commodity exchange that fosters a sense of individuals' shared personhood (see his *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 157ff.)

⁵ As Patten concedes at one point (Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 162).

necessary to my being an autonomous agent. If the reason I should commit myself to these institutions is just as means to this end, then once I have developed the necessary dispositions and capacities I presumably no longer have reason to assent to them. A proponent of this view could respond that the development of these capacities and dispositions implies an *ongoing* commitment to these institutions, perhaps because without continuing participation these dispositions are prone to fade. But this is, again, another psychological claim—one that is, at least, not obvious.

For these reasons, I believe this sort of approach cannot provide a fully satisfying answer to the *Sittlichkeit* question. If we are to be philosophically charitable towards Hegel, as I believe we must, then we ought to suppose that his answer to this question is not ultimately based on considerations about which empirical conditions conduce to the development of autonomous agents, even if he does clearly engage in such speculations.

Robert Pippin has developed an alternative view of the relationship between autonomous agency and the institutions of modern *Sittlichkeit*.⁶ According to him, what it is to act autonomously is to act on the basis of reasons that are both good, justifying reasons and that are also reasons with which I identify, reasons I take to be *my* reasons. The possibility of such autonomous agency, he argues, depends on my being part of a particular, historical community with whose institutions I identify, since such reasons will by and large be those attaching to various kinds of institutions, and since, on Pippin's view, there is nothing more to a being a good, justifying reason than being *taken to be one* by the members of a particular society.⁷ Pippin is keenly aware of the fact that this position seems to imply a kind of historicism, or even a cultural relativism.⁸ It would seem as if there is nothing more we

⁶ See e.g. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*; Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism".

⁷ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 198.

⁸ See *ibid.*, 201.

could say in favour of *these* institutions as against any other kinds of institutions, on this view.⁹

What stops the position from sliding into relativism, Pippin thinks, is his appeal to the idea that the institutions we find ourselves with in modern *Sittlichkeit* are the outcome of an historical, developmental process that is in a certain sense *progressive*. History is to be understood as a series of attempts, failures, and gradual improvements in our reason-giving practices: we get “better” at justifying ourselves to one another.¹⁰ Pippin’s picture is further complicated by the fact that this sense of *improvement*, of getting better, cannot involve a reference to some “independent validator”—that is, to some criterion of success independent of the actual, historical process in which different reason-giving practices obtain, fail (in some sense), and are replaced by new ones.¹¹ But he *does* want to claim that this developmental process can be understood as a rational process, and, “because rational, the realization of freedom.”¹²

As with the previous view, I think Pippin’s reconstruction gets some things right about Hegel. I think, for instance, that acting autonomously involves acting on the basis of good, justifying reasons, although I understand what this ultimately consists in quite differently from Pippin. I think, too, that there is something like a developmental argument to be found in Hegel, although, again, my view of this diverges from Pippin’s.¹³ Still, the chief problem with Pippin’s interpretation is that no account of how exactly this gradual, developmental process is supposed to work (or supposed to have worked) is ever really forthcoming. Given how much justificatory work this process is doing on Pippin’s account, this is unsatisfying. We are left having to take the claim that these particular reasons and institutions are better than any possible alternatives somewhat on faith: they simply *must* be

⁹ For a critique of Pippin along these lines, see Wayne Martin, “Hegel and the Philosophy of Food”, *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 7, no.2 (2010): 279-290.

¹⁰ Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 237.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ I attempt to reconstruct this in chapter 2.

better, since they are the outcome of this developmental process. For this reason, I think Pippin's position also fails as a comprehensive answer to the *Sittlichkeit* question.

A final line of interpretation addressing this issue is what has been called the “metaphysical” or “traditional metaphysical” interpretation of Hegel.¹⁴ In the Anglophone literature this interpretation is associated most closely with the work of Charles Taylor.¹⁵ According to this interpretation, Hegel is an expressly and extravagantly theological thinker, who holds that a supra-individual mind “produces a differentiated world out of itself”—the world of modern *Sittlichkeit*.¹⁶ These institutions are, then, an expression of the autonomous agency of a kind of “cosmic spirit”, and—so the thought runs—we mere mortals partake of this autonomy insofar as we are the “vehicles” of cosmic spirit.¹⁷

I shall have even less to say about this interpretation than about the others. There is no doubt that some of the things Hegel says can be interpreted as implying that he is predicating autonomy of some supra-individual mind, rather than of ordinary autonomous agents. Yet if an interpretation of Hegel can make sense of what he says about *Sittlichkeit*, mind, autonomy, and so on, without attributing to him such a view, then it should do so, since it is not an attractive view of the relationship of autonomous agency to the institutions of modern social and political life. Happily, I believe there *is* a plausible interpretation of Hegel's answer to the *Sittlichkeit* question that avoids the excesses of the metaphysical account.

On my view, the way to understand Hegel's answer to the *Sittlichkeit* question first involves seeing that, for Hegel, the possibility of autonomous action is grounded in a drive towards

¹⁴ Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 16-27; Paul Redding, “Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/hegel/>

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 373.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

self-comprehension. The underlying thought here is that autonomous actions are those that stem from something from which we are unable to disassociate ourselves, or with which we are inescapably identical as agents: I argue that this is an aim to act so as to comprehend ourselves. Roughly speaking, then, we act autonomously, and on good reasons, when we act in ways that make us more rather than less comprehensible to ourselves. Autonomous agency thus understood is a matter of degree, rather than an all-or-nothing affair.

This drive operates along two axes. On the one hand, we are each characterised by the distinctive concatenation of concerns and attachments that make us the particular individuals we are. This individual identity, or ‘character’, implies that we act autonomously when we act in ways that make us comprehensible to ourselves as the particular individuals we are, and it implies, I argue, that the reasons we thus act on are agent-relative reasons, reasons for *me* to do various things that are not thereby reasons for anyone else to do any particular thing.

On the other hand, the drive operates gradually and over time—*developmentally*—in changing how such autonomous agents conceive of their nature in general, of the kinds of beings they are (of their “essence”). I argue in chapter 2 that the outcome of this developmental argument is that we ought to conceive of ourselves as “persons”, in Hegel’s technical sense, and that this self-conception implies that we ought to view certain of the aims and interests of other persons as giving rise to agent-neutral reasons, reasons that are reasons for any person to promote these aims and interests.

The upshot of this is that the drive to comprehend ourselves urges us in two apparently different directions: it forces us to think of ourselves, and our relation to our ends, to the things we value, in two incompatible ways at once. The drive to comprehend ourselves seems, paradoxically, to lead us to conceive of ourselves in ways that threaten our self-comprehension. And because it threatens our self-comprehension, it threatens our ability to act autonomously. My argument, briefly, is that it is through adopting an attitude

of ethical love that we dissolve this tension between these two ways of conceiving of ourselves. Adopting and cultivating this attitude therefore advances our self-comprehension, makes us more intelligible to ourselves. It is thus, to this extent, a rational, justified attitude (it falls into the category of what Hegel calls a “practical feeling”). I argue that to express ethical love implies willing the institutions of *Sittlichkeit*. Ethical love is the ultimate way in which individuals make themselves comprehensible to themselves; ethical life is the way in which they express that love. It is for this reason that to submit to such institutions is to express, in the highest degree, our capacity for autonomous agency.

This interpretation avoids some of the problems that bedevil the other approaches. For instance, it does not entail that the justification of the institutions of *Sittlichkeit* waits upon the findings of empirical investigations in psychology or social psychology. Further, it avoids the lacuna of the Pippinian account: we need not take the claim that the institutions of *Sittlichkeit* are rational, are ways in which we express our autonomous agency, on a kind of faith. And finally, this interpretation does not involve the claim that we are autonomous only through our being vehicles for the realisation of cosmic spirit: on my view, the autonomous agents of ethical life are ordinary, humdrum, flesh-and-blood human beings.

No doubt this short summary raises more questions than it answers; no doubt, too, that this interpretation has various problems of its own. I shall attempt to address some of the potential problems raised by it at the end of this study.

2. Texts and interpretation

I wish to say something generally about the kind of interpretive approach I adopt in what follows. In order to introduce this approach I should like to consider a complaint made by

Frederick Beiser against various “Anglophone” or “analytic” approaches to the great German philosophers. Beiser accuses such treatments of “anachronism”, writing:

Kant and Hegel are read [by such commentators] as if they were participants in *our* discussions and concerns; but there is no interest in *their* discussions and concerns. So we learn much about what they *ought to have said*; but we learn little about what they meant in their own context.¹⁸

The passage is curious. Why suppose that the Kant’s and Hegel’s “discussions and concerns” are so radically discontinuous with our own discussions and concerns? Why think that they are just *their* discussions and concerns, such that our chief aim—at least in the first instance—should be to understand “the genesis or context” of their writings, rather than to think about them philosophically?¹⁹ Beiser apparently thinks this because he imagines that the sole alternative to this view (a view in which *they* have *their* concerns and *we* have *ours*) is one in which all figures in the history of philosophy are to be understood as responding to “*eternal*” philosophical concerns: concerns which are *a fortiori* also *our* concerns.²⁰ Because he seems to take the notion of an eternal philosophical concern to be nonsense, or at least hard to get a handle on, he insists that the right approach is to treat a figure in the history of philosophy as an historical figure, a contributor to conversations past.²¹

There is, though, a third possible view here: namely, that our philosophical discussions and concerns will be more or less continuous with Hegel’s, or those of any

¹⁸ Frederick Beiser, “Dark Days: Anglophone Scholarship Since the 1960s”, in *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Espen Hammer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 70-90 (72). Emphases in the original.

¹⁹ Ibid., 71.

²⁰ “The anti-metaphysical tendency of Anglophone scholarship has been based upon a specific hermeneutic, a certain method of interpretation, which has been widely practiced by analytic philosophers. This method is entirely a-historical. It has little interest in the genesis or context of a text, still less in the nuances of meaning in the original language ... The chief aim of this method is to reconstruct ‘the arguments of a philosopher’, to assess their value as solutions to apparently *eternal* problems, though these problems usually turn out to be only the latest fads and fixations” (ibid.).

²¹ Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 3-4. To be fair to Beiser, he does recognise that his approach has its own potential pitfalls, including a kind of “antiquarianism”; in the end, though, he says, “the philosophical historian has to make his or her choice”, and he plumps for his historical or “hermeneutical” approach (ibid., 5).

figure in the history of philosophy, depending upon what is under discussion. Whether the problems a philosopher is responding to are more or less perennial will depend upon what the problems are: the problems of epistemology are such abiding concerns, for instance, because we have always been in the business of knowing; the question of whether capitalism is a just form of economic organisation, by contrast, could only have been asked in the past couple of hundred years. The writings of a philosopher may transcend her historical context not because they are an engagement with timeless Platonic ideas but just because they arise out of concerns that are, in this way, more rather than less enduring. Moreover, the very character of our modern philosophical preoccupations has been shaped by the philosophical tradition of which philosophers like Kant and Hegel are important parts.

Thus, figures like Kant and Hegel are, to varying degrees, our partners in discussion; they are not just talking amongst themselves. This is not to say that an historical sensitivity and a close attention to the texts are not necessary in order to produce an adequate interpretation of a thinker—they plainly are. But it *is* to say that translating a thinker's terminology into a more recognisable philosophical idiom, or bringing that thinker into dialogue with contemporary philosophers and their concerns, is not necessarily to give up on the work of interpretation. On Beiser's view, bringing Hegel into contact with contemporary philosophy, with its concerns, concepts and terminology, implies that one is *no longer giving an interpretation of Hegel*: that one is *necessarily* ventriloquising, putting one's own philosophical concerns into his mouth.²² "The more we make Hegel relevant to our contemporary concerns," he says, "the less he will be like the real historical thinker; and the more we reconstitute Hegel in his historical individuality, the less he will be relevant to our contemporary concerns."²³ But this is a false dilemma, based on the misguided view of the nature of our philosophical concerns identified above. Bringing

²² Beiser, "Dark Days", 72.

²³ Beiser, *Hegel*, 4.

figures from the history of philosophy into contact with contemporary concerns can cast a helpful light on their thought, without necessarily distorting it. Accordingly, it is legitimate to find inspiration from the works of contemporary philosophers when one is seeking to interpret figures in the history of philosophy, and to believe that it is possible that such figures are seeking to respond to our own philosophical concerns, even if in different terms.²⁴

In what follows I therefore adopt an interpretive approach of rational reconstruction and defence.²⁵ My aim is to provide an interpretation of the normative foundations of Hegel's social and political philosophy that makes sense of his central theses (those encapsulated in the *Sittlichkeit* question, for instance), whilst also making sense *simpliciter*. As I proceed, I hope to show that Hegel has things to say to contemporary discussions of, for instance, the nature of autonomous agency, the nature of love, and so on.

The focus of my interpretation is the work of Hegel's mature period—that is, roughly, the period from 1817 until his death in 1831—although I shall very occasionally draw on earlier works to supplement my account. More specifically, I focus on Hegel's mature *Philosophy of Mind*, as well as his *Philosophy of Right* and associated lectures. In chapters 1 and 2 I draw heavily from the “Subjective Mind” section of the former work, and here I wish to say a few things about how to interpret this section in particular, in order both to avoid getting too bogged down in exegetical matters later, and hopefully to forestall some potential objections.

²⁴ To take one example, I think Hegel's theory of autonomous agency has affinities with that developed by J. David Velleman, and I have found Velleman's work helpful in thinking through how Hegel's account might fit together, although it goes without saying that their positions differ in various ways. (See the references to Velleman in chapter 1, footnote 30).

²⁵ Cf. Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience*, 8-11; Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 32-34.

This section presents particular difficulties for an interpreter, and especially for an interpreter approaching it in order to discover something amounting to a philosophical argument. The section as a whole has the usual Hegelian triadic structure; here, the division is between the “Anthropology”, the “Phenomenology” and the “Psychology”. The interpretive problem is that of how we are to take the relation between these different subdivisions, and the problem is compounded, as I see it, by the fact that multiple accounts of their relation are overlain in the text itself. More specifically, Hegel claims that Subjective Mind is: (1) an examination of *different aspects*, different “moments” of a concrete human being’s knowledge of itself (EG §380). Here, the idea is that we are looking at our subject, a concrete human being, from different perspectives. The Anthropology studies the “soul”, which relates to the world (although it is not, strictly speaking, a “world” from this perspective) through “sensation” and “feeling”. Phenomenology studies the “conscious” subject, who has proper awareness of an objective world, and of itself as an “I” confronting that world. Finally, the Psychology gives us an account of the activities of the mind responsible for the possibility of our awareness of an objective world, for the kind of relation to the world the “conscious” subject has (of which activities the conscious mind itself was strictly unaware).²⁶ According to this line of argument, the connection between these categories, and all their further subdivisions, is apparently rational or logical, and the development that Hegel traces is a matter of abstracting away from “higher” aspects of mind in order to analyse the “lower” aspects of the mind, before showing how these lower aspects of mind rationally imply or necessitate the higher aspects—as Hegel puts it, we show that the higher moments are already present in the lower moments (*ibid.*). The development is not meant to imply that the lower stages are somehow sloughed off or

²⁶ For this account of the relationship between the Phenomenology and Psychology see Heikki Ikäheimo, *Self-Consciousness and Intersubjectivity: A Study on Hegel’s Encyclopedia Philosophy of Subjective Spirit (1830)* (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä Publications in Philosophy, 2000), 30-31; see also his “On the Role of Intersubjectivity in Hegel’s Encyclopaedic Phenomenology and Psychology”, *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 49/50, (2004): 73-95 (78-81).

left behind as we progress: they remain as subordinate aspects or “moments” of the concrete human being (ibid.).²⁷ But Hegel also indicates that this text is: (2) an account of *phylogenetic* or *historical* development (see e.g. EG §406Z (103); EG §396Z (58)).²⁸ According to this line of argument, the development is, at least very roughly, a kind of linear development from earlier humans to more modern humans. Finally, the text is apparently also: (3) an account of *ontogenetic* development, an account of the maturation of an individual from childhood to adulthood (e.g. EG §385Z; EG §396Z (58-59)).

Now, Hegel apparently believes that (1), (2) and (3) correspond to one another, at least in a rough sort of way. So on the one hand he believes the development of a child to maturity recapitulates, in the stages through which the child progresses, the historical development of mankind. And he thinks that *both* of these developments correspond to the logical development described above, such that, for instance, earlier humans had (and younger humans *have*) a more soul-like existence, absorbed in feeling, whereas modern (or adult) humans have developed a knowledge of themselves as knowers of an objective world and, further, of the sorts of mental activities that make such knowledge possible.

This has implications for how we should understand the argument I will make in chapter 2. For there I will argue that agents driven by the aim of self-comprehension must eventually conceive of themselves as persons, in Hegel’s technical sense, and that this way of conceiving of ourselves rationally constrains our action in an ethical way—seeing ourselves as persons means we must take other agents into account in various recognisably

²⁷ This is, in a sense, much like Kant’s strategy in the first *Critique*. In the transcendental aesthetic, Kant says, “we will ... first isolate sensibility by separating off everything that the understanding thinks through its concepts, so that nothing but empirical intuition remains. Second, we will then detach from the latter everything that belongs to sensation, so that nothing remains except pure intuition” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A22/B36). Kant then starts with a particular aspect of cognition, intuition, in order to eventually argue to argue that nothing can even be given in intuition if it is not already subject to the categories of the understanding, which is to say, that this can only be understood as a “moment” of a whole, in Hegel’s terms.

²⁸ Because many of the *Anmerkungen* and *Zusätze* in the *Philosophy of Mind* (especially the Anthropology section) are several pages in length, referring simply by passage number (e.g. EG §406Z) is not particularly helpful—thus where an *Anmerkung* or *Zusatz* I have referred to is especially long, I have added the page number (to the English edition) in brackets (thus, e.g., EG §406A (103)).

ethical ways. Because of the correspondences Hegel draws between these three kinds of development, however, this argument has a peculiar status. For it is on the one hand a philosophical argument that proceeds rationally from premises to conclusions; but on the other this argument is, in some sense, a kind of recapitulation of an historical development in the self-knowledge of human, “minded” subjects. This means that the argument cannot be one that would necessarily persuade *any* rational agent at any time in any place, since the possibility of successfully reconstructing this argument depends upon the fact that human beings have, as Hegel sees it, reached a certain stage in the development of their self-knowledge, at which point we are able rationally to reconstruct this development. So Hegel’s developmental argument, in this way, straddles a boundary between more strictly philosophical derivation and more explanatory, developmental philosophical-anthropology.

Another source of interpretive difficulties with the text has to do with the different *voices* Hegel adopts throughout. He sometimes adopts the voice of the stage of development currently under consideration, and sometimes the voice of the *telos* of the development *reflecting on* the stage currently under consideration. This has implications especially for my argument in chapter 1, in which I draw quite heavily from the Anthropology section, and in particular from its section on self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*). This is a controversial place to look for help in understanding Hegel’s account of autonomous agency.²⁹ The reason it seems an unlikely place to start is because the Anthropology, as an account of the “soul”, is an account of a form of subjectivity in which the subject has not yet become aware of itself as an “I” confronting an objective world, which happens only in the Phenomenology. How, then, could this section provide materials for understanding autonomous agency, which presumably depends upon such self-awareness? Even the most cursory glance over the Anthropology confirms, however, that Hegel is constantly speaking in these two voices. When Hegel adopts the voice of the standpoint under consideration

²⁹ Although see Lydia Moland, “Inheriting, Earning, and Owning: The Source of Practical Identity in Hegel’s ‘Anthropology’”, *The Owl of Minerva* 34, no. 2 (2003): 139-170.

itself, it appears as though the Anthropology is an attempt at an account of a kind of subjectivity that involves a proto-self-consciousness.³⁰ But he also adopts the other voice: the voice of a fully self-aware subject confronting an objective world, *reflecting on* this lower aspect of itself (EG §406A (95)). And so the Anthropology is also an account of how the “*objective, rational, concrete* consciousness” (EG §408Z (121)) *relates* to its soul, which is an aspect or moment of its overall identity. Crucially, under “soul” fall all of those elements of “character” that go to make up an autonomous agent’s identity as the particular individual she is. When talking in this voice, then, Hegel is considering the “cultivated, intellectual consciousness, the subject which is at the same time the *natural* self of *self-feeling*” (EG §408A). What Hegel refers to as “free, harmonious self-feeling” (EG §410Z (133)) can therefore be understood as the self-aware subject’s comprehension of itself as a particular individual with particular characteristics, and thus as a crucial aspect of that subject’s self-comprehension as a whole. This aspect of our self-comprehension relates to an aspect of our autonomous agency, a kind of being “at home with myself” as the particular individual I am (VPG27 110/141). The category of self-feeling is almost always overlooked or dismissed as unimportant,³¹ but I shall argue that it is central to an understanding of Hegel’s ultimate account of justified social and political institutions in the section on *Sittlichkeit*.

I should also mention that in what follows I draw freely from Hegel’s lectures, both those on the *Philosophy of Mind* and those on the *Philosophy of Right*. As Hegel writes in the published 1821 *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, he intended this published book to accompany his lectures, where he would work out his ideas more thoroughly (and often in

³⁰ Hegel recognises how speculative (in the everyday sense of the word) such an endeavour is: it is “contrary to the laws of ordinary consciousness, and enters our consciousness only by means of philosophy” (VPG27 19/71).

³¹ See e.g. Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 104.

less abstruse language!) (PR 11/3). It is by now fairly well accepted that these lecture notes are a faithful representation of what Hegel in fact said.³²

3. Autonomy and freedom

A brief terminological point is in order at this point. Hegel only rarely uses the term *Autonomie*, which is for him all too redolent of Kant; he prefers to speak just of *Freiheit*—freedom. It might therefore seem as if to talk of his “account of autonomy”, or of “autonomous action” or “autonomous agency”, is to risk being at the very least anachronistic, and perhaps at the worst being downright misleading.³³ I have two reasons for choosing to talk about Hegel’s account of autonomous agency, rather than his account of freedom.

First, it is clear that the way Hegel sets up the issue corresponds to what is nowadays generally referred to by philosophers as the problem of autonomy, or of autonomous agency. One contemporary philosopher, Paul Benson, expresses the matter like this:

How can any of my actions genuinely be my own? How can they be more than just intentional performances, with whatever investment of my will that involves, but also belong to me in the special way that makes me autonomous in performing them?³⁴

Hegel is similarly concerned with how it is that I can act in such a way that certain of my actions are really my own, really “mine” (PR §4Z). This is why Hegel says that in the

³² See Patten, *Hegel’s Idea of Freedom*, 6 (fn.9).

³³ Cf. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 103.

³⁴ Paul Benson, “Taking Ownership: Authority and Voice in Autonomous Agency”, in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, ed. John Christman & Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 101-126 (101).

free state the individual is confronted “not with something alien to himself, but simply with what is his own (*mit ibrem Eigenen*)” (VÄI 136/98). When the individual stands with respect to the state’s various laws and institutions in this way, in such a way that they are his own, the relationship between the individual and these institutions is an instantiation of the relation Hegel describes as that of “being at home with oneself in one’s other, depending upon oneself, and being one’s own determinant (*in seinem Anderen bei sich selbst zu sein, von sich abzuhängen, das Bestimmende seiner selbst zu sein*)”, or as he puts it, the relation of “freedom” (EL §24Z2). Because it is the possibility of this type of *ownership* of one’s actions—their being “mine” in the fullest sense—that is at issue for Hegel (and not, for instance, either the traditional problem of free will and determinism, nor any notion of negative freedom in Berlin’s sense), I think it is appropriate to talk (*de re*, as it were) of Hegel’s account of autonomous agency.³⁵

Second, the term “freedom” comes to have a variety of technical senses in Hegel. For instance, in at least one of the senses in which he uses the term, it is deployed as a virtual synonym for personhood, a concept that will be my topic in chapter 2.³⁶ But personhood is just one kind of *self-conception*. Or again he talks of our “formal” freedom—the fact that we can abstract ourselves from all of our desires and inclinations, from our determinations (EG §382). I think it helps, then, to keep apart the general idea of one’s actions really being one’s own, of our being truly their author, from these other notions of freedom; one way of doing this is by referring to the former idea under the heading of “autonomy”.

³⁵ Actually, at least one commentator thinks that Hegel *is* concerned with the traditional problem of free will and determinism; see Christopher Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection: Hegel and the Logic of Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁶ E.g.: “Consciousness of freedom consists in the fact that the individual (*Individuum*) apprehends (*erfaßt*) himself as person, i.e. that he apprehends himself in his individuality (*Einzelheit*) as inherently universal, as the capacity of abstraction from and surrender (*Aufgebens*) of everything particular, therefore as infinite in himself” (VG 175/144).

Chapter 1: Autonomous agency

Hegel bases his social and political philosophy on the idea of autonomous agency: that is, on the idea that certain of our actions can be understood as more fully our *own* than others. In short, justified social and political institutions are to be understood as justified inasmuch as, and to the extent that, participation in them is on some level the way in which we act autonomously.¹

Something like this is accepted by many commentators on Hegel's social and political philosophy.² In this chapter I set out an interpretation of Hegel's theory of autonomous agency that departs in various ways from most current accounts. In the first section, I examine some contemporary views of autonomous agency, which function as stalking horses for my presentation of Hegel's theory, which I go on to elaborate in the second section. In the third section, I situate Hegel's theory against the background of his broadly Aristotelian views about life, ends and functions, in the hope that doing so will clarify and make more plausible the views set out in sections 1 and 2.

1. How to own an action

What we are seeking in trying to understand autonomous agency is an account of how it is that certain actions can really count as *mine*, as having been done by *me*, in the fullest possible sense, beyond their being merely intentional. "Insofar as I am practical, active, i.e. insofar as I act (*handele*), I determine myself, and to determine myself simply means to posit

¹ E.g. "[In the rational state], the individual's reason finds in these institutions only the actuality of his own essence, and if he obeys these laws, he coincides, not with something alien to himself, but simply with what is his own (*mit ihm Eigenen*)" (VÄI 136/98).

² See e.g. Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience*, 8; Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, viii; Christopher L. Yeomans, "Talents and Interests: A Hegelian Moral Psychology", *Hegel Bulletin* 34, no.1 (2013): 33-58 (33-34).

a difference. But these differences which I posit are still mine (*meinigen*) all the same” (PR §4Z). How is it that these “differences” are “mine”? To use a metaphor of which Hegel is fond, how is it that I rightfully own these actions as my “property” (*Eigentum*, EG §468)? Here I will approach Hegel’s position via a discussion of some contemporary approaches to the same question.

It helps to begin by asking just why a merely intentional action does not necessarily amount to an autonomous one. Why is an action caused in the appropriate way by a belief and desire of mine not necessarily an autonomous action? An individual has a desire for some thing, and a belief that taking a certain means will contribute as well as any other to the satisfaction of that desire. I want to smoke a cigarette, say. I think that taking one out of the pack, putting it to my lips and lighting it is as good a way as any of satisfying that want. Absent any intervening factors or deviant causal chains, my belief and desire will cause the relevant behaviour in the appropriate way, and it might be thought that the resultant behaviour will thereby count as autonomous.³

But being motivated by a belief and a desire in this way is not sufficient for the resultant behaviour to count as an action done by me in the fullest sense. The problem for this story concerns that last part: “done by *me*”. And it arises because of the sort of psychic complexity that characterises human agents, a complexity which manifests itself in the fact that we can be more or less alienated from various of our motivations, or can feel *identified* with them to a greater or lesser extent. For instance, I might feel simply assailed by my desire for a cigarette, and I may sincerely wish not to be motivated by it. In cases like this we often say we feel subject *to* these desires, rather than seeing them as our own; we see them as external to us. The intuitive thought here is that *I* occupy a standpoint from which

³ The exclusion of behaviour arising from “deviant causal chains” is intended to exclude cases where a belief and desire causes the intended behaviour, but not in the right way for it to count as intentional. Examples of such deviant causal chains are discussed by Donald Davidson, “Problems in the Explanation of Action”, in his *Problems of Rationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 101-116 (106); Harry G. Frankfurt, “The problem of action”, in his *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 69-79 (70).

I view this desire as external, and so what *constitutes* this standpoint, my standpoint, cannot simply be the beliefs and desires I have as a matter of fact.

Hierarchical accounts of autonomous action are responses to these sorts of considerations, as is clear from the work of Harry Frankfurt. Particularly salient for Frankfurt are those cases in which—as with my unwanted desire for a smoke—one is alienated from certain motivations and feels them as external to oneself, and, in contrast, those cases in which motivations are felt to be in harmony with one’s self.⁴ Actions proceeding from the former sorts of motivations, we are inclined to say, are in some sense not fully mine, as they are not backed up by, or assented to from, the standpoint occupied by *me*. In his early article “Freedom of the will and the concept of a person”, Frankfurt was concerned to develop a moral psychology capable of making sense of this split between what is internal and external to the agent’s standpoint and, so, of making sense of actions that could truly be mine in the requisite sense, because somehow stemming from attitudes that truly represent, and constitute, the point of view of the agent.⁵ In that article, this was done with the help of the concept of second-order desires and volitions. In virtue of having second-order desires that certain of my first-order desires be the ones that motivate me, I identify myself with those first-order desires, and action proceeding from such motivations is truly mine. What matters, from the perspective of autonomous agency, is not which desires are internal to me in the literal sense—are underneath my skin—but which I *make* internal to me through identifying with them.⁶

As Gary Watson has pointed out, however, introducing higher-order levels of desire simply relocates the problem, rather than solving it. There seems to be no reason to

⁴ For a recent example of his, see his *Taking Ourselves Seriously & Getting It Right*, ed. Debra Satz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 11-13.

⁵ In his *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 11-25. There, Frankfurt took himself to be giving an account of freedom of the will. But his (and others’) hierarchical accounts have often been taken by subsequent commentators as account of free or autonomous agency, and here I follow such commentators. See Benson, “Taking Ownership”, n.6.

⁶ See his “Identification and Wholeheartedness” in his *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 159-176 (171).

think that I could not be just as alienated from a particular second-order desire as I might be from a first-order one; and if that is right, then it cannot be the *fact* of a desire's being of the second order that makes it, and the first-order motivation it endorses, more fully *mine*.⁷ What truly constitutes the standpoint of the agent, Watson thinks, is my “evaluational system”, the standpoint from which I make value judgments about the world: action that “flows” from this system is fully autonomous action.⁸

Frankfurt's later development of his theory is in part a response to this criticism. In his later work, he attempts to delineate the internal-external boundary less in terms of acts of identification and more in terms of the things one loves, or cannot help caring about, which are taken to constitute one's “volitional nature”. For instance: “the unconditional commands of love are not ... adventitious elements of a person's will. They are essentially integral to it, for what a person loves is a defining element of his volitional nature. When he acts out of love, accordingly, his volitions do derive from the essential character of his will.”⁹ Frankfurt thinks that loves—which need not be for persons, but could be directed at things, ideals, or traditions—serve to delineate the agent's volitional nature because they involve volitional *necessities*; that we love or care about something implies that, for us, there are “certain considerations by which we cannot help being moved to act, and which we cannot help counting as reasons for action”.¹⁰ Behaviours that manifest or express one's deepest loves and cares, then, are really one's own actions in the fullest sense, since they stem from one's essential volitional nature, which constitutes one's standpoint as an agent. Of course, it is not that everyday desires fall out of the picture here: the point is that some of these will be ratified, as it were, by our loves, or the things we care about, and so action motivated by these will be said truly to be one's own.

⁷ See Gary Watson, “Free Agency”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no.8 (1975): 205-220 (218). A similar objection is made by T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 55.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁹ Frankfurt, “Autonomy, Necessity, and Love”, 132.

¹⁰ Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously & Getting it Right*, 42-43.

Here I am less concerned with the differences amongst these ways of explaining what constitutes the standpoint of the agent—second-order desires, values, things we care about or love—than with their common limitation with respect to that purpose. The fact that an action flows from these sorts of attitude is not sufficient for its being mine in the fullest possible sense. This is because it is possible that I might be alienated even from my loves, cares and values.¹¹ It is possible to love someone or something (or fail to do so) despite yourself, just as it is possible to be repulsed to find out that you value or disvalue something, or that you care or do not care about something. Perhaps I find that I routinely swell with pride at the sight of my country's flag fluttering in the wind, which reveals to me that I do, in some measure, care about my country—and I shrink from such feelings and am privately ashamed, convinced as I am, at least in my cooler hours, of the utter emptiness and contemptibility of the very idea of national pride. It is compatible with my valuing or caring about something (say, my country) that I not endorse my valuing or caring, that I find it contemptible. If that is the case, then actions stemming from my loves, cares or values (or from desires ratified by them) are not *thereby* autonomous, since I may be alienated or may disassociate myself from these attitudes—I may judge that when I act on them my actions are not fully my own.

Frankfurt discounts this possibility because he takes it more or less as read that one is identified with one's cares or loves. He says: "I ... propose just to stipulate that a lover is never troubled by conflict, or by ambivalence ... The lover does not passively submit to the grip of love. He is fully identified with and responsible for its necessities."¹² Watson suggests, by contrast, that one can disassociate oneself from certain ends and principles in

¹¹ This point is also made by Elizabeth Anderson (see her *Value in Ethics and Economics* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 5); and cf. also Sarah Buss, "Personal Autonomy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL =

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/personal-autonomy/>
¹² Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting it Right*, 44-45.

one's evaluational system, but "only from the standpoint of another such set that one does not disclaim", at which point the former ends cease to be a part of one's agential standpoint.¹³ Watson must think, then, that this standpoint consists just in those values one does not disclaim—we might say, those one identifies with or endorses. *These* values would amount to a set of second-order valuations, and it would be their *being* of the second-order, not their being *values*, that would make them constitutive of one's standpoint as an agent. As Watson was the first to point out, however, it is not clear why a motivation's being of a higher order, just as such, should make it any more internal to one's standpoint as an agent: this was the problem that the notion of an evaluational system was supposed to solve.¹⁴ So either Watson must admit *all* the agent's actual values into the evaluational system, into the agent's standpoint, or he must fall back on some version of a hierarchical model. The possibility of alienation from one's values tells against the first possibility; Watson's own argument against Frankfurt tells against the second.

The account of autonomous agency I want to attribute to Hegel can be understood as taking as its point of departure the shortcomings of these accounts. Our desideratum is something, some attitude, which necessarily constitutes the standpoint of the agent, some attitude we cannot disassociate ourselves from. It will be the contribution of this attitude, whatever it turns out to be, that really constitutes the contribution of *the agent* to her action. Action that flows from this attitude will thereby truly be able to be said to be fully autonomous.¹⁵

Hegel agrees that the sorts of attitudes discussed in the above accounts do, indeed, play a central role in autonomous action. He talks about the various concerns, cares, attachments and commitments of the individual—those attachments that Frankfurt and

¹³ Watson, "Free Agency", 216.

¹⁴ Ibid., 217-218.

¹⁵ "Flows from", "springs from" and the like locutions are, for now, to be taken as placeholder terms for a relation which will become more clear and less metaphorical by and by.

Watson capture with their talk of values, cares, loves—as constituting the “actuality” (*Wirklichkeit*) of the individual (EG §406A (95)), the “concrete heart of the human being as an individual” (VÄI 134/97), or an individual’s “character” (*Charakter*) (VG 85/72-73). As part of this motivational core, Hegel includes an individual’s “concerns” (VPG27 103/136), her “fundamental interests (*Grundinteressen*)” (EG §406A (95)), relations of friendship and love (EG §406Z (102)) and more generally what he calls “the essential and particular empirical relationships in which he stands to other human beings and to the world at large” (EG §406A (95); EG §447A). As elsewhere in his philosophy, Hegel is here not wholly consistent in his use of terminology, and he uses various distinct terms to denote the same phenomenon, but for the sake of simplicity I shall adopt the term *character* to refer to this bundle of attitudes. It is worth highlighting a few of the claims Hegel makes about character that will become important as we proceed.

First, an individual’s character distinguishes her from other individuals and so it is what makes her who she is as an individual (*Individuum*) (EG §395Z (51); VG 85/72-73).¹⁶ Second, Hegel supposes that certain of these elements of character give rise to what Bernard Williams would later call the “ground projects” of an individual.¹⁷ That is, they give rise to central interests and commitments that give meaning to an individual’s life and, indeed, give her a reason to live at all (EG §406A (96); VPG27 95/130). Third, character is a powerful source of reasons to act for the individual (EG §405Z (94)). Our character determines what we see as worth doing; it thus gives shape to our practical lives: it is “a fixed, governing element in one’s spirit” (VPRIII 183/256).

¹⁶ There’s a terminological point worth mentioning here: Hegel tends to use the Latinate *Individuum*, *Individualität*, *individuell*, etc., rather than *Einzelne*, *Einzelheit*, etc., when discussing the individual as characterised by the sorts of attachments and concerns at issue here, i.e. as particular, as distinguished from other individuals (see e.g. EG §§406A, 406Z, and *passim* in the Anthropology section).

¹⁷ See Bernard Williams, “Persons, character and morality”, in his *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-19 (12).

Finally, and importantly, Hegel suggests we form *conceptions* or *representations* of these elements of character. This thought that we are self-conceptualising or, as it has also been put, self-interpreting animals, is of fundamental importance for Hegel's theory.¹⁸

Natural things are merely *immediate* and *single*, while the human being, as mind, *duplicates* (verdoppelt) itself, in that it is in the first instance as natural things are, but it is just as much *for itself*, it intuitively itself, represents itself, thinks, and only through this active being-for-itself (*Fürsichsein*) is it mind ... inwardly it must bring itself into its own consciousness, along with whatever moves, stirs and drives in the human breast (VÄI 51/31).

Thus although love has a “natural” side, it also becomes subject to our interpretation and conceptualisation, and it is the result of these processes that is important in relation to the possibility of performing actions that are truly one's own: “a human being is determined by whatever representations he has formed of his own nature and volitions” (VG 57/49-50). Because we interpret elements of our character as having meaning—for example, my being a “friend” of someone as implying standards of conduct towards that person—our motivations relate to one another not merely according to some homogeneous metric of, say, intensity of feeling, or as fitting into a preference ordering; rather, they bear more complex systematic relations to one another, as I will explain further below. An agent's character, we can therefore say, is made up of various concerns and attachments which are the basis of various *particular* self-conceptions, which taken together amount to an *overall* self-conception.

Talk of an individual's “character”, then, is not to be taken as referring to their character *traits*, but rather to these various intimate concerns and attachments.¹⁹ When my

¹⁸ “Self-interpreting” is Charles Taylor's term. See “Self-interpreting animals” in his *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45-76. See also Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 44-47.

¹⁹ Bernard Williams uses the term in a similar way. See his “Persons, character and morality”, 5.

actions fit with or are in accordance with my character, Hegel says I have a feeling of myself in my actions, a self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*).²⁰

As I have suggested, however, it is possible to disassociate ourselves or be alienated from the kinds of motivational elements that make up our characters, and it therefore cannot be the fact *that* something is an element of this character that makes action springing from it autonomous. It is even possible, Hegel says (*pace* Watson), to disassociate ourselves from *all* of these elements at once. This is the thought behind this passage:

[Mind] *can* abstract from everything external and from its own externality, from its very life; it can endure the negation of its individual (*individuellen*) immediacy, infinite *pain*, i.e. *it can maintain itself affirmatively in this negativity and be identical for itself* (EG §382, last emphasis mine).

As a *spiritual* or *minded* being, “[t]he human being has the self-consciousness of being able to take up any content, or of letting it go, he can let go of all bonds of friendship, love, whatever they may be, he can cast them off. The human being can cast off and sacrifice the whole complex, his fulfilled consciousness, which life is” (VRIV 112; cf. PRV19 59).²¹ Hegel is not making the trivial point that one can, for instance, betray a friend or lover, and so act in a way that is not in accordance with one’s character, but the substantive point that human agents occupy a standpoint that transcends all such ties, that when we disassociate ourselves from these ties we are nevertheless “identical for ourselves”: “When I say ‘I’, I thus abandon my particular character, natural endowment, knowledge, age.” (PR §4Z) We have, as we might put it, an identity apart from character: the “fact of abstraction shows that all my ends and interests are external to me, insofar as they are different from me and from my I” (VPG27 13/66).

²⁰ The connection between *Selbstgefühl* and *Charakter* is made in Hegel’s discussion at VG 82-85/70-73.

²¹ I will use “mind” and its cognates in order to translate “*Geist*” and its cognates.

It is plausible to suppose that the reason why the various motivations canvassed above—loves, cares, values—fail to constitute the standpoint of the agent is that it is always possible that an agent does not count these various motivations as motivations on the basis of which the agent has reasons to act. It is *not* the case, as Frankfurt claims, that the fact of us caring about something entails that there are various considerations we *cannot but* count as reasons to act. It is always possible to throw into question the relevance of such motivations to the question of what we ought to do. “I do love him, but *why?*”, “*Why* do I even care about this?”: these are intelligible questions, and they attest to our minded nature. At this point, Hegel defines this minded nature as our *freedom*. But this, as Hegel immediately goes on to say, is a completely “formal” definition of freedom: it just serves to restate the idea that the standpoint we occupy is not given in, or exhausted by, all the ends and interests we find ourselves with as individuals with our particular characters (EG §382; VPG27 13/66).

Yet these reflections already suggest some content for this as yet formal identity: it somehow involves the aim of acting on the basis of justifying reasons as such. We have this aim, I suggest, because as minded beings we are characterised above all by what Hegel calls “the continuing drive of rational insight (*Trieb vernünftiger Einsicht*), which alone gives human beings their dignity (*Würde*)” (EL 13/3). Hegel says that thinking, by which he means, amongst other things, seeking reasons for things, including reasons to act (EG §§400Z, 406A (98)), is something “we cannot stop doing” (VG 25/25). This is because any attempt to disassociate ourselves from thinking, for instance by asking *why* we should seek reasons for things, inevitably thereby enters into the practice of reasoning.²² We may be able to stop thinking—by falling asleep, for instance—but we cannot *disavow* the aims of thinking; this is the standpoint from which we are able to disavow our *other* aims. The idea that we have

²² See Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, 292. The same point is made by Velleman (see J. David Velleman, “What Happens When Someone Acts?”, in his *Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 123-143 (141-142)).

such a drive of rational insight, then, seems to have some intuitive plausibility. Or rather, Hegel's idea is that we *are* such a drive (“*mind ... must be conceived as drive*” (EG §443Z)), that this drive is the motivation that ineluctably represents the standpoint of the agent, and therefore that to the extent that it motivates an agent's action that action will be genuinely *hers*.

All this might explain these rather gnomic remarks: “I is thinking as what thinks (*das Denken als Denkendes*)”; “[the human being] is thinking itself” (EL §24Z1); “*thinking* is what is our *very own (Eigenste)*” (EG §400A; cf. VÄI 27/12); or “it is only in thought that I am with myself (*bei mir*)” (PR §4Z). An action that springs from a value from which I am alienated is an action for which I do not take myself to have a reason, because I do not count this value as providing me with a reason; if the attitude that constitutes my standpoint as an agent is this drive of rational insight, and so my aim of acting on reasons as such, then such an action frustrates this drive and is incompatible with this aim. It would not, therefore, count as a fully autonomous action. By contrast, action for which I *did* take myself to have a valid reason for would be a fully autonomous action. Hegel therefore describes unfree action as involving a

... lack of insight (*Mangel einer Einsicht*); it is an irrational action, or an action which does not proceed from thought at such (*nicht auf das Denken als solches geht*) (VGPII 222/204).²³

We can now explain the shortcoming of the previous models of autonomous agency more precisely: they identify the autonomy-constituting attitude as something (e.g. a higher-order desire, a value, a care or love) that is *independent* of the subject's drive to act on the basis of reasons as such, and therefore on that motivation on the basis of which she

²³ It is clear from the context that although Hegel is expounding what he takes to be Aristotle's views here, he very much agrees with him. He says: “Just as the best that we even now possess in reference to psychology is what we have obtained from Aristotle, so is it with his reflections on the actual agent in volition, on freedom ...” (VGPII 221/203; cf. PR §4Z; EL §24Z1).

has reason to act, or greatest reason to act, and so independent of the drive that ineluctably represents the agent's standpoint. They all view autonomous action as action based on some higher-order desire, care or value; whereas if action stemming from some higher-order desire, care or value is to be autonomous it must be *because* that attitude expresses the agent's drive to act on that motivation on the basis of which she has reason to act.

This cannot be the end of the story, however. For how does an agent determine which is the motivation on the basis of which she has reason to act—or better reason to than is the case for any competing motivation? To say that something serves as a reason for an action is to say that it serves to justify it, shows it to be the correct thing to do; and this means there must be some standard or criterion with reference to which actions can be shown to be *correct*—to be “true” actions, as Hegel puts it (EL §21Z).²⁴ In the above example, presumably I find some conflict between competing values—national pride and, say, cosmopolitanism or internationalism—and I take myself to have a reason to act on the basis of the latter but not the former. If I am not to determine myself arbitrarily (act for no reason, and so heteronomously), then, there must be some criterion in virtue of which action on the basis of the one motivation is justified in a way that action on the basis of the other is not. Further, this criterion must itself be one that is inescapable for a thinking being, a being who cannot but demand reasons for acting. It cannot, for instance, be explained in terms of the promotion of some other substantive value, for any criterion depending upon such a value could itself be called into question by a thinking subject.

One temptation is to think that the criterion of rational action might be found in the bare idea of non-contradiction, but Hegel does not hold out much hope for this solution (EL §54Z).²⁵ At this point some commentators suppose Hegel can avoid the

²⁴ J. David Velleman, “Introduction” to his *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-31 (15).

²⁵ This is part of Hegel criticism of Kant's moral philosophy. See also PR §135+A+Z.

emptiness that seems to threaten here by claiming that this criterion has something to do with the goal of promoting one's own autonomy or rationality. According to Alan Patten, for instance, Hegel's view is that the criterion is to be found in the end of "sustaining and promoting one's own independence and freedom".²⁶ By this he effectively means that a formally free agent, in the above sense, is rationally committed to willing the necessary means to that very formal freedom, the various "attitudes, goals, and capacities" that allow an agent to "engage in radical reflection and abstraction ... [to] ask the difficult questions about *who* he is, and what his *true* purposes are" in the first place, where these necessary means will turn out to involve, in the end, willing various sorts of social and political institutions.²⁷

It is important to see that this cannot be Hegel's considered view. For Patten's position trades on an illicit inference: from the fact that I am formally free or rational it does not follow that I must view my existence as a formally free or rational being, let alone the existence of formally free or rational beings in general, as something to be promoted, which is to say as something *good*, and so rationally commit myself to the indispensable means to that end.²⁸ This is because whether or not such a state of affairs is good, to be promoted, will itself depend upon whether there are reasons for promoting it.²⁹ As Hegel puts it: "The rational is that which has being in and for itself, and from which everything else derives its value (*Wert*)" (VG 29/28). Again, the criterion that serves to justify some

²⁶ Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 99.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Part of the problem here is that Patten bases his interpretation upon passages from the introduction to the *Rechtsphilosophie*, where Hegel talks about the will which wills its own freedom (PR §21Z and *ibid.*, 94). But taking this as one's starting point for understanding Hegel's account of freedom, or autonomous agency, begs all the important and interesting questions. For the concept of freedom in play in the *Rechtsphilosophie* is, for the most part, already a thoroughly moralised one: acting freely entails recognising others, taking certain of their desires and interests as normative for you, in various recognisably moral and ethical ways. This is a controversial claim, which is why Hegel argues for it in the preceding sections of his system. I examine these arguments in chapter 2.

²⁹ I therefore think Moyaer is wrong to suggest that Hegel "gives a certain privilege to value (or purposes) over reasons" (*Hegel's Conscience*, 49). On my view of Hegel, the fact that something is valuable, or to be promoted, depends on there being reasons to value it, or to promote it.

actions rather than others cannot involve reference to any substantive value, even the value of autonomy (EL §54Z); to suppose that it does puts the cart before the horse.

2. Autonomous agency ‘as a particular way of thinking’

To act autonomously is for one’s actions to spring from some attitude that constitutes one’s standpoint as an agent. This attitude, I have suggested, is to be sought in what Hegel calls the drive of rational insight, and so involves an aim of acting for reasons as such—an aim we can thus say is a constitutive aim for minded or thinking beings.³⁰ The question, though, is how we can supply a criterion with reference to which actions can be justified, such that an agent could take certain motivations rather than others as providing her with motivations on the basis of which she has reason to act.

As I see it, Hegel’s position is that the criterion lies in the goal of self-knowledge.³¹ At the outset of the *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel asserts that a drive towards self-knowledge is intrinsic to being a thinking being, that it is not external to our identity as minded subjects, but constitutive of it:

[T]he summons to self-knowledge (*Aufforderung zur Selbsterkenntnis*), issued to the Greeks by the Delphic Apollo, does not have the sense of a command externally addressed to the human mind by an alien power; on the contrary, the god who drives towards self-knowledge is none other than the mind’s own absolute law (EG §377Z).

³⁰ I will use the terms “minded” and “thinking” interchangeably.

³¹ It is not controversial—indeed, it is trite—to observe that Hegel views *Geist* as endeavouring to achieve knowledge of itself. However, commentators have not really appreciated how this idea figures in his account of autonomous agency. Pinkard (in his *Hegel’s Naturalism*) is an exception, although his account differs in many ways from my own. To my mind, Hegel’s theory has some affinities in this regard with the theory of agency developed by J. David Velleman (although it goes without saying that Hegel’s theory also departs in many ways from Velleman’s). See, *inter alia*, his “Introduction”; “What Happens When Someone Acts?”; “The Possibility of Practical Reason”, in his *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 170-199; *How We Get Along* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Allen Speight also draws some parallels between Hegel’s and Velleman’s accounts of agency, especially with respect what they see as its narrative structure (“Hegel, Narrative and Agency”, in *Hegel on Action*, ed. Arto Laitinen and Constantine Sandis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 232-243).

Further, by self-knowledge, it is clear Hegel intends something quite rich—not just the acquisition of facts, for instance, but (self-)comprehension (*Begreifen*). For we are “not satisfied with mere acquaintance (*Bekanntschaft*)” with a thing; a human being “wants to know what it is, wants to comprehend it (*will wissen, was sie ist, will sie begreifen*)” (EL §21Z). We can therefore say that for Hegel a drive towards self-comprehension is intrinsic to thinking beings. The implication is that it will be the contribution of this drive to our actions that makes these actions fully our own. To fully justify and render plausible this somewhat odd sounding claim is the job of this and the following section.

Why should we suppose that this drive is intrinsic to being a thinking being? The reason, I propose, is that being driven to comprehend ourselves in particular is a part of what it is for us to be animated by the drive of rational insight, the aim of finding reasons for things, in general. Mind is a kind of “ordering activity”.³² The form this activity takes, in general, is that of understanding various particulars (e.g., particular intuitions) as necessarily connected in virtue of their falling under more general representations (e.g., kinds, laws, forces, etc.) (see e.g. EG §443Z).³³

To comprehend something means to understand it in its context. ‘I don’t understand it, explain it to me’, that is, show me its context and connection, the power of the universal of which this particular is the expression. (VPG27 232/244)

³² Willem A. deVries, *Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity: An Introduction to Theoretical Spirit* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 51.

³³ This is not to construe Hegel as what he would call a “subjective” idealist, rather than an “objective” idealist (cf. Robert Stern, *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object* (London: Routledge, 1990), ch.5). Hegel sees the subjective idealist position, according to which “it is we who determine the [perceptual] content thinkingly”, not as false, but as “only one aspect of ... true idealism”, and as “an essential moment” (BPhG 22/23; cf. EL §41Z2; EG §448Z (181-182)). In other words, Hegel thinks *both* that we undertake the activity of synthesising the content of perception (see EG §§445-468) *and* that the sorts of concepts and categories (“thought determinations”) we bring to bear in so doing are not *merely* ours, are not our imposition, but have “objective value and existence” (WLI 45/51). Thus in making use of such thought determinations we “instantiate the same rule system that governs the world” (deVries, *Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity*, 175); also Damion Buterin, “Knowledge, Freedom and Willing: Hegel on Subjective Spirit”, *Inquiry* 52, no.1 (2009): 26-52.

The kind of thing that frustrates this drive, then, is the inability to subsume some phenomenon under some more general explanation. (“We see the stars today here and tomorrow there; this disorder is for the mind something incongruous (*ein Unangemessenes*), and not to be trusted, for the mind has a faith in an order (*Ordnung*), a simple, constant and universal determination.” (EL §21Z))³⁴ The drive of rational insight is the drive to seek reasons for things in general, and since we are self-aware beings it includes a drive to make sense of ourselves in particular, that is, to comprehend ourselves.

My claim is that the drive towards self-comprehension is the ultimately the source of an agent’s reasons to act. An agent has reason to act on a given motivation insofar as the resulting action advances or sustains her self-comprehension. This suggests that an agent has reason to act on those motivations that would, if she acted on them, issue in action that is comprehensible, or intelligible in the light of her overall self-conception, for by acting in this way she will advance or maintain her self-comprehension. In action that aims in this way at intelligibility, a key role will be played by the agent’s particular self-conceptions. The fact that I am someone’s friend, for instance, implies various kinds of appropriate or fitting actions—those actions that, as Hegel says, conform with the concept of friendship, the actions of a “true” friend.³⁵ Although Hegel says only that a true friend is one whose way of *acting* corresponds with the concept of friendship, it is natural to suppose that it also makes appropriate or fitting various feelings, and motivations. A true friend rejoices in her friend’s accomplishments, sympathises with her in her disappointments, and so on. We need not have a wholly exhaustive or particularly determinate list of such fitting feelings, motivations and actions, of course, but it is important that the meanings and the practical implications of such particular self-conceptions are not simply up to *me*, but are subject to a

³⁴ The passage goes on to say: “It is the same with regard to the powers that govern human action in its infinite diversity.”

³⁵ “We speak, for instance, of a ‘true’ friend, and by that we understand one whose way of acting conforms with the concept of friendship” (EL §24Z2).

certain measure of general agreement. We can always disagree about the nitty gritty, the details of what it means to be a true friend; but the possibility of this disagreement obviously depends upon some deeper level of agreement. The meanings and practical implications of my particular self-conceptions depend to this extent upon social practices and institutions.³⁶

The motivations and actions implied by a particular self-conception are those that, should I adopt them or undertake them, would be susceptible to satisfying explanations; there would be a story to tell about why I did what I did (or felt how I felt) that made reference, at least implicitly, to (say) my conception of myself as your friend. “How come you weren’t at work?” “A friend needed me to help her move house.” These sorts of exchanges are ways of rendering actions intelligible, of contextualising our actions and showing, in Hegel’s words, the “power of the universal of which this particular is the expression.” My motivations to perform actions that are appropriate or fitting in the light of my self-conceptions will thus appear to me as motivations on the basis of which I have reason to act, since acting on them will result in action that would be comprehensible.

As Alasdair Macintyre writes, being intelligible is not just a property our actions must have in order for them to be understood by *others* in this way: we ourselves, in acting, have to be able to understand them as intelligible “if we are to be able to acknowledge them as actions rather than as something which we simply find ourselves doing, being as puzzled as anyone else as to what we are up to in doing whatever it is.”³⁷ The standard response to such agential puzzlement is to *stop acting*, to ask oneself: “What am I up to?” In such cases we are both *intellectually* and *practically* baffled: we stop what we’re doing because we stop knowing what we’re doing.³⁸ In such situations our drive to act intelligibly in the

³⁶ Alasdair Macintyre, “The Intelligibility of Action”, in *Rationality, Relativism and the Human Sciences*, ed. J. Margolis, M. Krausz and R.M. Burian (Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 63-80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁸ Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 209; J. David Velleman, *Practical Reflection* (Palo Alto, CA: CSLI Press, 2007), 27.

light of our self-conceptions, and the drive to comprehend ourselves that underlies it, are being frustrated.

Note that an action's being "comprehensible" or "intelligible" here cannot *depend* upon there being a reason for one to do it. We are looking for a criterion with reference to which actions can be shown to be correct, rational, or justified, and thus a standard that allows us to determine which of our motivations are those on the basis of which we have reason to act; this criterion therefore cannot depend upon the concept of reasons for action.³⁹ What I am suggesting is that Hegel defines this criterion in terms of our general aim of comprehending ourselves. It is the fact that we would be able to give an intelligible account of a prospective action in the light of our self-conceptions, and thereby advance our self-comprehension, that gives us reason to do the action. I propose that this is what Hegel has in mind in the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, that thinking and willing are not two separate faculties, but that "the theoretical is contained in the practical", that "the will is ... a particular way of thinking, thinking translating itself into existence, thinking as the drive to give itself existence." (PR §4Z)

Acting autonomously, then, is a matter of acting in a way that is intelligible, or on the basis of motivations that are intelligible, given the way we conceive of ourselves, and which thereby advances our self-comprehension. This definition moves things on a step, but only a step. The next step is to start to operationalise this account of autonomous agency by explaining how it might be that some actions and motivations could be more intelligible in the light of our self-conceptions than others.

In order to answer this, I need first to elaborate on a point I touched upon briefly in my discussion of character. Hegel sees the individual's character as a "totality" or a

³⁹ Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason", 176-178. Pinkard's reconstruction of Hegel seems to me ambiguous on this point (see e.g. *Hegel's Naturalism*, 99).

“system”, “the individual world-system which a subject is.” (EG §408)⁴⁰ The elements of one’s character, as I said above, are concerns and attachments by attributing which to ourselves we form particular self-conceptions, and these self-conceptions carry with them standards of appropriate (and so also inappropriate) action and emotion. These self-conceptions thus serve to make intelligible having certain other feelings and performing certain actions. Particular self-conceptions can therefore conflict or harmonise with one another to the extent that the feelings and actions they make intelligible conflict or harmonise. Consider again the example of finding yourself, despite yourself, swelling with national pride, revealing some hitherto unnoticed or repressed patriotic or nationalistic attachment to your country. Caring about or valuing something implies certain characteristic feelings and actions relating to the thing in question. Perhaps in this case this would include feelings of loyalty towards the nation, a tendency to privilege my compatriots over foreigners in various ways, a preparedness to defend my country, and so on. Cosmopolitanism or internationalism, by contrast, imply roughly the opposite sorts of actions and feelings, including, for instance, an feelings of solidarity towards other human beings as such, regardless of nationality, and so on. The conception of oneself as a patriot and as a cosmopolitan are incompatible in the sense that a subject possessing both of them could be confronted with situations in which they would not know how to act or to feel, because in order to feel and act intelligibly in the light of its overall self-conception the subject would have to feel and to act in incompatible ways in the very same situation. These two particular self-conceptions cannot sit alongside one another coherently in one and same agent, therefore, because they would frustrate the agent’s aim of acting such that her self-comprehension was advanced: whichever way she acted, a satisfying explanation of

⁴⁰ In the Anthropology, Hegel understands the individual’s actuality as comprising both the sorts of motivations I am describing as an individual’s “character” and also the subject’s *beliefs* about the world (or rather the *material* that will become fully-fledged belief once the dialectic proceeds to the level of Phenomenology and Psychology (EG §§400A, 408Z (118))), whereas in the Phenomenology and Psychology sections he treats of the theoretical and practical aspects of mind separately. He is clearly therefore seeking to understand both the subject’s beliefs and motivations as forming systems or networks (see e.g. EG §398A).

her action would be available to her only if she were able to suppress her knowledge of her countervailing particular self-conception. By contrast, other particular self-conceptions may harmonise with one another, in the sense that the aim of acting intelligibly in the light of both of these self-conceptions would not demand that the agent act in incompatible ways in the same situations; in these cases, I would not need to suppress knowledge of certain elements of my character in order to avail myself of a satisfying explanation of my action.

What this makes clear is that, as I mentioned above, elements of character bear complex, systematic relations to one another. Hegel thus writes of our awareness of our character, or individual “actuality” (see above), as an awareness of an intelligibly interconnected network:

The human being of sound sense and understanding is aware in a self-conscious, intelligent way of this actuality of his which makes up the concrete fulfilment of his individuality (*Individualität*); he has an alert awareness of it in the form of the interconnection between himself and the determinations of that actuality as an external world distinct from himself,⁴¹ and he is similarly aware of this world as a *network of intelligible* (verständlich in sich) *interconnections*. (EG §406A (95-96))

It makes sense to think of such a network as having a core or centre (*Mittelpunkt*) (EG §408Z (120)), and therefore also a periphery.⁴² A motivation can be closer to the centre or core of one’s character than is another motivation to the extent that there are a greater number of other motivations depending upon (because made intelligible by) the former than there are upon the latter. Perhaps internationalism is closer to my core in that revising this motivation would imply revising a great deal of other motivations, and perhaps also beliefs (about equality and human dignity, for instance). Nationalism, by

⁴¹ By talking about the individual as aware of her actuality “as an external world”, Hegel means that such a subject is aware that she is not “immediately identical” with the motivations that make up her character. By contrast, a subject who has “not yet detached the world from myself, not yet posited it as an external entity” believes that “I *am* this whole circle of determinations” (EG §406Z (102)), and so has not grasped herself as a thinking “I”, a subject who has an identity apart from these determinations.

⁴² The view I attribute to Hegel here, in which our motivations form a kind of complex “network” or “system”, is similar to that developed by Robert Noggle, “Kantian Respect and Particular Persons”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, no.3 (1999): 449-477.

contrast, might be peripheral: nothing would hang on it, in the sense that were it not the case that I held this value, none of my other motivations or beliefs would have to change. A motivation's "location" in the system is thus "determined by, and also with, all the others" (EG §398A). There is a kind of holism here: whether or not my possession of a particular motivation is intelligible depends upon all of my other motivations, and all of the connections between them. A motivation can thus be more or less intelligible or comprehensible for me to have, given my other existing motivations; it can either be given an "intelligible location (*Stelle*) in the system" or not (EG §408A). My conception of myself as essentially characterised by that motivation (for example as "an internationalist" or as "a nationalist") can be "a representation *of myself* that harmonises (*übereinstimmt*) with the *totality* of my actuality, with my infinitely determined individuality (*Individualität*)" or one that "contradicts the totality of my actuality" (EG §408Z (119)).

These considerations allow us to make sense of the notion that some actions might be more intelligible than others. A prospective action can be more intelligible for an agent than another prospective action if the motivation underlying the action is more integrated into the agent's character than the motivation underlying the other, for the more a motivation is integrated in an agent's character, the more an action on its basis can be understood as an expression of the *whole* character, of the whole concatenation of motivations that harmonise with the motivation the agent in fact acted on. In such cases our character will be, so to speak, "the universal of which this particular is the expression". By contrast, the less central a motivation, the less an action on its basis can be understood as an expression of the agent's whole character, because it is relatively isolated from the system which constitutes that character. The more integrated or harmonious we can make the motivations that constitute our character, the more comprehensible we will be to ourselves. Indeed, the more integrated our character, the more we will be a recognisable

kind of individual, one whose motivations hang together in an comprehensible way—and the more likely we will be to act in ways that are comprehensible.

The reason actions that can be understood as expressions of the whole of an agent's character are *more* comprehensible than those that can only be understood as arising out of more isolated motivations is because the former are subject to an inherently more *satisfying* kind of explanation.

Character requires, firstly, a formal element, the energy with which a human being, without letting himself be diverted, pursues his aims and interests and in all his actions preserves his harmony (*Übereinstimmung*) with himself. Without character a person does not emerge from his indeterminacy or he slides from one direction to the other. Every human being should therefore be required to show character. A person with character impresses others, *because they know what they are dealing with* (*weil sie wissen, was sie an ihm haben*) (EG §395Z (51-52), my emphasis).

Action on the basis of more peripheral or isolated motivations is susceptible to explanation, to be sure. But the more motivations are cut off from all other of one's motivations, the more actions that proceed from them are treated as pathological, and the motivations whence they arise treated as in need of further explanation—an explanatory dynamic that may continue indefinitely (cf. EL §211). By contrast, an action proceeding from integrated motivations is more directly intelligible as the kind of action appropriate given the kind of character I have. An agent driven to act in ways that are intelligible given her character will thus find reason to act on those motivations that are better integrated, and will seek to integrate the elements of her character; doing this will result in actions that better satisfy the drive to self-comprehension that is identical with the standpoint of the agent. I have said that the agent's actions are autonomous in so far as they are motivated by this drive, but we can go further and say that they are *more* autonomous insofar as they are not only motivated by this drive but *better satisfy it*. In this case actions resulting from well-integrated motivations will be more autonomous than those resulting from less well-

integrated motivations. The reason *why* I feel alienated from certain of my motivations, then, is because acting upon them would frustrate my aim of acting in ways that are intelligible—and so would frustrate the drive towards self-comprehension.

A strength of this theory of autonomous agency is that it allows for the idea that autonomous agency is a matter of degree, not an all-or-nothing affair. In the *Philosophy of Mind*, however, Hegel eschews presenting us with shades of grey and instead gives us pictures of the extremes (EG §408Z (116)): at one end, there is “the inner *harmony* of the self-consciousness persisting imperturbably in the *one* centre of its actuality” (EG §408Z (122)), the “internally consistent (*konsequentes*)” (EG §408) subject with

an alert (*präsente*) consciousness of the ordered totality of its individual (*individuellen*) world, into the system of which it *subsumes* each *particular* content of sensation, representation, desire, inclination, etc., as it arises, and inserts it in its intelligible (*verständigen*) place in the system; it is the *dominant genius* over these particularities. (EG §408A)⁴³

At the other end, there is a subject whose character is so disintegrated that it “acquires *two centres*”, and becomes deranged (*verrückt*) (EG §408Z (120)). On the basis of this thought Hegel goes on to develop a whole theory of madness, whose dubious claims we need not explore; the important thing for our discussion is that he understands derangement as a kind of *unfreedom*, or heteronomy, and its opposite a kind of *freedom*, or autonomy. The deranged individual has a particular representation of himself (a particular self-conception) that completely contradicts his character, “and yet cannot give up this representation but insists on making it actual”, that is, acting upon a motivation that is not integrated into his character (EG §408Z (126)). Derangement is a kind of “illness of self-feeling” (VPG27 110/141), and overcoming it entails “the absolute liberation of self-

⁴³ “The self-possessed (*besonnene*) human being orders (*ordnet*) every particular feeling in a totality.” (VPG27 111/142)

feeling, the soul's untroubled being-at-home-with-itself (*Beisichsein*) in all the particularity of its content", and the attainment of "free individuality (*Individualität*)" (EG §410Z (133)).

This is self-feeling: I obtain the totality through overcoming the particularity (*Partikularität*). I make that particularity ideal, and I am at home with myself (*ich bei mir selbst bin*). (VPG27 110/141)

Harmonious self-feeling and derangement thus represent two poles between which we can imagine a spectrum of more and less autonomous agency, that is, actions that are to greater and less extents comprehensible as expressions of the whole characters of the agents that perform them, and thereby which to a greater or less extent satisfy those agents' drive to self-comprehension.⁴⁴

Actions on the basis of more integrated motivations will be more autonomous not because I am *identified* with, or reflectively endorse, those elements—as if "I" am something tucked away somewhere inside this core. Nor is it the fact *that* something is an element of my character that makes it that action springing from it is autonomous. Rather, action that arises out of core elements of character is autonomous because it is more comprehensible, and thus can be understood as ultimately satisfying a drive towards self-comprehension that is inescapable for us as thinking beings, and which thus constitutes our standpoint as agents.

3. Thinking animals and other animals

The previous section explained that the concept of autonomous agency demands that action flow from and satisfy our drive towards self-knowledge or self-comprehension. But it seems odd, on the face of it, to suppose that human beings are motivated by such a

⁴⁴ "When spirit strives towards its centre (*Mittelpunkt*), it strives to perfect its own freedom" (VG 55/48).

drive. Does any actual agent ever act on this motivation? We might worry that the picture of autonomous agency I am attributing to Hegel implies a distorted picture of what really goes on when we act—as if a completely detached subject hovers above its various motivations before plumping for the one that makes it more comprehensible to itself. The purpose of this section is to arrive at an account of how the aim of self-comprehension relates to our more mundane ends that assuages this worry. In order to achieve this I begin by examining what Hegel thinks about purposes, and purposiveness, more generally.

When thinking about the nature of purposes or ends (*Zwecke*), Hegel cautions, “we must not merely think of the form of the end as it is in us, in conscious beings” (VGPI 382/332)—what he calls the idea of the “subjective end” (WLII 548/823) or sometimes “finite” or “external” purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) (EL §204A). But let us start with that idea, which is familiar enough. It is the idea that we have certain aims and goals that we seek to bring about by our actions. To this conception of purposiveness corresponds a particular mode of explanation. When we explain purposive action in accordance with this model, we are seeking to render it intelligible by attributing to the subject, as Willem deVries puts it, “a complex intentional state (complex in that it involves both beliefs and desires, cognitive and evaluative elements) which is causally sufficient” for her performing the action.⁴⁵ We understand an action when we attribute an intentional state to the agent that allows us to see how the action seemed worth doing to the agent. Here, the purpose or end is given in the desiring element of this complex intentional state.

We have an additional concept of purposiveness, however. Hegel’s inspiration here is Aristotle.⁴⁶ Hegel follows Aristotle in drawing a close connection between what something *is*—its essence or nature, or its *concept*—and its being teleologically organised in a functional sense, which involves what he calls an “immanent” or “internal” sense of the

⁴⁵ Willem A. deVries, “The Dialectic of Teleology”, *Philosophical Topics* 19, no.2 (1991): 51-70 (55).

⁴⁶ See the references to Aristotle at e.g. EL 22/10; §204A; EN §360A; see especially in his discussion of Aristotle in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, e.g. VGPII 174-177/157-161.

end or of purposiveness (VGPII 174/157). Understanding something in this teleological way is, in general, a matter of understanding how the elements of the thing contribute to its being the kind of thing that it is, having the form that it does. A house, for instance, is defined in terms of its function of providing shelter.⁴⁷ Understanding the construction of the house as “immanently” teleological is a matter of grasping how the elements of the house—the walls, the roof, the door, etc.—serve as means to this end, thus contributing to the house’s being a house, that is, being such as to be able to serve as a shelter. Notice the connection with the good, with normative assessment: a good house is one that is good at serving as a shelter, and so at keeping out the rain, staying warm inside, and so on. Similarly a good wall is one that enables the house as a whole to do this (that is *its* function) by being sturdy and impermeable.

This form of organisation is what accounts for the unity of the thing, for it being a particular substance in Aristotle’s terms. What it is for something to be a unified object cannot be a matter of its being literally physically, that is, spatio-temporally, contiguous. After all, the lid of my water bottle unscrews and completely physically detaches from the rest of it, and for all that the lid is still part of the bottle. What makes the lid a part of the bottle? The fact that it is necessary for the bottle to be what it is, which is to say, for it to fulfill its function: to enable me to transport and drink water. Without the lid the bottle is defective, or deficient with respect to its function, because I cannot transport water in it without it sloshing around and spilling. Again, there is a clear connection with the possibility of normative judgment here. A water bottle that was designed without a lid is obviously a bad water bottle: it is bad at fulfilling its function.

In these cases (the house and the water bottle) the object of teleological explanation is, of course, something produced by an artificer, and hence something that has the

⁴⁷ An example of Aristotle’s (*De Anima (On the Soul)*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 403b) to which Hegel refers (VGPII 200/181). Also cf. section 3 of Christine M. Korsgaard, “Aristotle’s Function Argument”, in her *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 129-150.

function it has only because some hunk of matter has had this form imposed upon it by an intelligent designer. But the teleological explanation—how its parts enable it to fulfill its function—is not *itself* an explanation of how this matter came to be given a form by an artificer, and need have no reference to that process at all.

Functions can be understood as characteristic activities. In her defence of Aristotle's function argument, Christine Korsgaard notes that *ergon* (function) and *energeia* (activity) are etymologically linked.⁴⁸ We might understand the functions of things such as houses in this way (where the characteristic activity of a house is *serving* as a shelter), but this idea really comes into its own for the first time in the explanation of living beings (VL 205/208-209). Here, the function is not some purpose assigned to a particular portion of matter by an artificer, but the living being's sheer activity of maintaining itself as the sort of thing that it is. So we can understand the "function" of a thing, independently of what it was made to do, as its characteristic kind of activity. Living beings are the sorts of things that strive to maintain themselves as the sorts of things that they are, assimilating inorganic nature through the nutritive process and seeking to produce more of their kind through the reproductive process (the "process of the genus" (WLII 486/774). This is, again, not to claim that living beings have had a purpose assigned to them by some designer; neither is it to ascribe a particular intentional state to the living being. Both of these would be to confuse internal with external teleology (EN §245Z). As with the bottle and the house, the teleological explanation of a living organism does not pertain to the process of its coming to be the kind of thing that it is, but just to the internal organisation that allows it to perform its function. Living beings are the kind of things that strive to maintain themselves as the kinds of things that they are: this is a definition of living, a definition of the logical category of life (EL §§216-222).⁴⁹ We *can* also regard the living being mechanistically, or as

⁴⁸ Korsgaard, "Aristotle's Function Argument", 134-135, and see VGPII 154/138.

⁴⁹ Korsgaard, "Aristotle's Function Argument", 141.

just an aggregation of parts; but then, Hegel says, we would simply be treating it as a dead thing, rather than in accordance with the category of life (WLII 476/766).

The living being maintains itself because it is in itself end. It exists, works, has drives, and these drives are its ends; it knows nothing of these ends, it is merely living ... The animal works at satisfying these drives, i.e. at reaching the end; it relates itself to external things, partly mechanically, partly chemically. But the relation of its activity does not remain mechanical or chemical. The product, the result, is rather the animal itself, it is its own end (*ist Selbstzweck*), brings forth in its activity only itself ... Self-maintenance (*Selbsterhaltung*) is a continual production by which nothing new, but always the old, arises; it is a taking back of activity for the production itself (VGPI 383-384/332-3).

What this means for Hegel is that all the parts of a living whole, and all of its activities, are organised around the goal of a kind of self-realisation, a realisation of the concept (*Begriff*) of the thing in question (WLII 480/769). It is only to the extent that the animal continues to be activated by this goal that it continues to be the kind of thing it is at all, continues to maintain its form, rather than disintegrating into its mere matter:

It is only as this constantly renewed inner process that the living being *is* ... When the soul has fled from the body, the elementary powers of objectivity [the chemical and mechanical processes—TC] come into play. These powers are, so to speak, continually ready to pounce, to begin their process in the organic body, and life is a constant struggle against them (EL §§218Z, 219Z).

Note here, too, the connection with the good, with normative assessment. An organism engaging successfully in this activity is faring well, and one that isn't—for instance, because of disease—is faring poorly.

Functional or internal purposiveness has, like external purposiveness or the “subjective end” model, its concomitant mode of explanation. This is what Hegel calls “*comprehension proper*” (EG §467Z). We explain something this way when we come to understand *how* it is that its various elements, properties, or activities contribute to its fulfilling its function—in the case of a living organism, maintaining itself as the kind of

thing that it is. In the type of explanation appropriate to the “subjective end” model, there is no necessary connection between the end and the nature of the agent. The “end lies outside” the nature of the agent (EL §205Z). In contrast, when we comprehend the activity of an animal, say in explaining why the lion stalks the long grass, we do so ultimately with reference to the lion’s function of self-maintenance. In this case, the connection between the end and the nature of the lion is intrinsic. Because the connection is intrinsic, such explanations rely on and reveal the essence or concept of the thing in question.⁵⁰

The idea of function generally also allows us to talk about what is good *for* the functionally-organised thing in question. In the case of the house, we might say it is good for the wall to get damp-proofed, because a good wall needs to be impermeable, because it is defined functionally with reference to the house, which is something that serves as a shelter. In the case of animals, we might say that it is good for an animal to get adequate rest, because only in that way will it be alert enough to evade predators, and only by doing that can it fulfill *its* function, maintaining itself as the kind of thing that it is. Or again, it is good for us, inasmuch as we too are animals, to take exercise, to eat healthily, to not stay out too long in the midday sun, and so on.

Now, houses cannot damp-proof their own walls; the needs of houses have to be attended to by diligent homeowners. But the functional needs (*Bedürfnisse*) of animals can be attended to by the animals themselves (EN §360). Animals have sensation (*Empfindung*), drive (*Trieb*) and instinct (*Instinkt*) (EG §381Z), and so they can actively seek out those things that are good for them in the functional sense, that is, in the sense of enabling them to perform their function well. And this is just what animals do, at least in the best-case scenario. They have drives and instincts that tend towards those states of affairs that conduce to their own well-functioning. And they will sense or find those states of affairs as attractive, good, and those states of affairs that tend towards their ill-functioning as

⁵⁰ See again deVries, “The Dialectic of Teleology”, 58.

aversive, bad. This is what Hegel means when he says that, in the case of functional teleology, and specifically living beings, “the good gives itself content” (VGPI 383/332). What this means is that animals will tend to take as their “subjective ends” those ends that are good for them in the functional sense: i.e., those conditions and states of affairs that tend to give rise to or maintain the animal’s own well-functioning. Because there are things that are good and bad for an animal, there is already value and normativity here, even before we get to the level of rational, spiritual animals.⁵¹ The animal senses its environment in terms set by its function of self-maintenance. It thereby senses its environment as something “*conformable* (entsprechend)” or appropriate to it, in the sense that it is laden with goals deriving, in this way, from its nature (WLII 482/771). The animal cannot, we suppose, think of its ends as goods for it. “The living being exists, works, has drives, and these drives are its ends; it knows nothing of these ends, it is merely living” (VGPI 383/332); “the animal is not yet aware of its ends as ends” (EN §360Z). Nevertheless, it *has* subjective ends, and these will be determined by its functional good. This is not at all to say that, in the case of an actual animal, all of its drives will all tend towards its functioning well as a matter of fact. We human beings, for instance, are inclined to consume far greater quantities of sugar than is good for us. But at one time in our evolutionary history, this *was* good for us.

Hegel seeks to understand the activity of mind on the model of animal life: the activity of beings animated by an aim of comprehending themselves should be understood as a kind of activity of self-maintenance.

The subjectivity of the animal contains a contradiction and the drive to preserve itself by sublating this contradiction; this self-maintenance (*Selbsterhaltung*) is the privilege of the living thing and, in a still higher degree, of mind (EG §381Z).

⁵¹ Cf. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism*, 26.

Animals can be understood as striving to maintain themselves as the kinds of things that they are: striving to embody their particular concepts. Human beings are living creatures, of course, and so come fitted with a panoply of similar natural motivations. But they also strive, Hegel says, to comprehend themselves.

We are now in a position to make the idea of actions proceeding from the aim of self-comprehension less abstract, and so to clarify the relationship between this end and our other ends. What the model of living beings suggests is that we can understand this relationship on the model of the way in which living beings' function of self-maintenance relates to their subjective ends. If I am right that for Hegel a drive to self-comprehension is intrinsic to thinking beings then it would not be a great further step to say that for him the function, in the sense of characteristic activity, of thinking beings is to comprehend themselves. This means there will be certain behaviours and attitudes that we can say are good for us, or bad for us, in the functional sense, with respect to this activity. Further, in the best case, although of course not always, a thinking agent will take these actions to be worth doing, and so it will strike her subjectively that she does indeed have reason to do or feel those very things that are good for her, functionally speaking, given her nature as a thinking being. These actions will be those that give rise to self-comprehension, which are those actions which can be given the most satisfying kind of explanation. This does not mean that this is *how* they strike her—i.e. as actions that are worth doing because they are good for her in the functional sense—any more than it strikes the cat that it is worth chasing the mouse because that would contribute to her maintaining herself as a cat. They will just strike her, naïvely, as things that are worth doing for their own sakes, as things she has reason to do.

Our actions can thus *proceed from* our aim of self-comprehension without it being the case that an agent consciously choose a particular action because she believes it contributes to this goal. The functional picture purports to explain why certain actions

would appear as better or worse to an agent, as worth doing or worth avoiding, because these contribute to the agent's functioning well as a self-comprehending being. The drive towards self-comprehension makes itself felt in the process of thinking about what to do, the process of practical reasoning, in that it makes considerations appear as weighing in favour of or against an action, to the extent that acting on them would be more or less comprehensible given the agent's overall self-conception, and so would further or hinder the agent's process of self-comprehension.

At the beginning of this section I raised the worry that agents never really act on the motivation of trying to comprehend themselves. What these reflections have made clear is that we can act on this motivation as it were at one remove. It is an aim that therefore animates us without its necessarily thereby being a consciously entertained aim. It is not that we regard our explicit aims as mere means to satisfying this motivation; it is rather as if—and this is the way Hegel expresses it—reason *itself* regards our explicit aims as means to its *own* satisfaction. Reason, he famously says, is cunning (*listig*) (WLII 452/746; EL §209Z). I regard that as metaphor; reason does not have ulterior motives, since it is not the kind of thing that can have motives at all. It is, nevertheless, a useful personification, inasmuch as it captures the relationship between the aim of the drive of rational insight and our mundane ends. Later—at dusk, as it were—we are able to come to recognise that we are animated by the goal of comprehending ourselves, and, indeed, that this aim is constitutive of our identity as minded subjects, such that its contribution to our activity is what makes that activity into autonomous action, as opposed to mere intentional activity.

4. Looking ahead

I argued that autonomous action is action that satisfies the agent's drive towards self-comprehension by being intelligible in the light of her overall self-conception. I argued, further, that actions that are more intelligible will be those that stem from motivations that are more integrated in an individual's character. Finally, I argued that the aim of acting so as to advance our self-comprehension can animate our action without its necessarily being our consciously entertained aim.

In this chapter I have been discussing autonomous agency as it relates to the individual's character. But Hegel thinks that the drive towards self-comprehension operates along two axes. On the one hand we seek comprehension in relation to “the *particular* capacities, character, inclinations, and foibles of the individual (*Individuums*)” (EG §377), and this has been my focus so far. On the one hand, however, the drive towards self-comprehension leads us to seek ever more adequate accounts of our nature in general, of our essence (*Wesen*). The “philosophy of subjective mind” can be understood as a kind of highly abstract, speculative history about how minded creatures might come to emerge from nature and to gradually reconceive both the world and themselves as part of this overall fundamental project. This is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Personhood and the duty of recognition

This chapter functions as a bridge between the account of autonomous agency set out in the previous chapter, and the account of Hegel's social and political philosophy that is still to come. The previous chapter looked at how self-comprehension bears on the autonomous agent as an individual characterised by the concerns and attachments of "character". The present one asks how agents driven to comprehend themselves might be driven to conceive and reconceive of the *kinds* of beings that they are, of what they are most essentially, a process that Hegel sees as, in part, an historical, developmental process. This issue matters because Hegel ultimately seeks to understand ethical demands as demands we impose on ourselves in virtue of the way in which we conceive of our essence, and so he sees this developmental process as leading autonomous agents to conceive of themselves in such a way that would support certain kinds of ethical practices and institutions. This is how I plan to interpret Hegel's contention that mind has an "implicitly ethical nature (*an sich seienden sittlichen Natur*)" (EG §382Z).

In the first section I explain Hegel's claim that autonomous agents stand under a "duty of recognition". The possibility of this duty depends upon there being a way of conceiving of ourselves that is inescapable for any self-comprehending agent, a concept of our essence, which supports us acting in ways that amount to recognising others. This concept of our essence is a concept of ourselves as "persons", in Hegel's technical sense. In sections 2 and 3, I reconstruct what I see as Hegel's argument for the conclusion that we must conceive of ourselves as persons, in this sense. In the final section, I clarify how conceiving of ourselves as persons rationally compels us to recognise others.

1. The essence of mind and the possibility of a ‘duty of recognition’

In the previous chapter, I argued that acting autonomously is a matter of acting in a way that is intelligible given the way we conceive of ourselves, acting in such a way as thereby to satisfy our drive towards self-comprehension. But Hegel’s aim, as I see it, is not only to set out an account of autonomous agency, but also to demonstrate that such autonomous agents act autonomously ultimately by acting *ethically* (and that, further, this ethical action will consist in assenting to or affirming certain social and political institutions).¹ The question for this chapter is how Hegel can justify this claim.

First, let us put this claim a little more precisely. For Hegel, ethical action is, in general, action that expresses recognition (*Anerkennung*) of other individuals. Recognising another agent consists in—I propose just to stipulate this at this point—seeing certain of their aims and interests as giving rise to objective reasons that motivate one to act to further those aims.² Thus, an action that expresses recognition is action directed at two ends: the recognised individual, for the sake of whom one acts, and the aims of that individual that one acts in order to further; one acts to further those aims *because* one recognises the individual. The recogniser sees the recognised as “counting” (*geltend*), as Hegel likes to put it. And since acting ethically means for Hegel assenting to or affirming certain social and political institutions—the system of right (*Recht*)—he can claim that through these institutions individuals express their recognition of one another, their mutual recognition (EG §436A; BPhG 76/77).

¹ For the moment I am using “ethical” in an everyday rather than the peculiarly Hegelian sense. I just mean action that takes others into account, respecting their interests and aims, in recognisably moral or ethical ways. The whole of the system of *Recht* (and not just ethical life) involves individuals acting “ethically” in this sense.

² It will gradually become clear that this captures what Hegel says about recognition. The terminology of “objective” (as opposed to “subjective”) reasons derives from Thomas Nagel’s early work *The Possibility of Altruism* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1970), and has since come to be supplanted by the terminology of “agent-neutral” and “agent-relative” reasons (see e.g. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 152-153). In what follows I do not cleave strictly to one or the other terminology.

Note that this is Hegel's account of the *form* that ethical action (and thus *Recht*) takes, and it does not yet tell us what the *matter*, or as Hegel says, the *substance*, of recognition is (EG §436A). That is, it does not say just which of an agent's aims demand recognition. I will consider this issue in the next chapter; here I am interested in the issues raised by Hegel's understanding of the form. The question, then, is why we should think that autonomous agents must take other autonomous agents into account, count them, in this ethical way at all: why we ought to think that, *because* we are autonomous agents, we stand under what Hegel describes as a "duty of recognition (*Pflicht des Anerkennens*)" (BPhG 74/75).

Previously I argued that to act more, rather than less, autonomously is to act in a way that expresses particular self-conceptions that refer to motivations that are more rather than less integrated in one's character. Since, however, character refers to that concatenation of motivations that distinguishes the individual from other individuals, agents will legitimately differ with respect to what acting autonomously involves. In terms of character, then, what it means for one individual to act autonomously will not necessarily be the same as what it means for another to act autonomously—an important thought to which we shall return. But to say that autonomous agents stand under a duty of recognition means that *any* agent ought to enter into and maintain relations of mutual recognition with others. And so it follows that there must be some way in which *all* agents must conceive of themselves, some universally inescapable self-conception, where this self-conception makes it a requirement for intelligibility that one be motivated and act in ways that amount to recognising others, such that only in being motivated and acting in these ways one is acting autonomously.

This inescapable self-conception would be a concept of our essence (*Wesen*), a concept of “who we unavoidably are”.³ As I mentioned above (§1.4), the drive towards self-comprehension operates, so to speak, along two axes. On the one hand, it operates along the axis of particular character, and on the other it operates along the axis of our essence: “in general [the human being] must see itself, represent itself, fix before itself what thinking finds as its essence” (VÄI 51/31; EG §377). In this chapter, then, we turn to this latter aspect. Only if a conception of ourselves is universally inescapable can we make sense of the idea that the actions implicit in that self-conception really are obligatory, are duties—that, on some level, we are not really able not to assent to them. Here, the “not able not to assent” does not imply, of course, a kind of physical incapacity. Rather, a failure to assent to them, to see them as obligatory, would reflect a mistake about who one *is*, most essentially. And so someone vacillating over the matter would not really be some *one* considering their options: it would be a person caught between their true identity and some impossible conceit. Hegel therefore connects the basis of our duties in general with our knowledge of our *essence* (EG §377Z).

This concept of our essence would make it a requirement for intelligibility to act on and to cultivate particular motivations. Hegel refers to this category of motivation under the rubric of “practical feeling” (*praktische Gefühl*).⁴ It follows, then, that acting on this kind of motivation would amount to acting in ways that express recognition of others. And thus Hegel claims that the system of *Recht* can be understood as a system in which individuals act on the basis of such “truthful” feelings:

Feelings, provided that they are of a truthful sort, are the same as what virtues and duties are. As the latter, feelings exist in their genuine style and objectivity. These feelings form a system of determinations, the objective determinations of freedom,

³ Pippin, “Hegel’s Ethical Rationalism”, 446.

⁴ Thus Hegel says that practical feelings belong “to the essentiality (*Wesenheit*) of the subject itself, arising out of it, not externally found, but *justified (begründet)* by the subject’s own essence (*eigenen Wesen*)” (VPG27 244/251, my emphasis). Equally, feelings can be “*one-sided*, unessential (*unwesentlich*), bad” (EG §471A).

the system of ethical life, and these realised, actual, is life in the state. (VPG27 246/253)⁵

So: a concept of our essence will make having and acting on certain motivations a requirement for intelligibility, and the resulting actions will amount to recognising others, and so discharging our duty of recognition; and because through such actions will we be acting in ways that are intelligible, and thus satisfy our drive towards self-comprehension, we will be acting autonomously. This explains why Hegel says that “[d]uty is the attainment of our essence” and “the winning of affirmative freedom” (PR §149Z).

The question of how to make sense of the idea that minded or thinking agents must act ethically towards other agents, that they stand under a duty of recognition, therefore turns into the question of how to make sense of the *essence* of mind—or rather, of the way minded beings conceive themselves essentially to be.

This latter equation is not simply an equivocation, as it seems at first glance, and this requires some comment before I move on to the argument. If we mean by “essence” what is traditionally meant by the term, those properties without which something would cease to be the kind of entity it is, then we are, as we have already seen, essentially self-comprehending beings, or essentially beings driven to comprehend ourselves (even if this essence is not always explicit to us (EG §385Z)). Thus Hegel says: “the highest command (*Gebot*), the essence (*Wesen*) of mind is to cognise (*erkennen*) itself, to know (*zu wissen*) itself and put itself forth (*sich ... hervorzubringen*) as what it is” (VG 75/64). This means, among other things, that we are essentially beings that form conceptions of our essence. Yet Hegel also claims that what we are essentially is *determined by* these conceptions we form of our essence. “Mind is essentially (*wesentlich*) only what it knows of itself.” (EG §385Z) Or again, mind’s nature “consists in self-revelation (*Selbstoffenbarung*)” (EG §383Z), a self-revelation

⁵ Or again: “The treatment of urges, inclinations, and passions in their genuine content is thus essentially the theory of legal, moral, and ethical duties.” (EG §474A)

that “does not reveal *something*; its determinacy and content is this very revelation” (EG §383). Because Hegel thinks the content of this self-revelation—what we conceive our essence to be—changes and develops throughout history, it apparently follows that our very essence changes throughout history, and so Hegel here departs from the traditional understanding of the term “essence”. And further, because minded beings will not always conceive of themselves *as* self-comprehending beings, it seems to follow that, at certain times at least, mind will have two distinct essences, which is impossible.

This logically egregious result can, however, be avoided. The question, as Michael Hardimon puts it, is how Hegel can coherently claim both that mind has a true, fixed essence, and that its essence changes and develops over time.⁶ The first step in avoiding this contradiction is to see that the (fixed) essence of mind is its characteristic *activity*: the activity of gradually comprehending itself. Activities or actions are extended in time; they have beginnings and ends.

To say that mind exists would seem at first to say: it is something finished. On the contrary, it is something active. Activity is its essence; it is its own product, and is therefore its own beginning and its own end (VG 55/48; cf. EG §442Z).

The action of mind gradually comprehending itself involves a sequence of different, ever more adequate (in a way still to be explained) concepts of its essence, but is not simply reducible to the concepts that go to make up this sequence. As an action, it is made up of these stages but not decomposable into them without remainder. It is the whole action (cf. EL §227Z). It is, as Hegel puts it, an historical deed:

The history of mind is its own *deed* (Tat). Mind is only what it does, and what it does is to make itself the object of its own consciousness. In history its deed is to gain consciousness of itself as mind, to apprehend (*zu erfassen*) itself in its

⁶ Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, 46. Hardimon here acknowledges this paradox but does not seek to dissolve it.

construing (*auslegend*) of itself. This apprehension (*Erfassen*) is its being (*Sein*) and principle (PR §343).

To say that mind's essence is determined by the conceptions that it forms of its essence is, then, not to contradict the claim that its (fixed) essence is to comprehend itself, for the latter is an historical activity or "deed" made up of, and so determined by, the particular conceptions of its essence that mind forms along the way, and is not intelligible apart from them.⁷ When we come to realise that this historical activity is our true essence—and it is precisely such a realisation Hegel means to effect in his readers through his philosophy—we do not come into a new bit of knowledge that might contradict the other concepts mind has previously formed of its essence. Rather, what philosophy apprises us of is a kind of retrospective account of what we've been up to this whole time, an account that shows how all our particular strivings hang together as parts of our historical deed, as orientated by the aim of self-comprehension. This historical deed is an expression of our capacity to act autonomously, inasmuch as the activities of conceiving of what we are essentially and acting on the basis of such conceptions is an expression of the drive towards self-comprehension (VG 54/47).

A few philosophical problems with this view of essence suggest themselves at this point. First, is it really at all plausible to think that what we are essentially is defined by how we conceive ourselves to be essentially? Here we should recall something mentioned in the previous chapter, namely that in relation to agency what Hegel believes are important are the *conceptions* one forms of oneself and one's motivations. In determining ourselves we are determined in part by the representations and conceptions we form of our particular motivations. Combining this claim with the above thesis that mind *is* what it *does* yields the result that there just is nothing more to one's having a certain essence than one conceiving of oneself as having that essence and for that conception to be effective in determining

⁷ See Mark Alznauer, *Hegel's Theory of Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 42-45, for a contrasting and more "essentialist" interpretation of this issue in Hegel.

one's conduct (cf. EL §140Z). Hegel is saying that we *make* a certain conception of ourselves essential by *taking* it as essential.⁸ It is a matter of what Hegel calls our conduct, our *Verhalten*. One line of thought about what it means to take a conception as essential (a line of thought I shall run with presently) is that it is a conception that forms part of the necessary background against which I can have *any* conception of myself.⁹

Second, how can such a picture make sense of the idea that certain conceptions of our essence are more rather than less adequate than others? For if we can effectively make true a concept of our essence just by taking it to be true, there seems to be no available standard with reference to which we could determine its adequacy. What constrains and provides a standard for this activity? The answer is that concepts of our essence can be more or less comprehensible as such—by being, for instance, simpler (VG 56/49; EL §21Z). Those conceptions of our essence that are more comprehensible we thus have good reason to adopt—or retrospectively, we can see that there was a good reason for mind to have adopted them, that it is rational for thinking beings generally to have progressed in this direction in the way they conceive of themselves. And inasmuch as they make us and our actions more comprehensible, through acting on such conceptions we act more autonomously. Thus through this history mind “strives to perfect (*zu vervollkommen*) its freedom; this striving is essential to mind.” (VG 55/48, my emphasis) Autonomy, again, comes in degrees.

To summarise: Hegel's claim is that autonomous agents stand under a duty of recognition. The possibility of such a duty rests on there being a way of conceiving of ourselves that is inescapable for any agent, that we cannot but treat as essential, that makes acting and being motivated in ways that amount to recognising others a requirement for intelligibility. This latter conception of our essence will be the outcome of a developmental

⁸ See Robert B. Brandom, “The structure of desire and recognition: Self-consciousness and self-constitution”, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 33, no.1 (2007): 127-150 (129 and *passim*); Robert B. Pippin, *Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 68-69.

⁹ Cf. Brandom, “The structure of desire and recognition”, 149.

process of mind gradually adopting conceptions of itself that are more comprehensible, such that in acting on the basis of them minded beings act more autonomously, perfect their freedom. Hegel describes this developmental process of mind in the “Subjective Mind” section of his *Philosophy of Mind*, and in what follows I reconstruct this argument.

2. The dialectic of objectivity and the humility of thinking

Hegel’s argument can be seen as a member of a family of arguments that attempt in various ways to demonstrate that ethical commitments are imposed on us by the way we necessarily conceive of ourselves—by the way we conceive of our essence, in Hegel’s terms.¹⁰ Hegel is, again, not particularly careful in his use of terminology here; he describes the relevant concept of our essence as, amongst other things, a concept of ourselves as “universal”, and as “infinite” (see e.g. VG 175/144; VGPI 121/99). He also describes it as a concept of ourselves as persons, as characterised by personhood (*Persönlichkeit*), and that is how I will refer to it here.¹¹

¹⁰ See e.g. Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*; Christine M. Korsgaard et al., *The Sources of Normativity*, ed. Onora O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120-122; Christine M. Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18-26. The key philosophical forebear of this family is Kant. At an important point in the *Groundwork*, his appeal to the way a rational agent, in acting, necessarily represents (*vorstellt*) herself (namely, as an end in herself) is a crucial premise in his argument for the conclusion that we must respect humanity—that is, rational agency, the capacity to act for reasons—in others too, by always treating it as an end in itself (Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A German-English Edition*, ed. Jens Timmermann, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 86/87/429. (All further references to this German/English edition of the *Groundwork* will be given in this format, namely: German page number/English page number/*Akademie* page number).

¹¹ See e.g. Hegel’s brief summary of subjective mind: “[T]he entire activity of subjective mind is directed to apprehending (*erfassen*) itself as itself ... When it has attained to being-for-itself, then it is no longer merely subjective, but *objective* mind ... Objective mind is person and as such has a reality of its freedom [initially—TC] in property” (EG §385Z). Compounding the interpretive challenges at this point is the fact that Hegel also says this concept of our essence *is itself a concept of ourselves as free* (EG §482A). In order to explain what he means by freedom here, however, he immediately refers to the Christian idea that human beings have unconditional value because they are the object of divine *agape*: “This idea [i.e. freedom—TC] came into the world through Christianity, according to which the individual (*Individuum*) as such has an *infinite* value since it is the object and aim of God’s love” (ibid.) I think that in identifying the concept of our essence itself as a concept of ourselves as free Hegel muddies the waters somewhat. The key point is that individuals who conceive of themselves as persons can realise their knowledge of themselves as

An individual who conceives of herself as a person, in this technical sense, takes herself to *count*, and takes others to *count*. That is, a person takes herself to be pursuing ends whose value is also a value *for others*, a value that is appreciable from a point of view that transcends her individual point of view, so as to provide reasons for others; and she takes others to be pursuing similar such ends, so that she takes herself to have reasons to act in ways that further their ends too. She thus, at least implicitly, commits herself to acting and deliberating in ways that are harmonisable with other agents, as she takes herself to be one agent amongst other agents pursuing a good that is a *shared object* for all persons.

To conceive of ourselves as persons, thus understood, is therefore to conceive of ourselves as moral and ethical beings. The “act whereby I take possession of my personhood, of my substantial essence,” Hegel says, is the act whereby I “make myself a responsible being, capable of possessing rights (*einem Rechts- und Zurechnungsfähigen*) and with a moral and religious life” (PR §66A). That is to say, I submit, that personhood is the concept of our essence that grounds our mutually recognitive action by making our being motivated and acting in ways that amount to recognising others a requirement for intelligibility. Understood in this way, personhood is the fundamental concept for understanding the normative basis of Hegel’s social and political philosophy:¹²

... the legislation and the whole circumstances of the people have their ground only in the concept that mind forms of itself, in the categories that it has ... Connected with this on the practical side, is the fact that actual freedom, political freedom, blossoms. This only begins where the individual (*Individuum*) for himself as individual knows himself as universal, as essential (*Wesentliches*), as having infinite value, or where the subject has attained the consciousness of personhood, thus wants to simply to count for himself (*also schlechthin für sich gelten will*) (VGPI 116/95).

persons, and so act autonomously or freely, only by acting in ways that express recognition of themselves and others.

¹² Hegel also uses “person” and “personhood” in other, narrower senses (see §3.1, below).

The explanation of the possibility of a duty of recognition depends, then, upon Hegel providing an argument to show how beings driven to comprehend themselves would be driven to conceive of themselves essentially as persons, in his technical sense. I believe we can represent Hegel's general strategy here in the following way. He sets out to show how agents driven to comprehend themselves must conceive of themselves as persons if they are to conceive of themselves in any way at all. Since we can assume that autonomous agents must conceive of themselves in some way—this, I take it, follows from the idea that we are self-interpreting beings, as I said in the previous chapter—it follows that, if Hegel's argument works, he will have shown that we must conceive of ourselves as persons. To explain this argument will take the next two sections.

We can start by asking how an agent, just conceiving herself as an individual, with a particular character, must conceive of herself. Note first that, as I have presented things so far, such an individual conceives of herself in a way that is at odds with the idea of conceiving of oneself as a person. Acting in such a way as to make sense given our characters means acting in pursuit of ends arising from elements of my character, for “special ends (*speziellen Zwecken*).” (VG 85/72) In this way, an agent “conducts itself (*verhält sich*) towards a universe determined in accordance with its *individual* standpoint (*individuellen Standpunkt*)” (EG §402Z (86); cf. EG §§406Z (107), 408Z (121)). Since, again, my character distinguishes me from other individuals, which motivations are intelligible for me to act upon will be dependent upon all the other motivations I have, and my reasons will be agent-relative ones. We could put it this way: with respect to my character, it is essential to my knowing what to *do* that I know who I *am*, because what I have reason to do will depend on my particular character. And so the good that attaches to my ends will be a good only from my point of view.

[T]he particularity of the individual (*Individuum*s) provides *reasons* for its acts and omissions, thus *universally valid* determinations, but it always does this only in a *particular* way (*besondere Art*), it thereby conducts itself essentially as *feeling* (*da sie sich dabei wesentlich als fühlend verhält*). (EG §405Z (94))

I take it that by “universally valid” here Hegel cannot mean that such reasons are agent-neutral or relate to values that are agent-neutral. With respect to reasons it is important to distinguish between agent-neutrality (or objectivity) and universality. Reasons are (perhaps trivially) *universal* in this sense: if someone has a reason to ϕ then anyone in relevantly similar circumstances has a reason to ϕ , where these circumstances can include the motivational state of the agent.¹³ A reason can be universal in this sense yet also agent-relative. This, I suggest, must be what Hegel is getting at by describing the reasons that derive from the particularity of the individual as “universally valid” yet as giving us reasons to act only in a particular way.

Still, we can say that if she is to have a sense of herself as possessing a character then she must have a sense of having things being a certain way *for* her, having her individual standpoint—for instance, of such-and-such an end as being good from her point of view. So she must at least see herself as distinguished from other standpoints—those other standpoints for which she must, if indistinctly, think that what is thus-and-so for her is not necessarily thus-and-so for them. This is something she must *do*—she must distinguish her standpoint from others: “I differ from the others insofar as I distinguish myself from other particular beings” (BPhG 24/25). But what does that mean—how does she do this? On a basic level, she must have a sense that things *appear* or *seem* a certain way to her. This is as much as to say that she is conscious of the distinction between the way things appear to her—her certainty (*Gewißheit*), as Hegel says—and the way things simply are. That is, she must possess the concept of “an *object* (*Gegenstande*) in the proper sense

¹³ See Powell, Brian K. “Revisiting Nagel on Altruism”, *Philosophical Papers* 34, no.2 (2005): 235-259 (240); cf. Stephen L. Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 117-118; and see Scanlon on what he calls the “universality of reason judgments” (*What We Owe to Each Other*, 73-74).

of the word” if she is to have the concept of her “certainty” or her subjective point of view. The two come as a package deal: “the I is revealed to itself only insofar as its other becomes revealed to it in the shape of something independent of it” (EG §413Z; cf. VPG27 143/169). Or again, the “I” is “*the light*, that manifests itself and an other too.” (EG §413)

This means that she must be a “conscious” individual, in Hegel’s technical sense—a subject confronting an objective world. The “must” here is a *rational* must, a necessity deriving from our drive towards self-comprehension. Whatever other possible explanations there might be for why humans possess the concept of objectivity (and it is at least not obvious why we should possess it at all¹⁴), we can say that for self-comprehending agents it is inescapable, since if we do not posit the world as objective, posit it “as if it were not posited” (BPhG 20/21), then we lose a sense of *ourselves* as particular points of view *onto* that world. In this way, “objects (*Gegenstände*) ... are means of integration [for the self]; this constitutes the whole basis of the theoretical and practical” (VG 56/49).¹⁵

Furthermore, the relevant concept of objectivity is a *normative* one that enjoins upon us a certain kind of *conduct* (*Verhalten*), an activity oriented towards a particular goal: “this objectivity is the goal (*Ziel*) of my *theoretical* striving (*Strebens*).” (EG §408Z (118))¹⁶ If we must, *qua* self-comprehending agents, make sense of the world as objective, then we must act in a certain way, and this activity can go either well or badly. This activity has two dimensions. On the one hand, Hegel’s work is an exercise in the topic of “transcendental psychology”: an account of the faculties of the mind (e.g. memory, imagination, recollection, and so on) necessary for us to synthesise sense data in order for us to be able

¹⁴ See Donald Davidson, “The Problem of Objectivity”, in his *Problems of Rationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 3-18. As for Kant, for Hegel “objectivity is an *achievement*, is not a *gift*”, as Roberto Torretti puts it (“Objectivity: A Kantian Perspective”, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 63, (2008): 81-94 (81)).

¹⁵ Hegel is *not* saying that the world is just a precipitate of mind. “The world must previously be outside us”, he says, “before it makes an impression upon us.” But he goes on: “The truth, the objectivity, the true objectivity of the world, is a further aspect” (BPhG 18/19).

¹⁶ The idea that objectivity is grounded in human “striving” comes from Fichte. For an excellent discussion of this issue in Fichte see Wayne M. Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte’s Jena Project* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997)).

to represent the objective world, and I shall have less to say about this. On the other hand, it is an account of the corresponding conduct of the concrete subject in relation to this objectivity.¹⁷ Here the question is of how we must *conduct* ourselves in relation to the world if we are to make sense of it as objective, of our task as knowers of an objective world (BPhG 20/21). Hegel's idea is that (since we *are* what we *do*) a certain conception of who we are is implicit in this conduct. And because pursuing this goal is inescapable for us as self-comprehenders, this will be a conception of who we are essentially. Hegel's argument starts, then, at a very elementary level, thinking through what it means just to take ourselves to be knowers of an objective world. But as it will turn out, this elementary thought is the first step towards understanding how minded beings have a duty to recognise others. Let us now turn to this first step.

In order to understand the self-conception implicit in the activity of making sense of the objective world, we should first be clear about what we mean when we talk about objectivity. For Hegel, following Kant, the central thought is that the idea of objectivity brings with it the ideas of *necessity* and *universality* (EG §406Z (99); BPhG 24/25; EL §41Z2). When I judge on the basis of my perceptual experience that “This rose *is* red”, I make a judgment about the objective world—this is the significance of the “is”. That is, in doing so I judge that things are thus and so not just for me; I imply that everyone else should have to find things to be thus and so too, *because* my judgment is about an object. My judgment is about how things are from no particular point of view.

Objectivity has ... the significance of being the universality of the subjectivity of consciousness ... In this sense, that which is an object for me as this particular is

¹⁷ See e.g. EG §467, where this distinction is on show. This division does not correspond exactly to that between Phenomenology and Psychology, although the latter section is more obviously concerned with “transcendental psychology”. See Ikäheimo, “On the Role of Intersubjectivity in Hegel's Encyclopaedic Phenomenology and Psychology”, 78-81.

also an object for the others; as it is for me, so it is also for the others (*so wie es für mich ist, so ist es auch für die Anderen*) (BPhG 24/25).¹⁸

The question, again, is how we have to conduct ourselves in order to be such judges, and so what concept of our essence is implicit in this conduct.

[O]bjective consciousness is aware of the world as an objectivity *external* to it, infinitely *manifold*, but at all its points *necessarily interconnected*, containing *nothing unmediated* within it; and it conducts itself towards the world in a corresponding way, i.e., in an equally *manifold, determinate, mediated, and necessary* way (EG §406Z (99)).

What does that “corresponding” conduct amount to? What are we doing when we make sense of the objective world? A great deal has been written about Hegel’s arguments in the sections on “consciousness”, but for our purposes we need not follow every twist and turn of the dialectic.¹⁹ I think I can draw out what we need for our discussion whilst cruising at a fairly high altitude over the text.

Return to our conscious individual. She has a particular point of view onto the world; that is to say, she apprehends the world from a determinate spatio-temporal perspective. The content of her sensation is “tied to *this* space and to *this* time, dependent on contingent circumstances ... belonging only to this individual subject.” (EG §400Z)²⁰ Her point of view is, to this extent, centred, perspectival or egocentric. This is not to say she is wholly sensorily passive—she can work up the content of her sensation into images,

¹⁸ It is true that this characterisation of the concept of objectivity comes from the outset of BPhG, whereas in EG it does not appear as though the relevant notion of objectivity includes reference to *other subjects* at all, but only to the idea that the object is something that exists independently of me. However, I take it that the passage in BPhG (which relates to EG §415) is an elaboration of what is logically implied in the idea of what he refers to in EG as an “*object* in the proper sense of the word”.

¹⁹ The focus has mostly been on Hegel’s arguments at the outset of the 1807 *Phenomenology*, rather than Hegel’s brief summation of much the same points in the *Encyclopaedia*, which have been comparatively neglected in the Anglophone secondary literature. For accounts that focus more on the *Encyclopaedia* version see Ikäheimo, *Self-Consciousness and Intersubjectivity*, deVries, *Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity*, ch.6; Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism*, 49ff; Andrew Chitty, “On Hegel, the Subject, and Political Justification”, *Res Publica* 2, no.2 (1996): 181-203.

²⁰ At EG §418Z, in the section on “sensory consciousness (*sinnliche Bewußtsein*)”, Hegel refers us back to the Anthropology sections on “sensation” (or “feeling”, *Empfindung*), which he says provides the “particular content of the sensory (*besondere Inhalt des Sinnlichen*).” So it is legitimate to reference this part of the Anthropology here.

through her faculties of memory, association and abstraction, and so on. Such images will remain, however, ultimately perspectival (EG §456Z).

How can what she receives through *this* particular perspective serve as the ground—that is to say, the rational basis—of a judgment about the objective world, i.e. a judgment about how things are from *no* particular perspective? As Hegel says, “the *individual* things of sensory apperception ... are supposed to constitute *the ground* (Grund) of universal experience (*Erfahrung*)” (EG §421; cf. VPG27 157/179). His answer is that we need to employ thought and reason (VPG27 9/63; cf. EG §408Z (118)). And his answer to the question of how we must conduct ourselves with respect to objectivity is: “thinkingly”. (BPhG 20/21) But what does that mean?

I think we can get at Hegel’s answer indirectly, by considering his rather startling claim that, as it happens, objective consciousness does not need the data or evidence of *any* particular spatio-temporal point of view in order to be conscious of the objective world. Consider the following:

When ... I rise to the standpoint of *consciousness*, I enter into relationship with a world *outside* me, with an *objective totality*, with an internally *interconnected sphere* of manifold and complex objects confronting me. As objective consciousness I certainly have initially an immediate sensation, but at the same time what is thus sensed is for me a point in the *universal interconnection* of things, something, therefore, which *points out beyond* its *sensory individuality* and immediate presence. So little is objective consciousness tied to the sensory presence (*sinnliche Gegenwart*) of things that I can also be aware (*wissen kann*) of something that is not sensibly present to me, as for example a distant country familiar (*bekanntes*) to me only through writings (EG §402Z (84)).

This last point needs to be taken with care. Hegel is not making the trivial point that one can learn things by reading about them. He is saying I have the same *kind* of awareness—consciousness—of the objective world when my awareness is not based on the evidence of my spatio-temporal point of view as when it *is* (awareness, *Wissen*, is what I

also have through *perception*, for instance (EG §420)).²¹ So we can be *conscious* of the world, in Hegel's sense of the word, even when we are just learning about it through words.

Names are conditions of thought itself: thinking is consciousness, and so must have an objective [reality] (*ein Gegenständliches*) in itself. The content that we possess with the name is what we call the sense (*Sinn*) (we do not need the image) of which we are conscious (*bewußt*), and which we have entirely before us. (VPG27 219/233; cf. EG §462A)

If we can be conscious of the world indirectly, as well as directly—by means of our own sense perception—then there must be something we are doing in both cases that makes the difference between being in touch with the objective world and not being so in touch.

Hegel's point must be the following. So far as objective consciousness is concerned, our judgments about the world—indeed our entire picture of the objective world—could be based either on our direct sensory and perceptual contact with the world, or indirectly (perhaps, as Hegel says, through books), since in either case what we are doing is the same, namely asking how things must be objectively, from no particular point of view, in order for them to appear to a particular point of view the way they do—employing, thereby, our ability to infer and reason.²² This must be the case *even in* the more ordinary cases, when I more or less immediately make a perceptual judgment on the basis of the evidence of my senses. Even this requires reasoning and inference, for in itself my sense perception

... is known by me in an immediate, individualised manner, contingently now enters my consciousness and then disappears from it again; in general a unit that is,

²¹ And *wissen* contrasts in this passage with *kennen* (*bekanntes*), which implies knowledge in the sense of acquaintance or familiarity.

²² I think Hegel's point here is precisely the same as one made by Thomas Nagel in his article "The Objective Self" (in *Knowledge and Mind: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Carl Ginet and Sydney Shoemaker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 211-232 (see especially 226-228)), and in this and the following paragraph I am drawing on this article.

both in its existence and in its constitution, a given for me, something, therefore, of which I know neither why it is nor why it has this determinate nature, nor whether it is something true. (EG §418Z)

What is required of me is, at least implicitly, to ask how things must be (how they are from no particular point of view) in order for them to appear as they do to *this* point of view, which is to employ my reasoning in order to understand my occurrent sense perception as “a point in the *universal interconnection* of things ... which *points out beyond* its *sensory individuality* and immediate presence”, as Hegel says above. It is *only* if we do this, employing, at least implicitly, our thinking and reasoning, that we are able to use the content of our sense perception as the basis for a judgment about how things *are*, for a claim that things are thus-and-so in the world; and so doing this is the indispensable means to making sense of the world as objective, to fulfilling the goal of what Hegel referred to above as our theoretical striving (EG §408Z (118)).

For the purposes of pursuing this goal, then, it is arbitrary that I base my activity on *this* particular point of view.²³ But if that is right, then I must be differentiating between two aspects of myself. There is me just considered as *this* individual perspective on the world, and there is me as the self that constructs an objective picture of the world;²⁴ for the latter, my particular point of view is just one possible source of evidence, among many, for how the world is, for what is the case. Hegel gives a name to this second aspect of our identity or essence: he calls it our “universal” or “abstract” I. Implicit in the very idea of making sense of the world as objective, then, is a conception of one’s essence as such a universal or abstract I (EG §430Z; EL §23A).²⁵

²³ A similar point is made by Pierre Keller, *Kant and the demands of self-consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4; see also Zeno Vendler, “A Note to the Paralogisms”, in *Contemporary Aspects of Philosophy*, ed. Gilbert Ryle (London: Oriel Press, 1976), 111-121 (118) and Nagel, “The Objective Self”, 226-228.

²⁴ Cf. Nagel, “The Objective Self”, 228.

²⁵ It is true Hegel only talks of “universal self-consciousness” at EG §436. However, given the reference at EG §430Z to the “I” as “what is wholly *universal* ... the *essence common* to *all* men”, it is clear that Hegel thinks that even before EG §436 he has explained that the I is in some sense universal. Moreover, as I show below, it is necessary that he has done so if he is to be able to claim that “desire” *contradicts* the I’s

Because the abstract I conducts itself in the same way with respect to all particular perspectives, there is no differentiation between how *you* conduct yourself as an abstract I, and how *I* do, and through conducting ourselves in this manner we achieve a shared point of view, become “so to speak *one* light” (EG §430Z). If we each conduct ourselves as an abstract or universal I, “[i]t is thus quite inadmissible (*unstatthaft*) to appeal to one’s sensations. Whoever does this withdraws from the realm, common to all, of grounds, of thinking, and of objectivity, into his individual subjectivity” (EG §400Z; cf. EG §447A). This cannot mean that we do not sometimes proceed to judge on the basis of our own sense perception—Hegel admits as much in quotations I have given above. Therefore it must mean that even when we *do* take ourselves to be appealing to our sense perception as the basis of a perceptual judgment, then what we are in fact doing, at least implicitly, is basing our judgment on a piece of reasoning about how things must be from no particular point of view in order for them to appear as they do to *this* particular point of view (mine, in this case). So this is not to appeal to my sense perception immediately, but to incorporate it in a piece of reasoning—to appeal to it *in a mediated way*. If I am to take “I saw the coffee cup on the table” as a reason to judge “there’s a coffee cup on the table”, then I must take this as an objective or agent-neutral reason: I’m thinking about how my perception might serve as a reason for *anyone* so to judge.²⁶ It is not *because it was me* (this particular I) who saw it that makes my perception a reason so to judge, for instance. This is what Hegel means when he says that thinking—and therefore consciousness, which depends upon thinking—involves “humility” (*Demut*) and is opposed to “arrogance” (*Hochmut*) (EL §23A).

Hegel sometimes confuses matters by saying that the “I”, because it thus conducts itself universally, *denotes* a universal or denotes the set of all subjects, in addition to denoting

universality.

²⁶ Cf. Christine M. Korsgaard, “The Activity of Reason”, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 82, no.2 (2009): 23-43 (35).

the individual who utters it (e.g. EG §381Z; EL §20A; PhG 86-87/§102). This just obscures the way in which universality enters into the picture here. The thought is, again, that the I conducts itself universally, that its activity is universal (PR §13A). Here the relevant contrast, I suggest, is with what Hegel described above as the individual conducting itself *as feeling*, or as particular. In conducting myself as a universal I, I *represent myself as an arbitrary self-consciousness*, in that, with respect to my goal of making sense of the world as an objective place, it is irrelevant that I happen to be *this* particular individual.²⁷ By contrast, when I conduct myself *as feeling*, I cannot represent myself as an arbitrary self-consciousness. Talk of the “I” as “universal”, then, need not commit Hegel to saying that it *denotes* a universal: the claim can be explained just in terms of the kinds of conduct enjoined upon us by the goal of making sense of the world as objective, and so the self-conception implicit in such practices. Keeping this in mind allows us to avoid some of the more metaphysically extravagant interpretations that might suggest themselves when Hegel starts talking of the I as universal.

To recap: as a self-comprehending being, I must at least think of myself as a particular individual, and in order to do so, I must think of myself as confronting and making sense of an objective world. In order to do *that*, I must conduct myself “thinkingly”, as what Hegel calls an “abstract” or “universal” I, and I thereby differentiate between myself as a particular I and myself as a universal I, and as the latter I must see the former as an arbitrary self-consciousness, as one amongst many other possible subjects on the basis of which to pursue the universal I’s goal of making sense of the objective world.

As I see it, this conclusion serves as a kind of lemma in the overall argument for the conclusion that autonomous agents must conceive of themselves as persons who stand under a duty of recognition. The following section will complete this argument.

²⁷ The phrase “represent myself as an arbitrary self-consciousness” is taken from Keller, *Kant and the demands of self-consciousness*, 4.

3. The desiring individual and the duty of recognition

The *locus classicus* for understanding Hegel's concept of recognition is his account of desire, recognition and the master-slave relation as it appears, if in slightly different forms, in both the 1807 *Phenomenology* and in the *Encyclopaedia*. These passages have been understood in various ways.²⁸ I do not plan to argue against any of these ways of taking Hegel's argument in particular, but rather suggest that we see what is going on here in terms of value, in terms of the way autonomous agents must value their ends.²⁹ The worry that the value of all our ends might be subjective, "special", particular, turns up in this section in the shape of a practical comportment towards the world that Hegel calls "desire". I've already suggested that understanding the world is a kind of *activity*, so the discussion of "desire" and the shift from the section on "consciousness" to that on "self-consciousness" is not straightforwardly a shift from the merely theoretical to the purely practical, for the theoretical and practical are, in this way, already interwoven. It is therefore more of a shift of emphasis.

Desire, Hegel says, "without being determined by *thinking*, is directed on an *external* object in which it seeks to satisfy itself" (EG §426Z). That is to say, desire is a practical conception of our essence that does not conduct itself *thinkingly*, as an abstract or universal

²⁸ These arguments have been understood as, *inter alia*, a refutation of solipsism and proof of the existence of other minds, as an explanation of the origin of self-consciousness and as part of a theory of intentionality. Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics* (London: Cornell University Press, 1996), is an example of the latter approach, and 99ff give a brief rundown of the history of the concept's reception. Cf. also Ikäheimo, *Self-consciousness and intersubjectivity*, 70. Robert R. Williams's *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (London: University of California Press, 1997) is a comprehensive account of the concept's importance for Hegel's ethical theory. Robert Stern's article "Is Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic a Refutation of Solipsism?", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no.2 (2012): 333-361 argues against anti-solipsism readings of the master-slave dialectic.

²⁹ As, in their different ways, do Dean Moyar (*Hegel's Conscience*) and Terry Pinkard. See Terry Pinkard, "Freedom and Social Categories in Hegel's Ethics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47, no.2 (1986): 209-232. However, I think Pinkard misconstrues the value distinction at issue. For him, it is between "desire"'s purely *instrumentalist* notion of value and a picture according to which some things (persons) can have *non-instrumentalist* value (217-220), whereas I think the relevant value distinction at play is that between *relative* and *objective* value. Further, Pinkard's take presents Hegel's account as showing why the 'desire' picture is incompatible with respect/recognition of persons, but does not show why we *must* recognise persons—which I take my reconstruction to do.

I. As desire, the individual is therefore like a conscious subject who does not apply their reason and thinking in their experience, and Hegel discusses these individuals in the same terms: “The will as desiring will is only sensuous, particular and self-seeking.” (VPG27 172/192; cf. EG §428) Nevertheless, desire takes itself to be aimed at something, to be “conscious of various ends and interests” (BPhG 74/75), to have an intentional object that it takes, at least in some minimal sense, to be good, to be worth pursuing.

Because it is not determined by thinking, however, it turns out that this object is “a nullity (*ein Nichtiges*)” (EG §426); for desire, “the immediate, external object has no genuine reality” (EG §426Z). Hegel’s point here might be understood in light of the previous discussion of objectivity. Recall that part of the significance of objectivity is that it brings with it a notion of universality. The idea is that for something to be an object is for it to have a way that it is from no particular point of view, such that when I make a judgment that things are thus-and-so, I am suggesting that anyone else, suitably placed, should have to find things to be thus-and-so too. To say that there is nothing to the object of desire, then, might be to say that it is not properly an object in this sense: it is to say that the way it is for me is *not* the way it is for others. It is, for instance, good for me, but not necessarily for you. All I have as desiring will is the object of “my end, my particularity, my desire, etc. All this still lacks the determination of universality” (BPhG 74/75).

What the desire picture precludes, then, is the possibility of my pursuing an end whose value can be appreciated from an impersonal point of view, not just from the point of view of a particular subject. The value of any end can on this picture therefore only be relative to the particular desires and interests of an individual—the latter are what give the end its value. Therefore the ends pursued by the desiring individual have only agent-relative, not agent-neutral value. Hegel here adopts Kant’s terminology to make the point:

The deficiency (*Mangel*) in me appears as an external object, and this object is only something that is not an end in itself (*selbst Zweck*), has no absolute subsistence (*Bestehen*) for itself. (VPG27 164/185)³⁰

The desiring individual “does not believe in the being, the independence (*Selbständigkeit*) of external things, rather it believes that they have their being relative to it.” (VPG27 164/185)

Desire rules out the possibility of certain of an individual’s aims giving rise to objective reasons, or their having ends to which objective value attaches. This rules out the possibility of recognition. It means regarding others, and also *myself* from an objective point of view, as worthless. I do not yet want “simply to count” for myself, as Hegel says above; for if I take all of my ends to have only value for me, then I cannot regard anyone else as having any reason to do anything on account of my ends (to come to my assistance, say).

In his discussion of desiring consciousness, Hegel proleptically contrasts a state of recognition with the situation at the current point in the dialectic: “Within the universal, need is realisation, counting in another (*das Gelten in einem Andern*). This contradicts self-consciousness at this standpoint” (BPhG 76/77). And he indicates that desire *must* be overcome: the other is *supposed to count* for me, he says (BPhG 74/75). Indeed, considering oneself in this way is said to involve a contradiction (EG §428Z) that becomes especially salient once we think about how multiple such desiring individuals would conduct themselves towards one another (EG §430Z). Out of all this, Hegel claims, “[r]eason demands that mutual recognition be the result.” (VPG27 170/191)

There does not appear to be anything contradictory in desire *as such*, with each individual considering the value that attaches to their ends to be only a value *for them*.

³⁰ In Kant, an “end in itself (*Zweck an sich selbst*)” or objective end is one that has “absolute worth” and must be willed by every rational agent (ibid., 84/85/428) and contrasts with “relative” ends, those ends for which “a particular (*besonders*) kind of desiderative faculty of the subject gives them their worth” (*Groundwork*, 82/83/427).

Rather, the possibility of a contradiction here depends upon the desiring individuals thinking about themselves as both desiring individuals on the one hand and abstract or universal I's on the other. Thus, in order to generate this contradiction, Hegel at this point draws upon the preceding claim, outlined in the previous section, that we must conduct ourselves as abstract or universal subjects. He explains the contradiction as follows:

In this determination lies the massive contradiction that, since the I is what is wholly *universal*, absolutely *pervasive*, *interrupted* by *no limit*, the *essence common* to *all* human beings, the two selves here relating to each other constitute *one* identity, so to speak *one* light, and yet they are also *two* selves, which subsist in complete *rigidity* and *inflexibility* towards each other, each as a *reflection-into-self*, absolutely *distinct* from and *impenetrable* by the other. (EG §430Z)

Or again: “This is the highest contradiction—the most perfect indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) towards each other, and perfect identity. The sublation (*Aufheben*) of this contradiction—for it cannot remain a contradiction—is the process of recognition.” (VPG27 167/187)

Hegel famously sets out to show how this contradiction and its resolution is played out through a kind of struggle. It “is presented as a struggle for recognition which resolves itself initially in the relationship of mastery and servitude. It is therefore not only a contradiction for us, but also for those within the relationship.” (BPhG 74/75) As this quotation indicates, there may be more than one way of understanding how this contradiction is resolved. On the one hand, there is Hegel’s story about how it is resolved for the participants, as it were, which begins with the idea that since the servant is forced to labour for the master he necessarily reconceives the way he sees his desires (as “containing” those of the master (EG §435Z)). I am not going to recount here that more familiar story, which strikes me as not particularly compelling.

On the other hand, though, we might simply understand the self-conceptions of the parties at this stage as contradictory, irrational, from the perspective of our drive towards self-comprehension: the individuals who take themselves on the one hand to be perfectly indifferent to one another, and on the other to be abstract, universal I's, have a self-concept that can be *simplified* by bringing their practical self-conception as desiring wills into line with their theoretical self-conception, which would make them more comprehensible to themselves. This could therefore be understood as a rational development. This is a process Hegel refers to as “thinking *asserting* itself in the will (*als das im Willen sich durchsetzende Denken*)” (PR §21A), or as my “endeavouring to place myself as existent on an equality with myself as thinking.” (VGPIII 308/402)³¹

This would be a rational development because to view oneself simultaneously *qua* actor as a desiring individual and *qua* knower as an abstract I is to have an acutely disharmonious self-conception. As an abstract subject, I relate to myself as to an arbitrary self-consciousness, and with respect to my goal of knowing the objective world, it is not of any significance that I am *this* subject, apprehending the world from this point of view—all perspectives are, for my abstract I, treated equally in this respect. But “desire” involves relativising the significance of a motivation to the fact that it is had by a particular individual, *me*, making the fact that I am *this* subject in this sense essential, rather than arbitrary, with respect to my goal of knowing what to do. *Qua* desiring will, it is necessary to my treating some desire as giving rise to a reason to act that it is the desire of a particular individual (namely me), and the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for you. I could not very well base my plans about what to do on the basis of your desires, since *ex hypothesi* they could not, in themselves, give rise to any reason to act for me. But why should one and the same individual standpoint be regarded in one respect as of sole significance whilst in another as

³¹ The full quote: “The unity of thinking with itself is freedom, the free will. Thought just as volition, is the drive to sublate (*aufzuheben*) one’s subjectivity, the relation to existence, the realising of oneself, since in that I am endeavouring to place myself as existent on an equality with myself as thinking.” (VGPIII 308/402)

of no more significance than any other standpoint, as the ultimate and exclusive authority in one respect and as having no more authority than any other standpoint in another? Regarding ourselves in this way compromises our ability to grasp *ourselves*, since our essential nature will depend on the aspect under which, or the perspective from which, we regard ourselves, either as actors or as knowers. So our goal of making sense of ourselves gives us a reason to bring our practical self-conception into line with our theoretical one.

Bernard Williams suggests that there is a justification for this bifurcation. Theoretical reasoning is thinking about the world, about what is true. For this reason, in the question, “What should I think about this matter?”, the “I” could just as well be replaced by an “anyone”. Connectedly, it is part and parcel of theoretical reasoning that I aim for a set of true beliefs that harmonises with those of other reasoners.³² By contrast, Williams says, the I that acts is “first-personal, radically so”: in practical deliberation, I am not aiming at truth but rather just at what I should do as *this* agent, with these wants and desires.³³

But this misconstrues the reason why theoretical reasoning must aim at a harmonisation of everyone’s beliefs or judgments. As self-comprehenders, I have suggested, we must posit the world as objective in order to conceive of ourselves in any way at all. The selfsame drive underlies, then, both our agency and our need to make sense of the world as objective. If that is right, then Williams has not really offered a reason why we must maintain this disjunction between theoretical and practical reasoning and he simply begs the question against the Hegelian position.

For this reason, overcoming the standpoint of desire can be construed as a rational development, a development that can be seen as making us more comprehensible to ourselves.

³² Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 68.

³³ *Ibid.*, 67.

[I]t is a knowledge of self in which the immediacy of desire has been worked off. It is a knowledge of self in which the condition of sensuous individuality or self-seeking is negated ... the other is there not as a mere particular, but as a universal, free ... The self-consciousness now knows itself no longer as a particular and has the determination of universality immanent within it (VPG27 173/193).

We can begin to see what transcending the standpoint of desire, what thinking asserting itself in the will, would involve. Namely, it would involve acknowledging that with regard to what I take myself to have reason to do, it is arbitrary that I am *this* individual; it would be to represent myself *practically* as an arbitrary individual. If making sense of my perceptions as perceptions of an object means thinking about how things must be from no particular point of view in order for them to appear as they do to *this* point of view, then I am thinking about how my perception might serve as a reason for *anyone* so to judge. And now so too with respect to my motivations: in order to regard them as giving rise to potential reasons to act, I need to be able to conceive of my motivations as, as it were, the outcome of a confrontation with something objectively good or valuable, something *to be valued*. I must, we might say, *strive to posit what is good or valuable as objective*.

Just as this objectivity is the goal of my *theoretical* striving (*Strebens*), it also forms the norm of my *practical* conduct (*die Norm meines praktischen Verhaltens*). (EG §408Z (118))

This means that I cannot regard my motivations as reasons to act without thereby regarding them as reasons for anyone to act—and the same goes for you. Hegel thus says of the slave, labouring for the master and so transcending the standpoint of desire, that his desire “acquires the *breadth* of being not only the desire of a *particular* individual but containing within itself the desire of another” (EG §435Z), which is to say, the slave reconceives his motivation as directed at something that is valuable from a point of view that transcends his individual point of view. In Hegel’s tale, this point of view is at first only the point of view of the master, but the dynamic at play here clearly pushes minded

beings towards reconceiving their motivations as directed at objects whose value can be appreciated from a purely impersonal point of view, objects of rational desire for any agent.

4. Personhood, recognition and self-forgetfulness

In this final section I bring together the conclusions of the preceding arguments in order to explain Hegel's claim that agents act autonomously ultimately by acting ethically, and specifically by recognising others, or, what comes to the same thing, that agents are driven to conceive of themselves as persons, in his technical sense.

The initial thought was that if Hegel could show that agents must conceive of themselves as persons if they are to conceive of themselves in any way at all, then—because agents must conceive of themselves in some way—he will have shown that agents must conceive of themselves as persons. I argued that in order to conceive of ourselves as particular individuals, we must conceive of ourselves as confronting and making sense of an objective world. Thinking through what was involved in that, it emerged that I must conduct myself as an “abstract” or “universal” I, representing my particular standpoint as that of an arbitrary self-consciousness, as one amongst many other possible subjects on the basis of which to pursue the universal I's goal of constructing a picture of the objective world. This concept of ourselves as “universal” is a concept of our “essence”, because it is thus inescapable for any agent. I then argued that this concept of ourselves also gives us a reason to conceive of the way we value our ends in a certain way. As I have said, we must strive to posit the good as objective in order to avoid an acute disharmony in our conception of ourselves, a disharmony Hegel represents as arising when we conceive of ourselves on the one hand as subjects of “desire” and on the other as “universal” I's. For regarding ourselves in this way compromises our ability to make sense of ourselves: our

essential nature will depend on the perspective from which we regard ourselves, either as actors or as knowers. Our goal of making sense of ourselves gives us a reason to bring our practical self-conception into line with our theoretical one, which Hegel calls the process of thinking asserting itself in the will. Therefore, it follows that doing this—bringing our practical self-conception into line with our theoretical one—is something we must do if we are to conceive of ourselves in any way at all.

In the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel says that when thinking asserts itself in the will,

... it becomes clear that it is only as thinking intelligence that the will is genuinely a will and free. The slave does not know his essence, his infinity, his freedom; he does not know himself to be an essence; and he lacks this knowledge of himself because he does not *think* himself. This self-consciousness which apprehends itself through thinking as an essence, and thereby frees itself from the contingent and the untrue, is the principle of right, morality, and all ethical life. (PR §21A)

The will that “thinks itself” is that what Hegel calls the “actually free will”, the “unity of theoretical and practical mind”, and the will of a “person” (EG §481; PR §35A).³⁴ Thus, the concept of our essence that results from thinking asserting itself in the will is a concept of ourselves as persons, as characterised essentially by our personhood. Therefore, *we must conceive of ourselves as persons if we are to conceive of ourselves in any way at all.*

To achieve this self-knowledge, this consciousness of ourselves as persons, is to initiate ourselves into moral and ethical space, so to speak—it is to make ourselves into responsible agents who demand recognition and take ourselves to owe recognition to others. Persons take themselves to *count*, and they take other persons to count: they see certain of their ends as giving rise to reasons for the other to act, and see certain of the other’s ends as giving rise to reasons for them, inasmuch as they represent themselves as

³⁴ For two quite different takes on what Hegel means by the unity of theoretical and practical mind, see Stephen Houlgate, “The Unity of Theoretical and Practical Spirit in Hegel’s Concept of Freedom”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 48, no.4 (1995): 859-881; and Buterin, “Knowledge, Freedom and Willing”.

one person amongst other persons pursuing a good that is a shared object of rational desire for any agent. We need to keep in mind here that this is something we *do*. We *posit* value as objective, just as we posit the world as an objective place: it is a *task*, made necessary, ultimately, by the aim we have in virtue of being animated by a drive towards self-comprehension. It is not that “the Good” is something out there, completely independently of the activity of minded beings, waiting for us to discover it—Hegel holds that it is through *us* that value comes into the world. So when I recognise the force of certain of your aims as giving rise to reasons for me, I recognise you, I want to say, as *a co-positor of a realm of objective value*. Hegel hallows the concept of recognition in such oracular terms for just this reason: to recognise someone is both to attend to the seriousness of the objective value of their ends, yet also simultaneously to marvel at the fact that such objective force and value could have its source in a co-positing subject—not as *this* subject, but as another self-comprehending, thinking being. This is the sense in which mutual recognition is, according to Hegel, an awareness of the unity of the subjective and the objective, thus, as he says, a “thoroughly *speculative*” relationship (high praise indeed from Hegel) (EG §436Z). To recognise someone is to acknowledge that the value (or disvalue) of a particular end of theirs, despite originating in them as a co-positor of value, is a value for others as well, and so does not depend for its value or disvalue on the particular agent who takes it to be their end; it is to see their end as something in which I should have an impersonal preference—a preference for an end viewed independently of my relation to that end.³⁵ This is why Hegel talks about certain desires individuals have, as well as certain rights they have, as *containing* those of other individuals (EG §435Z; BPhG 76/77): that is, they have the status of being *to be satisfied* or *to be respected* by anyone. In the language of the early *Phenomenology*, “its *being* is the *action* of the *single* individual and of all individuals and whose action is immediately *for others*, or is a *thing* (Sache) and is such only as the action of

³⁵ See Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, 133, for the distinction between personal and impersonal preferences.

each and everyone: the essence which is the essence of all beings, viz. *mental essence*” (PhG 310/§418).³⁶

Conceiving of ourselves as persons, and therefore recognising others, means seeing certain of their desires or ends as simply *to be satisfied* by anyone, as to be preferred impersonally. This is not because these ends’ being satisfied is an intrinsically valuable state of affairs. Rather, their value derives from persons in their role of co-positors of a realm of agent-neutral value. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, action that expresses recognition is directed at two ends: the recognised individual, for the sake of whom one acts, and the aims of that individual that one acts in order to further. In this case, that former end is the other person whom I recognise, and it only makes sense for me to take myself to have a reason to pursue the latter end *because* I recognise the person, and in turn because it makes sense for me to conceive of myself as a person. In being motivated to pursue such ends we are therefore expressing our recognition of other persons—which is just as much as to say that we are expressing our own personhood.

I suggested above that this concept of our essence would have associated with it a kind of “practical feeling”, a motivation made intelligible by this self-conception, action on the basis of which would amount to recognising others. And I think we do indeed find Hegel suggesting that personhood, thinking of oneself as universal, has an associated motivation that, in his discussion of the master-servant relationship, he describes as a “negative determination directed against self-seeking” (VPG27 174/194). I want to claim that Hegel here describes personhood as making it intelligible for us to adopt and cultivate a certain kind of second-order motivation that is directed against certain of our first-order

³⁶ This is a passage from the “Spiritual Animal Kingdom” section, which involves Hegel critiquing this shape of consciousness. However, in this passage Hegel is proleptically contrasting the shape of consciousness that is the object of his critique with the one that is to supersede it. This transition is arguably one of the most crucial in the whole of the 1807 *Phenomenology*. In an early draft of that work, Hegel wrote that “absolute knowing”—that is, the *telos* of the whole progression Hegel examines in that work—first emerges at this point (see Michael N. Forster, *Hegel’s Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 611).

motivations.³⁷ Which first-order motives would these be? Hegel here describes them as self-seeking ones. Given my analysis of personhood, I think it makes good sense to say that these would be any motivations that implicitly or explicitly relativise the value (or disvalue) of something to the desires and interests of the particular individual, thus fail to posit the good as objective. Hegel describes such motivations as those involving a kind of *conceit* (*Eitelkeit*, sometimes *Eigendünkel*) or *arrogance* (*Hochmut*), which he describes, with some bombast, as *evil* (EG §472A). More significantly, perhaps, he also describes it as a kind of derangement or madness—because, ultimately, these motivations and the actions that spring from them are ways of not making sense to ourselves, given the fact we are persons (EG §408Z).

Let me give an example. Hegel subscribes to something like the Stoic virtue of *ataraxia* or imperturbability (EG §516; VNS §70).³⁸ As a virtue that makes sense to cultivate in light of our nature as persons, Hegel describes it as a form of “ethical personhood” (EG §516). The reason he can claim that it is, on this basis, a virtue, is because he thinks it is the opposite of a kind of conceitedness:

A sensible human being, a great character, can find something in harmony with his will without giving way to the feeling of joy, and, conversely, can suffer misfortune without giving way to the feeling of pain. Anyone who succumbs to such feelings is more or less caught up in the conceit (*Eitelkeit*) of attaching particular importance to the fact that just he, this particular I (*dieses besondere Ich*), experiences either good fortune or bad (EG §472Z).

What is the negative second-order motivation that opposes our conceitedness? Hegel calls it self-forgetfulness (*Selbstvergessenheit*) (PR §140A; VNS §70A). Self-forgetfulness is, in this sense, is a tendency to see that “what is, what should be, must be grasped

³⁷ Much in the same way that, for Kant, “respect” is a “feeling” that is “*self-wrought* by a rational concept” and which “infringes on my self-love” (*Groundwork*, 30/31/401). For a detailed discussion see Andrews Reath, “Kant’s Theory of Moral Sensibility: Respect for the Moral Law and the Influence of Inclination”, in his *Agency and Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Theory: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch.1.

³⁸ See also his discussion of Stoic ethics, esp. VGPII 289-290/270.

immediately and done without further ado.” (VNS §70A) That is, I suggest, a tendency to act in order to advance what is objectively good. Self-forgetfulness is, then, a kind of practical feeling, in Hegel’s sense; it is a motivation that is made intelligible by the way we conceive ourselves essentially to be.

We can now explain why self-comprehending beings stand under a general duty of recognition. Duties are ways of acting and being motivated that are required for intelligibility given some universally inescapable conception of ourselves, a conception of our essence. If they are to conceive of themselves in any way at all, beings driven towards self-comprehension must conceive of themselves as persons. Conceiving of oneself as a person makes it a requirement for intelligibility that one act in way that expresses recognition of other persons, because it makes it a requirement for intelligibility that one represent oneself practically as an arbitrary self-consciousness, as one amongst many persons pursuing a good that is a shared object of rational desire, and to do this is to recognise other agents as co-positors of this objective good. Hence we have a general duty to recognise others, to enter into and to maintain relationships of mutual recognition.

Two questions suggest themselves at this point. Firstly, what is the content of recognition? That is, which of others’ aims demand our support? Secondly, what is the relationship of our concept of ourselves as persons, with its associated duty of recognition, to our conception of ourselves as possessing particular *characters*, by virtue of which we are distinguished from one another? As I shall explain in the next chapter, Hegel’s answers to these two questions are connected.

Chapter 3: Abstract personhood and commodity society

This chapter begins by demonstrating how the previous two chapters set the scene for Hegel's theory of "objective mind", that is, his account of justified social and political institutions. Briefly, my argument is that as autonomous agents we must respond to two sets of reasons, which I call reasons of individuality and reasons of personhood. These two sets of reasons create a kind of motivational tension for agents driven to comprehend themselves, and the account of how we work out and express this tension is, effectively, Hegel's theory of objective mind.

Section 1 deals with this distinction between the two sets of reasons, and the tension between them. On my view, the first sphere of objective mind, "abstract right", is a particular way of attempting to solve that tension. That is, as I go on to argue in section 2, what Hegel calls the "abstract person" is a particular way of trying to render intelligible the relationship between these two sets of reasons and, as I argue in section 3, the institutions of abstract right are the way in which the abstract person expresses its overall self-conception.

1. Reasons of individuality, reasons of personhood, and the task of objective mind

On the account of autonomous agency defended so far, for an action to be truly my own is for it to be intelligible given the way I conceive of myself, so that it satisfies my drive to self-comprehension. I argued in chapter 1 that more autonomous actions are those stemming from self-conceptions that refer to motivations that are more integrated into my character—the distinctive concatenation of concerns, relationships, attachments that make

me the particular individual I am—such that these actions can be understood as an expression of the whole of this character, and therefore as more comprehensible; because they are more comprehensible they better satisfy the drive that inescapably represents my standpoint as an agent, and so are more autonomous—more truly my *own* actions. The drive towards self-comprehension is common to all agents, but because our characters distinguish us from one another, it nevertheless follows that certain considerations are reasons for me to act that are not thereby also reasons for other people to act: an action's being intelligible with respect to my character means its stemming from a self-conception that is more integrated with *my* concerns, attachments, etc. I will call the reasons we have arising out of these concerns “reasons of individuality”. The particular mode of being-together-with-oneself in one's actions (that is to say, autonomy) that results from acting on reasons of individuality is called “self-feeling” (*Selbstgefühl*).

What I will call “reasons of personhood”, by contrast, are the reasons we have in virtue of our conceiving of ourselves as persons. As I showed in the previous chapter, the same drive that underlies autonomy as self-feeling also underlies a gradual development in the ways individuals grasp the *kinds* of beings that they are—what they find their *essence* to be—that culminates in the conception of themselves as essentially persons. As persons, we must strive to posit the good as objective, as an harmonious object of willing for all rational agents, so as to avoid an acute disharmony in our conception of our essence. Conceiving of ourselves as persons means conducting ourselves “universally”, which means representing ourselves as an arbitrary individual in our practical deliberations. Acting on reasons of personhood will amount to acting in ways that express recognition of other persons.

It is plain that there's a tension between these two sets of reasons: in considering myself as a person, it cannot be the case that what I must do is a function of the fact that I am the particular individual I am; I must represent myself practically as an arbitrary self-

consciousness. But in acting on reasons of individuality, I act on reasons I have only in virtue of being the particular individual I am; I therefore cannot, in acting on such reasons, represent myself practically as an arbitrary self-consciousness.

This means that the preferences I have in virtue of my particular character are for ends the value of which can only be appreciated from my individual standpoint. Furthermore, if I take myself to have a reason to bring something about that is not thereby a reason for anyone else to bring that thing about, then what I really take myself to have reason to do is: to *be the one* who brings it about. I cannot eliminate reference to *myself* from the description of the end at which I aim; I want to be *in* the end, Hegel says—I want to find my own self-feeling in it (VG 81-82/70). This means that when I act on reasons of individuality I must (implicitly or explicitly) think that the value of the ends at which I am is dependent upon *me* being the one who brings them about. From the perspective of our personhood, this is “conceited” rather than “self-forgetful”, attaching particular value to the fact that the agent stands in a special relationship to the ends it brings about. Conceiving of myself as a person, by contrast, makes intelligible motivations and actions that aim at states of affairs that do not make essential reference to me, the value of which can be appreciated from an impersonal standpoint, and does not depend in any way on my being the person to bring them about. This sort of self-forgetfulness, however, also seems—from the perspective of character—to appear as something exceedingly austere, life-abnegating even. (For this reason Hegel says that to call someone a person is sometimes an expression of *contempt* (PRV19 68; cf. PhG 357/§480)). Conceiving of ourselves as persons is thus at odds with conceiving of ourselves in terms of our particular characters. Yet both seem inescapable: as I said in §1.1, the motivations that go to make up our character provide us with ground projects that give our lives meaning and make them worth living at all (VG 85/72); but the argument of the previous chapter showed that if

one is committed to conceiving of oneself in any way at all, then one is also committed to conceiving of oneself as a person.

Thus the drive to comprehend ourselves seems to urge us in two incompatible directions. It is not only that these two aspects of ourselves might *practically* collide with one another, in the sense of simultaneously giving us good reasons for pursuing practically incompatible goals. They might, to be sure (though equally they might sometimes enjoin us to act in order to achieve the very same ends). But the conflict is also more fundamentally motivational, and lies in the *way* in which these aspects of ourselves imply that we should think of ourselves and take ourselves to relate to our ends. Conceiving of ourselves simultaneously as persons and as individuals with particular characters threatens the possibility of our having a unified conception of ourselves, and so thwarts the drive towards self-comprehension, and therewith jeopardises the possibility of acting autonomously.

This conflict and its resolution is the topic of what Hegel calls objective mind. The task is to explain how we might reconcile and render intelligible these two aspects of ourselves in such a way as to solve this deep motivational problem, as I shall call it, and act on the resulting overall self-conception in a social world occupied by multiple individuals.¹ Hegel's claim is that the way we act on the resulting overall self-conception will provide us with *content* for the duty of recognition we stand under as persons. (Thus Hegel identifies "objective mind" with the "content of right" (PR §57A)).

Put in this way, it is clear that the way to understand the theory of objective mind is as Hegel's attempt at working through what is really a perennial and quite general problem of both moral and political philosophy: the relationship between our *individual* concerns and attachments and their attendant obligations and the more impersonal obligations that

¹ That this is how Hegel views objective mind is clear, I think, from the first paragraph of that section in the *Encyclopaedia* (EG §483).

are usually taken to be characteristic of morality (in the normal, rather than just the Hegelian sense). For instance, paradigmatically personal or intimate attachments like love or friendship,² but also less intimate relationships that nevertheless are supposed to involve certain sorts of special obligation to particular entities or individuals—such as patriotic individuals might take themselves to have towards their country or their compatriots—arise out of my standing in a certain special relationship to the object of my attachment, and these are quite understandably taken to differ in spirit from the demands of an impartialist morality, whose dictates do not presuppose that I stand in any special relationship to the individuals or other entities to whom I have moral obligations.³

For Hegel, this problem is not just a matter of the balancing act between the interests of the collective and those of the individual. It is fundamentally about whether we can find a self-concept and corresponding form of association that solves the deep motivational problem inherent in considering ourselves simultaneously as persons and as individuals. It is a problem of the way we conceive of the *shape (Gestalt) of the will*, as Hegel now puts it (VR3 189; PR §32), where such a shape is conceived of as a possible relationship between the “universal” moment or aspect of the will (PR §5) and the “particular” moment (PR §6):

Each human being will find these two determinations [universality and particularity] in its self-consciousness; it is freedom. The human being now appears as a being (*Wesen*) full of contradictions, it is the contradiction itself ... The power of mind is that it can bear this contradiction in itself, no other natural being (*Naturwesen*) can have it in itself and exist. But mind is not merely the existence (*Existenz*) of this contradiction, it is just as much also the dissolution (*Auflösung*) of it, and this is the concept of the will. (VRIV 118; cf. VRIV 172, PR §35Z).

² See for instance Williams, “Persons, character and morality”; Michael Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 73, no.14 (1976): 453-466; Susan Wolf, “Morality and Partiality” and “The Importance of Love”, chs.3 and 11, respectively, in her *The Variety of Values: Essays on Morality, Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³ Alasdair Macintyre, “Is Patriotism a Virtue?” (Lawrence: University of Kansas, Lindley Lecture, 1984).

Hegel does not give us his final answer to the motivational problem immediately. The theory of objective mind (or the *Philosophy of Right*) is, as I see it, a series of attempts at working out an answer—a series of shapes of the will. The first such attempt is given in the section Hegel calls abstract right, which will be my focus in this chapter.

Hegel's purpose in the abstract right section, then, should be seen in light of the overarching goal of finding a solution to this motivational problem. In part his argument here is negative: it is to show how a particular attempt at solving the problem—an overall self-conception Hegel calls abstract personhood—fails, in the sense that it turns out not to be a self-conception through which we can really render ourselves comprehensible.⁴ But he also has a subsidiary, and more positive goal. For when Hegel claims, as I take him to be claiming, that we cannot ultimately make sense of ourselves just by conceiving of ourselves as abstract persons, the conclusion he draws is not that we must repudiate this self-conception wholesale, but that we must understand it, and the kinds of actions that stem from it, as only a *part* of the final answer to the motivational question. So although abstract personhood fails, it retains a subordinate role in Hegel's final answer to the motivational question, which will finally be worked out on the terrain of *Sittlichkeit*, or ethical life, as we shall see in the following chapter. This is important because Hegel's claim is that abstract personhood expresses itself in the practices of abstract right, which amount, or so I shall argue, to the central institutions of a commodity exchange society. His goal, then, can be understood in part as a qualified justification of the society of commodity exchange. Both Hegel's negative and positive goals here thus contribute to his overarching goal of finding a solution to the problem of intelligibly combining the motivations and reasons of individuality and personhood.

⁴ I therefore agree with David Ciavatta that abstract right is in part an “*internal critique*” of the self-conception underlying ownership (David Ciavatta, “Hegel on Owning One’s Own Body”, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 43, no.1 (2005): 1-23 (1)).

Before I turn to the argument of abstract right, a brief terminological clarification is in order. It is important to be mindful of the shifting ways in which Hegel uses the terms “person”, “personhood”, and so on. On the one hand, Hegel uses these terms in just the way I have hitherto been using them, according to which they denote one moment or aspect of the will—the universal aspect, the will that “thinks itself”. He refers to this sense of personhood when he describes it as, for instance, the “absolute justification, on which everything else depends” (PR §35A marginalia), or when he says that “personhood is the justification of human beings” (PRV21 §35; cf. EL §163Z1), that it is the “highest” thing in human beings (PRV19 67; PRV21 §35; PR §35Z). In this sense, it is that conception of ourselves in virtue of which we are initiated into moral and ethical space, in virtue of which we are agents who count, and see others as counting. We can call this the broad sense of personhood. On the other hand, he uses it to refer to particular *shapes* of the will, that is, particular ways in which the universal and particular moments are taken to relate: most conspicuously “abstract personhood” (PR §40A), but also the “moral person” or “particular person” (VR4 159-160; PRV19 54) and “concrete” or “ethical personhood” (EG §516; VPRIII 211/286).⁵ We can call these narrow senses of personhood. Unfortunately, because Hegel’s use of “person”, “personhood”, etc., is most conspicuous in the section on abstract right, and because even Hegel himself does not adhere strictly to these terminological distinctions, it is usually taken that by these terms Hegel *only* means to refer to abstract personhood.⁶ In what follows I shall continue to use person, personhood,

⁵ Hegel obscures this fact by sometimes also giving these latter shapes different names. So for instance, in the discussion of morality, he says that whereas before (in abstract right) the individual was “only a *person*”, it is now (in morality) “determined as a *subject*” (EG §503; cf. PR §105; VNS §50). And he writes: “In [abstract] right the object [of investigation] is the *person*, in the moral standpoint it is the *subject*, in the family, the *family member*, in civil society in general the *citizen (Bürger)* (as *bourgeois*)” (PR §190R; Cf. PRV21 §190). Although see also PR §279A; PRV19 54.

⁶ The only commentators sensitive to this distinction between (what I call) the broad and narrower senses of personhood are Ludwig Siep, *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992), 99-100), and Michael Quante, “‘The Personality of the Will’ as the Principle of Abstract Right: An Analysis of §§34-40 of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* in Terms of the Logical Structure of the

etc., in the broad sense, as I have been using it up until now, appending the relevant qualifier (e.g. “abstract”) when discussing a particular narrow sense—i.e. a particular shape of the will.

2. What does the abstract person do?

It might be thought that, given the argument of the previous chapter, the solution to the motivational problem outlined above is obvious: the right way to think of ourselves, of who we fundamentally are, is just exclusively as persons. For to think of oneself in terms of the attachments and commitments of character, and to act on its associated reasons, is not to represent oneself practically as an arbitrary self-consciousness, and doing *that*, as that argument showed, gives rise to an acute disharmony in our self-concept, given the way we must inescapably conduct ourselves as knowers of the objective world. One way of seeking to render the relationship between personhood and individuality comprehensible, then, would simply be to deny that reasons of individuality *are* ever really (good) reasons to act: the only acceptable claims are the claims of personhood. If we accept this then the resulting overall self-conception is what Hegel calls one of *abstract personhood*.⁷

Abstract personhood is therefore an initial attempt at solving the motivational problem.⁸ Or: personhood *begins* as abstract.

Personhood begins at first not with the subject’s mere general consciousness of itself as an I concretely determined in some way or other, but rather with its

Concept”, in *Hegel on Ethics and Politics*, ed. Robert B. Pippin and Otfried Höffe, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81-100 (82).

⁷ In Hegel’s terminology “abstract” always implies a universality that omits or is opposed to particularity (WLI 275/602; EL §163Z1).

⁸ Discussing the relationship between these moments, Hegel says: “This individual (*einzelne*) human being, with these drives, desires, this caprice (*Willkühr*). That which preponderates (*Das Ueberwiegende*) is that he is person, through the freedom that is for itself” (VR4 163).

consciousness of itself as a completely abstract I in which every concrete restriction and validity (*Gültigkeit*) is negated and does not count (*ungültig ist*) (PR §35A).

As abstract person, I still *have* all the concrete attachments and actual motivations of character (VNS §12A). It is just that, for me, none of these *count*, or give rise to good reasons to act (PRV21 §34). Chapter 1 presented a picture of an individual's character as possessing a certain kind of systematic structure. Because of this structure, motivations could have a certain "location" either more or less integrated with this systematic totality, such that they could give rise to better or worse reasons for action, such that action stemming from them could be more or less comprehensible, and therewith more or less autonomous. By contrast, denying that character *counts* dissolves this volitional structure in that it amounts to the assertion that all of these motivations are, in themselves, equally inadmissible grounds for action. The abstract person still *has* various motivations but relates to them thus as external, as merely given.

Particularity is present at this point, but as still sundered from personhood, from the determination of freedom, present as desire, need, drive, contingent whim (*Belieben*), and so forth. In formal [i.e. abstract—TC] right, therefore, it is not a matter of particular interests, my advantage or my welfare (PR §37; cf. PR §49).

I am aware of myself and others as having these desires, needs, particular interests, and so on, but I do not view any of them as having any normative force at all. "So far as [abstract] right is concerned, it makes no difference whether someone else's will may want something relating to my will" (PR §112Z).

There is a pressing question as to what the abstract person has reason to do at all. If it is to be a self-conception at all, then abstract personhood must at least imply that some sorts of conduct are appropriate and some inappropriate. It must be action-guiding—it must have some *content*; this is, after all, what we're after: content for right. Expressing my personhood

means being moved by objective considerations that do not make any essential reference to me, and so by ends whose value does not derive from the fact that I desire them, but from the fact that they are impersonally to be preferred. This amounts to expressing our recognition of one another and, again, is Hegel's account of the *form* that right takes, and does not yet tell us about its content.

If this content is, *ex hypothesi*, not going to be derived from the motivations that constitute us as the particular individuals we are, then it must be derived in some way from the moment of personhood itself. Perhaps, then, the content or object of our recognition would be those ends individuals adopt *qua persons*, as themselves acting in accordance with the duty of recognition, acting on reasons of personhood. But this would quite clearly be circular. Hegel does not show his reasoning here, but I believe something like these considerations must lie behind his claim that his starting point, abstract personhood, is in itself empty, contentless, formal or indeterminate (PR §35; EG §488).

If abstract personhood is contentless, then how can it serve as an action-guiding self-conception at all? Hegel, evidently aware of the problem, says: "The essential point of view to be taken here is now that this initial indeterminacy is itself a determinacy" (PR §34Z). In other words, despite appearing contentless, abstract personhood *does* imply that individuals *qua* abstract persons have good reasons for acting in some ways rather than others—it *does*, then, have content. How is that? Apparently by way of clarification, Hegel adds: "indeterminacy, opposed to the determinate, acquires the character of being something determinate" (ibid.). We might understand him as saying by this that, despite the fact that abstract personhood is in itself empty, the *way* in which we take our identity as universal, as persons, to relate to our determinate, given motivations, our "desire, need, drive, contingent whim, and so forth", the moment of particularity, does in fact imply some determinate content for this shape of the will. As we have seen, as abstract persons we take it that none of the concerns, ties or commitments of character give rise to reasons

for us to act; in this sense, we conceive of these things as external, given. Yet at the same time, as we have seen, this self-concept does not itself give us any determinate guidance in what we ought to do: it recoils from the heteronomy of particular individuality only into a haven of a universality that is itself empty. This is the character of its *self-relation*. Hegel is suggesting, then, that the content of abstract personhood must be extracted from the character of this self-relation.

Abstract personhood bears a striking similarity to what Michael Sandel would later call the “unencumbered self”, which he believes underlies Rawlsian liberal political philosophy. His characterisation of this “picture of the person”, as he calls it, casts such a helpful light on the notion of abstract personhood that it is worth quoting at length:

[T]he unencumbered self describes first of all *the way we stand toward the things we have, or want, or seek*. It means there is always a distinction between the values I *have* and the person I *am*. To identify any characteristics as *my* aims, ambitions, desires, and so on, is always to imply some subject “me” standing behind them, at a certain distance, and the shape of this “me” must be given prior to any of the aims or attributes I bear. One consequence [*sic*] of this distance is to put the self *itself* beyond the reach of its experience, to secure its identity once and for all. Or to put the point another way, it rules out the possibility of what we might call *constitutive* ends. No role or commitment could define me so completely that I could not understand myself without it. No project could be so essential that turning away from it would call into question the person I am.⁹

As with the unencumbered self, the abstract person describes a kind of *self-relation*, the *way* in which we stand towards the elements of our character—in Hegel’s terminology, it describes the moment of singularity, the way in which the universal moment of the will relates to the particular moment (PR §39). As with the unencumbered self too, the abstract person’s identity is secured in abstraction from its various particular commitments. Because of this, I relate to my ends in a certain way: as ends that I *may* pursue, or may not. They are ends that I relate to arbitrarily, or as Hegel says, indifferently: “The relation (*Beziehung*) of

⁹ Michael J. Sandel, “The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self”, *Political Theory* 12, no.1 (1984): 81-96 (86) (first emphasis mine).

my freedom to *this* particular existence is an indifferent (*gleichgültige*), possible [one]" (VR4 177; PR §37Z).¹⁰

It is worth lingering here over the literal meaning of *gleichgültig*: *equally valid*.¹¹ The abstract person relates to her ends indifferently, as equally valid, as there can be no reason for her to prefer one rather than the other of them: no reason deriving from the her character, nor one deriving from personhood as such. All these motivations are *separable* (*trennbar*) from me (PR §41; cf. PR §43A). As Sandel says about the unencumbered self, nothing can be so essential to it that turning away from it would call into question its identity. If that is right, then a natural way of understanding what an abstract person might do is that she makes various sorts of arbitrary choices.¹² The abstract person thus is characterised by *arbitrary* will (*Willkür*) (EG §§488, 492).¹³ This is a way of understanding what the abstract person does: it can reflect on its particular motivations, and it can simply decide to satisfy one rather than the others.¹⁴ In this way, there is simply nothing *more* for an abstract person to be than a kind of unencumbered chooser.¹⁵

The abstract person's choices must be in a certain sense groundless. Since it is not in possession of a structured motivational "system", the abstract person simply confronts a mass of motivations as equally potential candidates for endorsement, a leveled-out volitional field. So the abstract person must be an agent who simply *decides* to act on a particular motivation; the will of the abstract person is a *deciding* (*beschließende*) will (PR §39).

¹⁰ This lecture note pertains to PR §39, where Hegel is discussing the third moment of the will, individuality, as it appears in abstract right.

¹¹ Hegel himself plays on this literal meaning at WLII 437/734.

¹² "Choice (*Wahl*) therefore is grounded in the indeterminacy of the I and the determinacy of a content" (PR §15Z).

¹³ As Hegel quite clearly says the will of the abstract person is *Willkür*, in what follows I draw at points on what Hegel has to say about *Willkür* in both the *Philosophy of Mind* and the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* in order to elucidate the concept of the abstract person.

¹⁴ Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 22; Neuhauser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 24.

¹⁵ This explains a seeming paradox: that despite the fact that abstract personhood emphasises the "universal" moment of the will, the abstract person is "*an individual* (einzeln) person related only to himself" (PR §40). Cf. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 136. Combined with the inattention to the shifting senses of "person" and "personhood" in Hegel, this explains the fact that often commentators simply take "person" to mean for Hegel "little more than the "negative freedom" of liberalism" (Lewis P. Hinchman, *Hegel's Critique of the Enlightenment* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1984), 203).

To decide to act on a particular motivation is to take that motivation to be a reason and, through that decision, to *make* it a reason. The decision is therefore a “sovereign act” that derives its authority from itself; “arbitrariness (*Willkür*) says: ‘I will, because I will’” (PRV21 §15). It is through such decisions that an abstract person defines itself, since, after all, there is no other possible source of self-definition for such a will. Through its decisions it makes itself into a determinate individual (PR §13).

To decide to act on a particular motivation is to make that motivation a reason. This must at least mean that I thereby take that motivation as setting an end that justifies my taking the relevant means to achieve it.¹⁶ In deciding arbitrarily, though, I am conscious of the fact that my decision is just that: arbitrary. If I decide to act on a certain desire, to treat it as reason-giving, I am conscious of the fact that there are any number of other desires I could have chosen to satisfy, could have determined as reasons for me, since my decision was, properly speaking, groundless. Further, since an abstract person relates to its motivations indifferently, by deciding to satisfy one rather than another I sacrifice that indifference, since I treat it as reason-giving, end-setting, and *self-defining*, and commit myself at least to taking the necessary means to that end (PR §17Z).

A choice, a decision to treat some motivation as reason-giving, therefore does not in itself adequately express my abstract personhood, since it sacrifices the indifference that characterises the abstract person’s self-relation. “No single content is adequate to it and in no single content is it truly itself” (PR §15Z). This is what makes *Willkür* “a *contradiction*”, or dialectical:

[I]t actualises itself in a particularity, which is at the same time a nullity (*Nichtigkeit*) for it, and *has a satisfaction in the particularity which it has at the same time left behind* [my emphasis—TC]. As this contradiction, it is initially the *process* of distraction (*Zerstreuung*) and of sublating one inclination or pleasure by another, and of

¹⁶ See Michael E. Bratman, “Identification, Decision, and Treating as a Reason”, *Philosophical Topics* 24, no.2 (1996): 1-18 (9).

sublating the satisfaction, which is *just as much no satisfaction* [my emphasis—TC], by another to *infinity*. (EG §478)

What is required is a way of acting that somehow does not surrender the abstract person's universality: that decides, but in doing so also somehow still manages to express its indifference to this decision.¹⁷ It seems difficult, on the face of it, to see how such a seemingly paradoxical requirement might be satisfied. However, in what follows, I argue that Hegel's aim in the abstract right section is precisely to show how, by engaging in certain practices, the abstract person can—provisionally—achieve this feat.

3. Property and commodity exchange

Hegel follows Kant in seeking to tie the justification of private property closely to the conditions of autonomous agency, and his argument sets out in a similar way.¹⁸ As we have seen, an abstract person is a deciding will. The form its autonomous agency initially takes is that of an arbitrary decision to treat one of its motivations as a reason, as setting an end for it, and thus as justifying taking the means to that end.

As a physical, embodied agent, my agency invariably involves my employing some portion of the external, physical world as this means (EG §489). This is the case even if the only such portion is the one consisting in my own body (PR §48), although more often than not, of course, my agency will involve other such portions too. Even if only in a

¹⁷ This talk of *Willkür* being essentially a kind of *dialectical process* makes it clear that Hegel is not using the term just to mean the “capacity for choice”, which is essentially what it means in Kant (see Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 42 (*Ak* 213). (Pace Neuhaus, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 288-289 fn.17).

¹⁸ See Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 68-79 (*Ak* 245-257), and for an excellent discussion see Robert Paul Wolff, “The Completion of Kant's Moral Theory in the Tenets of the Rechtslehre”, in *Autonomy and Community: Readings in Contemporary Kantian Social Philosophy*, ed. J. Kneller and S. Axinn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 39-61.

minimal and trivial way, then, I necessarily engage in some *appropriation* (*Zueignung*) of the physical world (PR §44).

This perhaps seems an oddly extravagant way of putting it, but the point is a straightforward one: acting at all requires that I *exclude* others from some portions of the physical world (this body, this apple I wish to eat) (PR §58). We can carry out our purely mental activity without excluding anyone else (I can think about the number six without hindering you from doing the same, for instance), but acting in the material world inescapably involves my employing or using certain means in such a way as for this to be incompatible with your employment or use of these same means.

I must at least, Hegel says, claim these external things I appropriate as *mine* (PR §59), by seizing possession of the thing, forming it, or simply marking it as mine (PR §§54–58), where the significance of such appropriation is that in so doing “I endow the thing”—that is, whatever it is I appropriate—“with some end not directly its own ... I give it my soul” (PR §44Z). These things come to *represent* my purposes, the fact that I will to do such-and-such with them (PR §58). This too might seem extravagant. We can admit that our agency necessarily involves appropriation of the physical world, in the sense of excluding others, but why go so far as to claim that this means making it that certain parts of the physical world *represent our wills*?

Well, as an abstract person I am a *person*, and so must take it that the ends at which I aim have a value attaching to them that is not simply for me, but also affords others reasons to act too. Thus, I take myself to have a *right* to the things I appropriate, and so take myself to have reason to complain if anyone interferes with them. Now, were I to lose this right in what I had appropriated the moment it fell out of my hands, such that anyone else would at that point be within their rights to appropriate it, then this would be as much as to say that I had had no right to it in the first place. It follows that since I *do* take myself to have a right to it, this right cannot flow from the fact of my actual, physical possession

of the thing (what Hegel calls, simply, “possession” (*Besitz*)), my actual possession of it here and now.¹⁹ My right to it must accrue to me somehow in virtue of some other (non-empirical) relationship I bear to the thing, and this, it is plausible to think, is the relationship I bear to it through my *will*, because I will that the things I appropriate are to serve as means to my end. “Property is the rightful aspect, which must involve the will ... The aspect of the will is the non-sensuous, the non-temporal ... rightful possession in general is property, which is the aspect of right.” (VNS §24A; cf. PR §45) I have what Hegel calls *property* (*Eigentum*) in the thing, then, in virtue of the fact that my will bears a certain relationship to it, and for such a relationship to obtain it is of course not necessary that I be in actual, physical possession of the thing. Property depends, then, on the fact that we are capable of understanding the will of an individual to do something as *represented* or “reflected” in a thing (PR §90), so that we take it as an embodiment or existence (*Dasein*) of an end of theirs, and thus of their will as willing that end; we are able to take possession of things “in representation”, not only with our hands (PR §54Z; cf. PRV21 §58). This is how we are able to understand, for instance, damage to property as an injury to the owner: it is a way of *coercing* the owner, of hindering them in their pursuit of their ends, because we understand their will to be represented in their property (PR §§94, 96).²⁰

Property is possible because we are able to take a thing as representing the will of an owner, as a *sign* of their will (PR §58). This means others taking the fact that something is “mine” as giving rise to reasons for them to act in certain ways, chiefly, in this case, in ways that amount to not interfering with the thing without my consent. Property, then, depends for its possibility upon mutual recognition:

¹⁹ Possession means just that “I have something in my external power” (PR §45).

²⁰ Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch suggests that Hegel’s claim that the abstract person must give itself an “external sphere of freedom” depends for its cogency upon his speculative metaphysics (Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, “Personal Respect, Private Property, And Market Economy: What Critical Theory Can Learn From Hegel”, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11, no.5 (2008): 573-586 (579)). In the interpretation I have given I hope to have shown that this idea makes sense without importing any particularly controversial metaphysical assumptions.

The *essential* existence (*Dasein*) of property is the *existence* of its rightful, absolute aspect, and this is that in property persons *recognise* (anerkennen) one another as persons. (VNS §31; cf. EG §490)

Property therefore gives us some content for the duty of recognition. Through respecting the other's property, we recognise certain of the other's aims, namely those aims that are represented in their property holdings, as giving rise to objective reasons; through asserting our own ownership of things we demand the same kind of recognition from others. Any person has a reason to act so as to respect the property holdings of other persons (BPhG 76/77).

So far, Hegel has argued that in order for an abstract person to express their overall self-conception, they must *appropriate* some portions of the external world to use as means to the ends they set through their decisions. If we are to take it that they have a right in this appropriation, then we must understand what they appropriate as representing or reflecting their will. The possibility of understanding a thing as a representation of a will depends in turn upon mutual recognition. Through such recognition, we take the abstract person's ends as giving rise to objective reasons.

As yet, however, this does not fully solve the contradiction that characterises the will of the abstract person. In possessing things as property, the will of the abstract person is expressed in particular things, which serve as her means and so embody particular aims of hers. The significance of this is that the abstract person, who had at first "not yet been particularised or posited as distinct in some specific way" (PR §49A), now has defined itself by its decisions and the property in which its purposes are embodied and so particularised itself; through its decisions and property it thus for the first time posits itself as a particular individual, carves out a particular identity for itself (PR §59).

By being taken into possession, the thing acquires the predicate ‘mine’ and my will is related to it positively. Within this identity, the thing is equally posited as something *negative*, and my will in this situation is a *particular* will, i.e. need, inclination, and so forth.

Hegel’s point is just that appropriation is, in the first instance, of particular things that are the means to particular ends, the ends set by the decisions of the abstract person to satisfy whichever motivation (need, inclination) it decided to satisfy: “property must ... have the character of being ‘this’” (PR §46Z). As I explained above, in order to resolve the contradiction inherent in the arbitrary will of the abstract person, we need to find a way the agent can decide yet *also* express indifference to its purposes. This means finding some way in which the agent can embody, have reflected, its will in a thing (that is, possess property) but at the same time express the fact that it could very well have *not* so embodied its will, because in the first place its decision was groundless or contingent, since it relates to all of its motivations indifferently (EG §492).

One way that suggests itself is that the abstract person might embody its will in a thing but then later decide to withdraw it; I may simply abandon the thing (PR §65). But this is not exactly what we want: we want some way of expressing the fact that I *could very well not have* put my will in this thing, *even as I do* have my will in it. Hegel puts this desideratum suggestively by saying the abstract person must appropriate or take possession of something that is not a “this”:

The connection (*Beziehung*) of my freedom to *this* particular existence is an indifferent (*gleichgültige*), possible [one]; this existence is indifferent against my freedom. The third [moment of the will of the abstract person—TC] is, then, the relation (*Verhältniß*) of personhood to externality (*Äusseren*). The human being must take possession, but not in *this*; this is the fundamental determination (*Grundbestimmung*) (VR4 177).²¹

²¹ In what follows I make extensive use of Hegel’s lectures, especially VR4, in which Hegel goes into much more detail about value, money, commodities and so on than he does in the 1821 *Grundlinien*. These discussions allow us to make much better sense of some of the positions Hegel holds in the *Grundlinien*, I believe.

In order to express our abstract personhood, we need to possess property in a certain way, or possess a certain kind of property. Hegel's claim is that we need to possess property *as value*, which is to say as exchange value (PR §63). "In so far as I possess a property as value," he says, "this is *rational possession*; I am owner of the thing as a universal" (VR4 227, my emphasis). And to relate to things as possessing value is to relate to them as commodities (*Waren*): "Insofar as they have value, we consider things as commodities. They count (*gelten*) according to their value and only according to their value, not according to specific aspects." (VR4 228-229; VNS §37)

Commodities (and money) are to be understood as forms of property, Hegel says (VR4 229). In his philosophical sense, then, a commodity is a way of understanding our will as represented in a thing, a way of embodying our purposes in things. But it is a way of having my will represented in a thing in a peculiar sense, Hegel is suggesting, a way that expresses at very the same time the fact that I could very well have put my will in another thing, since to possess a thing as a commodity is to have it *count* for me only as a quantum of value, under which aspect a particular thing is as good as any other (PR §63Z). When I possess something just as a particular piece of property (as a "this"), it embodies a particular purpose, and thereby my will as willing a particular purpose. By contrast, when I possess something as value I take it as the embodiment not of a particular purpose, but as the *possibility* of particular purposes being satisfied, and therefore of my will as capable of willing any of a number of particular purposes, in that I possess it as a quantum of monetary value: "Money represents any and every thing" (PR §63Z).²² It is therefore "the most intelligible possession, it is the possession most worthy for human thought." (VR4 229)

If acting at all involves appropriation, and so particularising myself, money comes as close as possible to a form of property that avoids my particularising myself, allows me,

²² And see Hegel's marginal comment: "*Value*, self-maintaining possibility to satisfy a need. (*sich erhaltende Möglichkeit, ein Bedürfnis zu befriedigen*)." (PR §63 marginalia)

like the shape of consciousness Hegel calls the beautiful soul, “to retain everything as a possibility” (PR §13Z).

What does it mean, though, to possess a bit of property *as* a commodity, or as value? To see what it might mean, contrast two senses in which we commonsensically take ourselves to have or possess things—take our wills to be “in” things, as Hegel would say. I own a mandolin, for instance, bequeathed to me by my grandfather. This object possesses a kind of significance for me that springs from the way it is threaded into the warp and weft of my life, so to say—an importance not appreciable apart from some understanding of my concerns and attachments of character (in this case, my familial attachments in particular), and of the way this object has its place in an actual life history, *mine*.²³ Our lives are full of things we relate to in this way, in a mode of caring we might call *cherishing*. I also own the computer with which I write these words, but I do not cherish it. It is worth a lot of money, to be sure, and a great deal more than the mandolin. But it is free of the sort of significances that attach to the mandolin; it has no special place in my life. I *merely* own it.

Notice that the significances of cherishing connect people to *particulars*: it is *this* mandolin that I so cherish, and it could not be substituted with a comparable one, or even a better one, without irrecoverable loss. Notice too that these significances imply that individuals might have good reasons for valuing things in a particular way, for cherishing certain things, that are subjective, that are just reasons for *them*. To you, this very same mandolin might be as good as any other, even if you are able to recognise why I so cherish it, why for me it is priceless. (Although you too might come to cherish it, depending upon how you come to relate to me). This is all, of course, because the value it has for me stems from my attachments and motivations of character. I possess the mandolin *as a this*; by contrast, I have no such particular connection to *this* computer.

²³ Cf. Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 11.

Now, the mere fact of my possessing something—having something as “mine” in such a way as to exclude others—does not, in itself, express one or the other relation, either cherishing or mere ownership; it is ambiguous between the two. Neither, indeed, does my making *use* of a thing or employing it in some way. When I play the mandolin I am careful not to scratch the woodwork with the pick, after playing I lay it down gently, I try to keep the dust off it. But so too do I handle my computer with care, mindful, for instance, not to strike the keys too hard, even in my frustration. This mindfulness arises only out of some dim awareness of the cost of replacing the thing, however, not out of consideration for its irreplaceability.

What expresses the fact of the mandolin’s irreplaceability for me is neither the way I possess it, nor the way I use it, but the fact of my refusing to regard it as fungible, and so my resisting the thought that it would be appropriate to relate to it in terms of an homogeneous metric of value, as a commodity. The abstract person, we can say, is the agent for whom such resistance could only ever be an expression of a sort of unreasonable preciousness: the abstract person’s practical field is divided, without remainder, into *persons* and *intrinsically fungible things*. Any third category here, any richer mode of concern towards things, would bespeak of an enchanted worldview.

To really express this way of relating to things we need not only to be respected by others as having an exclusive right to use these things, but ultimately to engage in a practice of alienation (*Entäußerung, Veräußerung*), which is “the relation (*Verhältnis*) of property as a value” (VR4 224). It follows that properly to express my abstract personhood means not just claiming things as my own, in the ways mentioned above, but alienating them. This is why Hegel insists that I *must* alienate property: “I *can* alienate my property as an external thing, but more than this I *must*, due to the concept, alienate it as property, in order that *my*

will should become objective to me as *existent* (daseiend)” (PR §73; cf. PR §71A).²⁴ More specifically, I express my abstract personhood by alienating things through *exchange*. Strictly speaking, Hegel defines alienation just as relinquishing ownership, and he says this could be achieved simply through abandoning the thing, or by giving it away. But as I already said, abandonment—and, for the same reason, giving something away—does not quite achieve what is achieved when the will relates to things in terms of their *value*, which better expresses the way the abstract person relates to its ends. Again, what is needed is a way of having my will in an object that at the same time expresses that I could very well not have put my will in this object—and this is achieved when I relate to the object as simply a quantum of value, through exchange.²⁵ When I regard an item of property as a commodity, I am indifferent to the specific qualities of the thing and view it as commensurate with other things (PR §63). If I sold the mandolin, for instance, I would have to view it in abstraction from those significances that attach to it for me in virtue of way it relates to my particular individuality. “This indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) [to the specific qualities of the thing] is thus a further essential moment. The thing remains specifically determined; but I am indifferent towards it, for me this specificity is omitted” (VR4 226; cf. PR §53 marginalia).

To summarise, then, the will of the abstract person contains a contradiction. In order properly to express its overall self-conception, it needs somehow both to decide to do something, so sacrifice its indifference towards its motivations, yet simultaneously also express its indifference towards its end. Because Hegel understands property as a way of representing our will in things, this contradiction can be solved by claiming things as *property* and further relating to them in a certain way, *as value*, or as a commodity, which is a

²⁴ In a lecture note to this paragraph he says: “As my will as universal is coming into existence, I must surrender (*aufgeben*) the particular. My will should be objective to me as will” (VR4 248; cf. VR3 265).

²⁵ Perhaps this is why Hegel says that a gift contract is “formal” whereas a contract of exchange is a “real” contract (PR §76), and that: “Exchange (*Tausch*) is the main type of contract (*Hauptvertrag*)” (VR4 262).

way having my will reflected in the thing that expresses the fact that I could very well have placed my will in any other thing. In order really to express this way of relating to property, we need to engage in the practice of exchanging things. In order to express its overall self-conception, then, the abstract person needs there to be a sphere of commodity exchange in which it participates.

Although I mentioned above that Hegel's argument sets off in much the same way as does Kant's argument for private property, there is thus a key difference here that needs highlighting. Kant's concern, really, was to show how it is possible for someone justifiably to possess something external as his or her own property. But what has mostly been missed, however, or at least underemphasised, is that Hegel's chief aim is more specific than that: it is (qualifiedly) to justify the society of *commodity exchange*.²⁶

It is important to see that this is not exactly the same thing. It is not a conceptual truth that a property right, even a private property right, is a right of alienation and exchange.²⁷ We can imagine a property regime in which individuals have rights to the exclusive use of things but without their thereby having rights to transfer those rights of exclusive use to others. Because it is usually tacitly assumed that a private property right conceptually includes a right of alienation and exchange, the general strategy for the philosophical partisans of market society ever since Locke has been just to attempt to prove an individual's right justifiably to hold some external thing, and to believe that success in such an attempt carries along with it the right to bring the thing to market. But

²⁶ I think there is a definite trend in the literature to focus just on possession and property as such and to downplay the importance of alienation, exchange and contract to Hegel's argument. I think this gets things backwards. E.g. Dudley Knowles, *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right* (London: Routledge, 2002), 114; Jeremy Waldron, *The Right to Private Property* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 369; Schmidt am Busch, "Personal Respect, Private Property, And Market Economy", all downplay or dismiss outright the importance of these institutions to expressing abstract personhood for Hegel's view. But cf. Seyla Benhabib, "Obligation, contract and exchange: on the significance of Hegel's abstract right", in *The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel's Political Philosophy*, ed. Z.A. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 159-177.

²⁷ Waldron, *The Right to Private Property*, 53 (although see his qualification of this claim on the following page).

having a right to possess external things as one's own is only a necessary, and not a sufficient condition of having that latter right.

For this reason, anyone who wishes really to justify exchange society has to offer a philosophical justification of the practice of commodity exchange itself. This is what Hegel has provided here. It is not that individuals have a right to private property, and that this entails that (amongst other things) they *may* alienate this property: it is that alienating property, specifically through exchange, is how we fully express our abstract personhood; and so we must engage in the practice of commodity exchange. We suppose, Hegel says, that we enter into various sorts of trades and exchanges just in order to get some particular things we need—and so, presumably, we do. But “implicitly” we are “led to do this by reason, i.e. by the Idea of the real existence of free personhood” (PR §71A). Even if we did not need to enter into such contractual arrangements in order to obtain what we need, we would have a good reason to enter into them anyway. Suppose we lived in a world in which, instead of the market, a sophisticated computer determined where, when and to whom productive assets should be allocated, and suppose that this was gloriously efficient: the computer could effortlessly and precisely determine the allocation and distribution necessary in order to maximise the productive use of these assets, and whichever pattern of allocation it determined could be brought about, such that the result was that human needs and wants were met to the greatest possible extent given the available resources. We would have to abolish such a system, and put in its place a system where the allocation of resources was determined (at least chiefly) through commodity exchange, Hegel would have to insist. Whether a certain system of property serves human needs well or poorly, vis-à-vis some other possible system, is properly speaking a matter of utter indifference; what is important is whether or not it is rightful (where the right in question here is abstract right), which means whether it can be understood as an expression of our abstract personhood (PR §§41Z, 45A). And for that to be the case, there needs to be commodity

exchange.

Commodity exchange therefore provides further content for the duty of recognition, a way in which individuals take certain of one another's aims as giving rise to objective reasons. In this case, these are the aims they have to separate themselves from their respective commodities through exchange, because this act of separation expresses the indifferent relationship they bear towards their ends—their abstract personhood. Such mutual recognition is embodied in a contract to exchange items of property.²⁸

4. The limits of abstract personhood

The preceding amounts, on the face of it, to a robust defence of the necessity of commodity exchange—not as instrumentally justified as the most efficient way of allocating resources, but as an expression of our abstract personhood, as part of the content of right, and hence a way in which we express our mutual recognition of certain of each other's aims.

Hegel had the aim of providing such a defence at least in part because he had been deeply impressed with the great classical political economists, and was convinced that the object of their “science”, market capitalism, represented a form of human sociality that demanded to be given a rational grounding.²⁹ (Marx, of course, saw precisely that this was what Hegel was up to.) Hegel, then, is providing a philosophical justification for the central institutions of the capitalist economic arrangements that were, in his time, gradually supplanting pre-capitalist forms of economic organisation. A central fact for such arrangements is the universal alienability of property, both in the sense that *anyone* is

²⁸ “*Contract* is thus the real existence of property. In immediate property the free will has not become truly objective to me” (PRV21 §71).

²⁹ PR §189A. See also Raymond Plant, “Hegel and the Political Economy”, in *Hegel on Economics and Freedom*, ed. William Maker (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), 95-126

permitted to alienate property (there is no particular group with special, exclusive rights to trade things, for instance) and in the sense that *anything* is alienable: the property one has in one's labour-power (PR §80), in one's "mental aptitudes, erudition, artistic skill, even things ecclesiastical (like sermons, masses, prayers, consecration of votive objects), inventions, and so forth" (PR §43A), are all saleable through contractual exchange relationships mediated by money (PR §§63, 63A, 63Z). Thus any kind of restriction on these arrangements—Hegel lists, *inter alia*, "feudal tenure", "testamentary trusts" (PR §63Z), any common property from which I cannot on a whim remove my share (PR §46), in short any "encumbrances (*Unfreiheit*) on property" (PR 66A)—counts as an "alienation (*Entäußerung*) of personhood" on a par with slavery (PR §66A). Any property encumbered in this way is "not in accordance with the concept of property" (PR §63Z). In other words, Hegel is *building into* the concept of property that it is alienable property, where such alienation chiefly takes the form of exchange. And he can do that, I have suggested, because he has given a direct argument for how the practice of commodity exchange is itself an instance of right—it is a way in which we discharge our duty of recognition.

Indeed, it follows on this view that the point of exchange—whether individuals realise this or not—is just to maintain our relationship towards things as value, rather than to procure for ourselves particular useful things (PR §77; PRV21 §77). The point is that through the contractual exchange relation, abstract persons maintain their relating towards things as value, as commodities; they thus retain their *independence*, Hegel says (VR3 266). They act in ways that express their abstract personhood, which expresses their independence from the particularities of their characters.

Hegel does not exactly state this, but it is clear that the apotheosis of this dynamic, the truest expression of abstract personhood, would be not entering an exchange relationship in order to get some particular thing one needs, but explicitly just to get value itself. This is just what Marx saw, albeit in a different way: that the *telos* of the commodity

form is *capital*, value thrown into circulation in order to generate more value, money begetting money. But whereas Marx saw capital as an expression at bottom of a basic contradiction between two aspects *of a thing* when treated as a commodity (its use-value and its exchange-value),³⁰ for Hegel the even deeper contradiction is the one implicit in the very nature of the abstract person and the way in which such an agent would need to act in order to express its self-concept. For this contradiction, as we have seen, makes it necessary for individuals to relate to things as commodities in the first place.

There are a number of criticisms we could make of Hegel's argument at this point. The first, perhaps, is the one immediately suggested by this connection to Marx, namely, that what Hegel has done is to have taken a self-conception, abstract personhood, that is causally generated by a certain actual, material practice—commodity exchange—and used it in order to attempt to legitimate that very practice.³¹ If, as Marx believed, any system of commodity exchange would inevitably involve capital, wage-labour and so exploitation, the charge would be that Hegel's argument is ultimately *ideological*, in the pejorative sense.³² It serves up a sham justification for a system of domination and unfreedom. I shall not enter into this debate.

A second criticism is that Hegel has only shown that a system of commodity exchange is *sufficient* for the abstract person to express its overall self-conception, he hasn't shown that it is *necessary*. That is, there might be other ways in which the abstract person could solve the contradiction in its willing that did not involve relating to things as value, as commodities, and so engaging in commodity exchange. It has to be said, however, that relating to things in this way does seem peculiarly well suited for solving the contradiction inherent in the arbitrary will of the abstract person. It would be incumbent upon someone

³⁰ Karl Marx, "The Commodity", in *Value: Studies by Karl Marx*, trans. and ed. Albert Dragstedt (London: New Park Publications, 1976), 7-40 (40).

³¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 243). Also cf. Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism", *Political Theory* 18, no.1 (1990): 6-23 (7-9).

³² See Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 12-22.

wishing to pursue this objection to provide a compelling case for there being some other way in which the abstract person could solve this contradiction.

Doubtless there are other objections that could be brought against Hegel's argument here. But I want to close by explaining what is, in effect, his own case for the limits of this position, and thus to return to what I described at the outset as his negative aim in the abstract right section.

To put it simply, the practice of commodity exchange does not ultimately solve the contradiction inherent in the arbitrary will of the abstract person; it rather relocates it. As we have seen, the contradiction is provisionally solved by the possibility of relating to things as value, as commodities, and so entering into contractual exchange relations. Forming a contractual agreement means each of us having to hold up our side of the bargain. To put this another way, contracts involve striking a deal or forming an agreement, a *covenant*, that implies each of us can insist upon the other's *performance* of a certain act or set of actions, those that amount to holding up one's side of the bargain (PR §78).

Now, this latter performance is something I cannot be indifferent towards. Striking a deal means there is "a *common will* which has been brought into existence and which has superseded the arbitrary and alterable *dispositions* of the parties" (PR §79A). If I agree to the stipulated terms, "I am immediately bound by right to carry them out" (PR §79; cf. VNS §§35, 35A). If I am to be indifferent towards my particular piece of property, treat it as a commodity, then I must enter into exchange relations; but if I must enter into exchange relations then I must bind myself to carry out a particular action: "a particular will, as performance" (PR §78Z). And this means I must, minimally, treat such an action as an end in my practical reasoning, which determines me to take the necessary means to it. The abstract person therefore both must and must not bear an 'indifferent' relationship towards its ends.

Such “performances” can themselves be traded as commodities, treated as value, and, notoriously, the result can be labyrinthine systems of derivative value that become increasingly disconnected from the real actions of individuals. At bottom, however, all such systems must ultimately involve, on some basic level, covenants that imply the right of someone to insist upon a particular performance. (Indeed, when enough people become convinced that such systems of derivative value do not rest on the possibility of insisting upon an actual “performance”, the result is crisis).

That basic point for us, however, is just that the will of the abstract person cannot solve its basic contradiction through commodity exchange. Hegel dramatises the point by suggesting that the result of this is wrong (*Unrecht*) and so *crime*, since the abstract person will be led to assert its indifference towards the performance to which it has bound itself, since, as he puts it, “in contract I have surrendered [arbitrariness and contingency] only as arbitrariness in the case of an individual thing and not as the arbitrariness and contingency of the will itself.” (PR §81A; cf. PR §81Z) In this sense, there is, as Ludwig Siep says, a “‘rational’ aspect at the heart of every crime”³³ for Hegel—not because the criminal might have his private reasons (to keep the wolf from the door, for instance) but indeed because such a crime can be understood as stemming from the self-same motivation as impels us to possess things as value, hence trade them as commodities: the need to express our abstract personhood.³⁴ The basic point, though, is just that commodity exchange cannot ultimately solve the contradiction in the abstract person’s will.

³³ Ludwig Siep, “Person and Law in Kant and Hegel”, in *The Public Realm: Essays on Discursive Types in Practical Philosophy*, ed. Reiner Schürmann (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1989), 82-104 (98).

³⁴ I should say at this point that this is not exactly how Hegel presents his case for the “contradictory” nature of abstract right. His official line is redolent of Locke’s argument about the “inconveniences” of the state of nature, where people want for a neutral judge to arbitrate in disputes (see John Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons 1924), 123). At the stage of abstract right, Hegel says, the administration of justice could only take the form of particular individuals exacting *revenge* upon one another, because they lack a way of punishing wrongdoers that is “freed from subjective interest and a subjective form and no longer contingent on power” (PR §103). In other words, they lack a judge who stands above the various contracting parties and adjudicates matters of crime and punishment. Abstract right is thus not a self-sufficient sphere. This seems to me a less satisfying way of making his case than the way I have presented it here.

For this reason Hegel's defence of commodity exchange is only partial. Hegel ultimately acknowledges limitations on the social practices that abstract personhood underlies.³⁵ Yet the justification of the institutions of abstract right is still crucial, for the rights of the abstract person underpin central parts of the "civil society" section that is an element of *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel's ultimate account of justified social and political institutions. Key elements of civil society are, on the one hand, a market economy, and on the other the administration of justice—the protection of property rights and the enforcement of contract law (PR §§182-229). The argument of abstract right has shown that these practices are ways in which we express our abstract personhood, and that this affords us some content for the duty of recognition. We thus have a *duty* to participate in these practices (EG §486A); and further, it has shown that it is possible that there could be just punishment, namely in those cases where individuals infringe on one another's property or flout their contractual obligations. Abstract right is thus also a *right to coerce* people in certain circumstances (PR §94), and this right underlies the possibility of the administration of justice.

The lesson to be drawn from the limitations of abstract personhood, then, is not that abstract personhood should be repudiated wholesale, but just that it cannot be the last word on how the motivational problem I adumbrated at the outset is solved. That is, we cannot solve the problem by simply denying the legitimacy of reasons of individuality. Beings that are driven to comprehend themselves thus cannot rest with the idea of themselves as abstract persons. Hegel's next move is to assert the legitimacy of reasons of individuality alongside those of personhood.

³⁵ See Peter G. Stillman, "Hegel's analysis of property in the *Philosophy of Right*", *Cardozo Law Review* 10, (1989): 1031-1072).

Chapter 4: Love as political virtue

In this final chapter I begin with a discussion of the section on *Moralität*, which precedes Hegel's account of *Sittlichkeit* in the *Philosophy of Right*. I argue that this is Hegel's second attempt at finding a solution to the motivational problem. Next, I examine some of the common interpretations of Hegel's theory of *Sittlichkeit*, and I argue that these fail as solutions to the motivational problem: they are solutions proper only to the level of *Moralität*. Following that, I argue that what Hegel calls 'ethical love' is his ultimate way of solving the motivational problem that animates the theory of objective mind. I defend the thesis that this conception of love underlies Hegel's theory of *Sittlichkeit*. Ethical love is, in short, a way in which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves; ethical life is how we express that love.

1. Getting a life

In §3.1, I argued that the task of objective mind is working out, making intelligible, the relationship between two aspects of our self-concepts as agents: our personhood and our individuality. What followed showed that a particular way of working out this tension—namely simply denying the validity of reasons of individuality—fails. Abstract personhood is ultimately not an overall self-conception we can intelligibly express. If there is to be a solution to the tension between these two aspects of ourselves, then, it cannot consist in that simple denial. Hegel's next step is therefore to assert the legitimacy of acting on reasons of individuality. That is, what Hegel now introduces in the section on "Morality (*Moralität*)" under the title of the "right of the subject's *particularity*" (PR §124A), or the

“infinite right of the subject” (VG 82/70), is, I will suggest, the idea that any solution to the problem of resolving this tension has to admit the legitimacy of individuals acting on reasons of individuality—of being a particular individual (EG §503; VNS §50).

But if this next move is to represent an advance, and not simply serve as a restatement of the motivational problem, *Moralität* must present us with some way of seeing how the right of particularity might be reconciled with our acting on reasons of personhood. Hegel does this by means of an account of a shape of the will he calls the “particular person” or “moral person” (see §3.1, above), which expresses its overall self-conception by willing “the good”. “The first determination is ... freedom in the form of personhood [i.e. abstract personhood]—TC; the further determination of personhood is what we call morality: that I am not merely [a] person, [but] that I know this ... as [a] moral person I will the good” (VR4 159-160; cf. PR §104). Moral personhood, then, is a further attempt at solving the motivational problem at the root of objective mind. Like abstract personhood, it ultimately fails. However, the way in which it fails is instructive for understanding Hegel’s doctrine of *Sittlichkeit*. Moreover, the way it fails relates to a general complaint I have about several of the common interpretations of Hegel’s doctrine of *Sittlichkeit*—that, essentially, they remain at the level of *Moralität*, that they remain merely ‘moral’ solutions to the motivational problem. To explain what I mean by this I begin with a brief account of the *Moralität* section.

Hegel writes that the right of the subject’s particularity takes the form of “love, romanticism, the quest for the eternal salvation (*Seligkeit*) of the individual (*Individuums*), etc.; next come morality and conscience” (PR §124A). What connects these seemingly disparate subjects, and so explains why Hegel pursues the motley topics of the *Moralität* section all under this one heading, is the idea of reasons of individuality. This is what he means by saying that, in all of the phenomena of *Moralität*, “the objective aim is *mine*, so

that in it I maintain myself as *this* individual” (PR §112A). This might seem odd, on the face of it. What, for instance, has “morality” got to do with these sorts of reasons?

The thought here is the following, I believe. If *qua* persons we ought to represent ourselves practically as arbitrary self-consciousnesses, so as to posit the good as objective, then it is hard to see how we could, thinking of ourselves in this way, make much sense of our normal ideas of blame or responsibility (*die Schuld*), central concepts in our moral practice. Whether or not I have reason to accept blame for a particular instance of wrongdoing depends ineliminably upon the special relationship I stand in towards to those happenings that *I* bring about, my deeds. I do not mean that the question of whether or not I *in general* ought to be held responsible for my deeds depends upon my identity—as if I might be above the moral law—but just that whether or not I am guilty in a particular case depends upon whether or not *I* am the one who did the deed, upon whether the deed is “mine” (PR §115). And so the value or disvalue of any sort of punishment rests inescapably upon the identity of the one subject to it, upon such special attachments as agents have to their deeds, since if an agent is guilty then punishment will be just whereas if she is not it will, by definition, be unjust. In considering the reasons I have for *accepting blame*, then, I cannot represent myself practically as an arbitrary self-consciousness.¹

Reasons of conscience are formally similar, and not coincidentally, to considerations of responsibility. Consider in this connection an example from Bernard Williams:

Jim finds himself in the central square of a small South American town. Tied up against the wall are a row of twenty Indians, most terrified, a few defiant, in front of them several armed men in uniform ... the captain in charge ... explains that the Indians are a random group of the inhabitants who, after recent acts of protest against the government, are just about to be killed to remind other possible

¹ This is the sense, by the way, in which the practices of abstract right depend upon those of *Moralität*, since abstract right implies the possibility of attributing responsibility for wrongdoing to particular persons (for violations of contract, and so on). The shape of the will underlying abstract right depends conceptually upon that underlying *Moralität*.

protestors of the advantages of not protesting. However, since Jim is an honoured visitor from another land, the captain is happy to offer him a guest's privilege of killing one of the Indians himself. If Jim accepts, then as a special mark of the occasion, the other Indians will be let off. Of course, if Jim refuses, then there is no special occasion, and Pedro here will do what he was about to do when Jim arrived, and kill them all.²

We might imagine the voice of Jim's conscience bids him not to shoot, and if he accedes to the voice's bidding we would have to say that, given the nature of the case, he seems to be attaching particular importance to the fact that (if he accepted Pedro's offer) *he* would kill one of the captives. The fact that we might agree that Jim ought to go with his conscience, or at least that we might see that as permissible, indicates an acceptance of the legitimacy of reasons of conscience, which are a species of the genus of reasons of individuality.³ At the moral standpoint, conscience is "the self-certainty of *this* subject" (PR §137). For these reasons Hegel argues that moral subjectivity and conscience threaten to descend into a kind of conceit (*Eitelkeit*) (PR §140A; EG §512; VNS §70A).

Hegel spends a great deal of the *Moralität* chapter unfolding an account of moral agency to go along with these moral practices (responsibility depends, for instance, on what we *intend*, not just what we happened to do, and so on), and this—along with his famous criticisms of Kant in this section—has attracted most of the attention in the literature on this part of the *Philosophy of Right*.⁴ I shall have no more to say about these themes here, but I raise them to make clear the conceptual connection between them and the idea of reasons of individuality, which is the thread that ties together these apparently disparate topics.

Hegel's reference to love as part of the right to particularity should remind us of the fact that he talks of relationships of love as forming part of an individual's character.

² Bernard Williams, "A critique of utilitarianism" in J.J.C. Smart & Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: for and against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 77-150 (98).

³ Or rather, reasons of what Hegel calls "formal" conscience, or conscience at the standpoint of morality (PR §137).

⁴ See Michael Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action*, trans. Dean Moyar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Similarly, in including what he refers to as a “right of welfare (*Recht des Wohls*)” (EG §505) as part of *Moralität*, Hegel means to insist on the legitimacy of our acting on the basis of the sorts of concerns that constitute our particular characters. As he explains in his lectures:

Welfare includes the natural needs of the individual (*Individuum*s). In the first place this comprises the moment of *particularity* in taking possession of and acquiring property, but it just as much also pertains to spiritual needs, to educate oneself (*sich zu bilden*) and in general to bring one's self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*) of one's particular actuality (*besonderen Wirklichkeit*) into harmony with the general concept of one's life and its diverse aspects (VNS §58).⁵

We would therefore miss what Hegel is saying here if we took his invocation of a right of welfare just as, for instance, an insistence on a right to a certain level of physical and material security—although he does think this right *entails* that, as I shall explain presently. More fundamentally, the point is about the legitimacy of my acting on the basis of certain sorts of reasons, namely those reasons of individuality that arise out of my character, or as he now puts it, pursuing the general concept of one's *life*. What the right of particularity grounds, then, is a right of everyone to have a “life”—not just a physical or natural existence, but a life in the sense in which you might admonish someone to “get a life”. That is, to have a *concept* of one's particular life that one is motivated to pursue, or (what comes to the same thing) to strive to comprehend oneself as the particular individual one is.⁶ Indeed, since we only have an interest in going on living at all if we are able to pursue a life in this sense (because such concerns and attachments as these provide us with our ground projects), it follows that this spiritual need is in a sense more fundamental than this interest in our continuing physical existence.

A right to “life” in this sense is therefore nothing like a Lockean property right in one's own person, which none may violate. It implies a right to maintain oneself at a certain level of physical existence, where this level is *consequent upon* the spiritual need of

⁵ Emphases apart from “particularity”, “self-feeling”, “general concept” and “idea” mine.

⁶ In what follows, I shall use “life” to refer to this weighty sense of “having a life”.

pursuing the general concept of one's life. The fundamental nature of this need becomes clear when Hegel talks about the potential for conflicts between the rights of abstract right and those pertaining to our having a right to have a life.⁷ These may arise because there are situations in which an individual's assertion of their property rights (e.g. a creditor insisting on the repayment of a debt) may conflict with the right of an individual (e.g. a debtor) to maintain herself at a certain level. Hegel argues that when conflicts arise, the rights of the latter take precedence: *life*, he says, has a right against abstract right (PR §127Z). A debtor, for instance, has the right to whatever is necessary to maintain his life “on his own social level (*standesgemäßen*)” (PR §127A), because “kinship relations (*verwandtschaftlichen Beziehungen*) and other close relationships (*Verhältnissen der Nähe*) imply the right to require that no one shall be sacrificed altogether on the altar of [abstract—TC] right” (PR §127Z, my emphasis). Note that the right to life is implied by the *relationships* the individual bears to certain others—the kind of close relationships as constitute, in large part, a person's character. And note further that this right to life is not just a right to bare subsistence: it is a right to maintain oneself *in accordance with one's social position* (*standesgemäßen*), or *estate* (*Stand*). It is the fact that we have a right to pursue the concept of our individual life that gives rise to rights to a certain level of physical and material security—it is the “infinite value” that inheres in pursuing our particular lives that is the fundamental factor here.⁸

It is this right to a life in this weighty sense that forms the content of distinctively *moral* recognition, the proper end and duty of the “moral” or “particular” person. The interest each of us has in pursuing the concept of her life gives rise to reasons for others to do or forbear from doing various things, and so acting on these will amount to recognising others. The creditor, for instance, is not permitted to insist upon the full restitution of his

⁷ See the discussion of this issue, and especially the contrast with Locke, in Domenico Losurdo, *Hegel and the Freedom of Moderns*, trans. Marella and Jon Morris (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 153ff.

⁸ “The religiosity and ethicality (*Sittlichkeit*) of a restricted life (*beschränkten Lebens*)—a shepherd, a farmer—in their concentrated inwardness (*Innigkeit*) and their restriction to a few simple circumstances of life, have infinite value; they are just as valuable as the religiosity and ethicality of an educated knowledge and an existence with a wide range of relationships and actions.” (VG 109/92)

debt where this would interfere with the debtor's maintaining himself at his own social level—and this as a matter of the debtor's *right*. This negative duty has a correlative positive one: we ought to promote the *welfare of all*, universal welfare, or what Hegel calls “the good” (PR §§125, 130, 134). The shape of the will Hegel calls moral or particular personhood, then, attempts to solve the motivational problem by making each individual's pursuit of their life, and so their acting on reasons of individuality, something that is to give rise to reasons for anyone to do or forbear from doing certain things in the furtherance of that pursuit. This is what it means to say that the moral person ought to will the good.

However, it can be shown in fairly short order (shorter than with abstract personhood, that is) that the moral solution, as we can call it, does not properly resolve the contradiction between our individuality and our personhood. The problem with the solution, at bottom, is that it does not change the terms in which we understand these two aspects of ourselves. On the one hand, in aiming at the particular ends I have as part of my pursuit of the concept of my life, I cannot represent myself practically as an arbitrary self-consciousness. The value attaching to these ends is thus a “subjective value” (PR §122; cf. PR §114). On the other hand, I view these same ends as giving others reasons to act, to do or forbear from doing certain things, and so as objectively valuable.

At the standpoint of morality, subjectivity and objectivity are distinct from one another, or united only as *contradictory*. It is this fact more particularly which constitutes the *finitude* of this sphere. (PR §112A)

To the subject, who in the existence of his freedom essentially becomes a *particular*, his *interest* and *welfare* ought, because of this existence of his freedom, be an essential end and therefore a duty. But at the same time in the aim of the *good*, which is not the particular but only the universal of the will, the particular interest *ought* not to be a moment. (EG §509)

The relationship between these moments looks similarly unintelligible when viewed from the other end of the telescope, so to speak: from the point of view of the solicitous moral agent doing good by an other. I need not believe there is any value at all in your ends, I might think them wholly worthless, yet I must treat them as if they are objectively valuable. Hegel intimates that *Sittlichkeit* is the terrain on which we will find the ultimate reconciliation between these aspects of our identity: “The unity of the subjective with the objective good in and for itself is *ethical life*, and in it we find the reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) which accords with the concept” (PR §141Z).⁹

2. Routes to reconciliation

In this section I want to review a few of the ways in which commentators have taken Hegel to have pursued this reconciliation, in order to show that these do not achieve the goal Hegel sets himself of finding a solution to the deep motivational problem. More specifically, I think most interpretations of Hegel on this score understand him only as giving *moral* solutions to the problem, solutions proper only to the level of *Moralität*.

One natural thought is that the reason *Sittlichkeit* affords us the possibility of reconciling these two aspects of ourselves is because it is a model of a complex ethical community that allows for various contexts of action with their own differing logics. Ethical life, that is, allows us to respond to our general duty of recognition towards others

⁹ Here I dissent from Robert Pippin, who suggests that “the Hegelian claim for a ‘unity of objective and subjective moments’ amounts to his version of a strong internalism requirement: that rational considerations be shown to be motivating” (“Hegel’s Ethical Rationalism”, 448; see also his *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 22 & 155 fn.19). The “internal” vs. “external” reasons distinction is, on my view, not what is at issue here. Indeed, *all* the reasons I have been discussing throughout are already “internal”: they are reasons that an agent, starting from their “subjective motivational set”, could become motivated to act upon (see Bernard Williams, “Internal and external reasons”, in his *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101-113). This is because I have argued (ch.1) that all agents are characterised by (and so have as part of their “subjective motivational set”) a drive towards self-comprehension and that (ch.2) this should lead them to the conception of themselves as persons. The tension I believe is at issue is therefore one between different kinds of internal reasons—reasons of individuality and reasons of personhood.

as abstract and moral persons on the one hand, and to respond to the reasons stemming from our individuality, and so to discharge our obligations towards particular others with whom we stand in special relationships, on the other, by including within itself different institutions within which we can express these different aspects of ourselves. So, for instance, the system of needs (the market economy, more or less) is an institution that provides occasion for us to engage in practices that express our recognition of all others both as abstract persons (see chapter 3) but also, Hegel thinks, as moral persons, since the poverty and hardship that inevitably result from the operation of market forces mean that individuals' right to 'life' is compromised; thus, civil society "is the place where *morality* finds plenty to do despite all public organisation" (PR §242). The system of needs thus allows us to act on these reasons of (abstract and moral) personhood. By contrast, the family, for instance, is a sphere in which we act on reasons of individuality: I have reason to care for you because I am your brother and you are my sister. Or again, I have a reason to sacrifice myself in war for *this* state just because I am a citizen of it and it is *my* state.¹⁰

Moreover, it is suggested, it is *only* by engaging in the practices that put into effect these sorts of reasons of individuality that we can *have* the opportunity to put into effect the reasons of personhood. That is, it is only in such an ethical community that we can *be* abstract and moral persons. For instance, the institutions of ethical life—the family, for instance—serve educative, acculturating functions that are indispensable if we are so much as to develop the kinds of capacities and self-conceptions that make us persons (see my discussion of this kind of view in §1 of the introduction, above). In the family, it is said, parents discipline children, and this discipline educates them to the "freedom of personhood" (PR §177). And so on.

This institutional fix thus involves conceding, in effect, that reasons of individuality and reasons of personhood conflict with one another, but contending that a complex

¹⁰ One finds this way of reconciling these two aspects in both Allen Wood and Frederick Neuhouser. See Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 211-212; Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 100-101, 147).

ethical community allows for expressions of both. And it adds that we have a reason that applies to us just insofar as we are persons *to have* the sorts of special obligations that are bound up with our reasons of individuality, since the ways in which we express these are enabling conditions for us to act on reasons of personhood.

This is therefore a kind of solution, but it is only a moral one. For it is still the case that reasons of individuality and reasons of personhood are at odds with one another in the motivational sense: acting on them involves conceiving of ourselves in fundamentally different and opposed ways.

Dean Moyar's position offers a more nuanced view of the reconciliation between reasons of individuality and reasons of personhood in terms of what he describes as a "nesting" relationship between the two.¹¹ For Moyar's Hegel, in *Sittlichkeit* people for the most part act on reasons of individuality, reasons that are "generated by specific individuals".¹² For instance, my particular relationship towards my daughter generates reasons for me to care about her well-being, and so to, say, help her with her homework, that are not thereby reasons for anyone else to help her with her homework.¹³ But I could *also* characterise my end in terms of the relevant social role (being a good father), and so, according to Moyar, in terms of the way in which my acting on these reasons of individuality also advances a value that attaches to the institution and which, he takes it, anyone has a reason to

¹¹ See Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience*, ch.2.7. Here Moyar puts the matter in terms of the distinction between *motivating* and *justifying* reasons, but it is clear he sees the motivating reasons as being what I have described as the reasons of individuality: "One's motivating reasons are generated by specific individuals (e.g., by my standing purposes of securing the well being of *these* members of *my* family)" (ibid., 74), and that the justifying reasons within which these reasons are nested will be ultimately have reference to a kind of "agent-neutral value" (see Dean Moyar, "Hegel and Agent-Relative Reasons", in *Hegel on Action*, ed. Arto Laitinen and Constantine Sandis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 260-280 (section 3)) that is secured by ethical institutions, therefore a value that anyone has a reason to bring about.

¹² Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience*, 74.

¹³ Ibid., 78.

promote, due to the way in which it fits into an institutional context that advances the good in general.¹⁴

Moyar's position seeks a somewhat closer integration between reasons of individuality and personhood, but nevertheless I do not believe it solves the deep motivational problem. The way I relate to loved ones is as individuals whose value for me derives just from our particular relationship: "I place special value on these people and communities, whose reason-generating value is thus relative to my agency."¹⁵ I do not suppose that my loving the person implies that anyone else has reasons to do anything with respect to my beloved; rather, the objective value of the person I love is secured only through the way in which my attachment to them fits into a broader context of institutional purposes, through the mediation of institutional ends: "If I explain to you why I value my daughter and the kinds of reasons she generates, I can do so with reference to the institution of the family and the value we place on the family's purposes, such as raising independent persons."¹⁶ The reasons I thus act on as a family member, Moyar says, are not actually *themselves* good, justifying reasons.¹⁷ He does not believe they are thereby *unethical*; yet they only have such ethical status as they do through the good offices of the institutions in which they are embedded or "nested", whence they derive their ultimate justification.

This strikes me as a strained view of such relationships, quite apart from whether it is the right account of Hegel's views (although the burden of the rest of this chapter is, effectively, to show that it is not): as though value of my beloved's interests rests on *my* being the one who promotes them.¹⁸ Moyar's agent is still motivationally fractured: on the

¹⁴ Moyar, "Hegel and Agent-Relative Reasons", 274-275; Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience*, 74.

¹⁵ Moyar, "Hegel and Agent-Relative Reasons", 263. The quote is in fact taken from his description of Nagel's category of "special obligations" (see Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 165), which he later says are the types of obligation characteristic of the family in *Sittlichkeit* ("Hegel and Agent-Relative Reasons", 271-272).

¹⁶ Moyar, "Hegel and Agent-Relative Reasons", 276-277.

¹⁷ Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience*, 74.

¹⁸ Moyar confronts this sort of objection at one point ("Hegel and Agent-Relative Reasons", 277). He explicitly *denies* that he is claiming that the beloved's good is valuable only if it is promoted by me, but then seems to say that this does not entail that anyone else has a reason to promote it. This seems to me

one hand my closest loved ones derive such value as they have *for me* from the special relationship I bear towards them, and this is a purely subjective value. The only way I can demonstrate their objective value, or the objective value of their various ends, is by showing how my so loving them advances an institutional purpose that anyone has reason to promote. This is, again, ultimately a moral solution to the problem.

The general problem with all of these approaches, I believe, is that they take the nature of special obligations and general obligations (reasons of individuality and reasons of personhood) as fixed, given, and then seek ways in which certain kinds of institutional set-up might achieve a kind of accommodation, a *modus vivendi*, between the two. Such a strategy remains at the level of *Moralität*, where “subjectivity and objectivity are distinct from one another, or united only as *contradictory*” (quoted above).

These institutionalist strategies do not go deep enough; they do not touch the deep motivational problem. It is possible, of course, that there simply is no solution to the problem: maybe it is just a fact about us that we are riven by an opposition between two incompatible points of view, as Thomas Nagel believes.¹⁹ But we should surely understand Hegel, ever the synthesiser, as at least *attempting* to transcend such a position.²⁰ That he is attempting to transcend this antinomy is indicated in part by Hegel’s use of the term *reconciliation* (*Versöhnung*) itself. In his book on Hegel’s concept of reconciliation, Michael Hardimon explains that unlike the English term “reconciliation”, the German *Versöhnung* “strongly connotes a process of transformation. When two parties become genuinely *versöhnt*, they do not resume their relationship unchanged. They become *versöhnt* by

less of a response to the objection than a reformulation of it.

¹⁹ See, *inter alia*, *The View From Nowhere*, esp. ch.10, and his essay “Subjective and Objective” in his *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 196-213.

²⁰ See Pinkard’s discussion of Nagel as occupying something like the position of Hegel’s “unhappy consciousness” in the 1807 *Phenomenology* (Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 368 fn.47).

changing their behavior and attitudes in fundamental ways”.²¹ So whereas one can “reconcile” oneself to miserable circumstances through grim acquiescence, one would not thereby be said to have *versöhnt* oneself to them.

We should expect, then, that the way in which Hegel attempts to reconcile these two aspects of ourselves will involve each aspect undergoing some sort of transformation. Accordingly, I suggest Hegel’s ultimate solution to the motivational problem operates at a deeper level than the interpretations adumbrated above. It operates, in the first instance at least, not at the level of institutions, but at the level of *the reasons themselves*. The shape of the will Hegel calls “concrete” or “ethical personhood” describes a person with a certain kind of outlook or attitude (*Gesinnung*) of concern for the goods of other persons, for their lives, that involves acting on reasons that share some of the characteristics of reasons of individuality and some of reasons of personhood—or so I shall argue in what follows. Because this sort of attitude so integrates these aspects of ourselves, and their associated reasons, it renders us more intelligible or comprehensible to ourselves. And so it is *in virtue of this* integration, this reconciliation, that it will be a *rational* attitude. Action stemming from this attitude will be autonomous.

This rational attitude can be thought of as a kind of virtue: “Ethical personhood, i.e. the subjectivity that is permeated by the substantial life, is *virtue*” (EG §516). Further, I will claim that the best way to think about this virtue is as a kind of *love*. In this I set myself against something of a trend in the secondary commentary and, indeed, possibly even against Hegel’s own explicit self-understanding. On the face of it, the official story is that the three distinct spheres of *Sittlichkeit*—family, civil society, state—have corresponding to them three distinct attitudes—love, honour in one’s estate (*Standesehre*), and trust or patriotism—and that these have associated with them the ethical agent’s particular reasons and duties, his “duties of relationships (*Verhältnisse*)” in general (PR §150), including in the

²¹ Hardimon, *Hegel’s Social Philosophy*, 85.

sphere of civil society “duties of his estate (*Standes*)” (VG 94/80) and “duties of profession (*Berufs*)” (VÄII 188/567). It appears, therefore, as if there is no overarching, unified or all-encompassing account of virtue to be found in *Sittlichkeit*.²² But whilst it is true that we may accrue further particular reasons and duties in these stations, there is a more fundamental attitude—a kind of master- or meta-attitude—that gives us reason, Hegel thinks, to make ourselves a *part* (a *member*, as he says) of these institutions in the first place, and this because it is by so making ourselves a member that we express this rational attitude. Careful attention to what Hegel says about what he calls the “ethical attitude” reveals that he is thinking of it as a kind of general form that can assume different particular shapes (see e.g. EG §§516, 535; PRV19 129-130). What I am suggesting is that this master- or meta-attitude is itself to be understood as a kind of love.

To return to a couple of passages I quoted above (§2.1), then, I am suggesting that this sort of love is a specific kind of “practical feeling”, that is, an attitude arising from the way we conceive ourselves essentially to be, in which the overall self-conception in question is one that reconciles our individuality and personhood. The significance of such practical feelings in Hegel’s social and political philosophy is that their expression or actualisation constitutes the system of *Sittlichkeit*. The tendency in the interpretations of *Sittlichkeit* I outlined above is to see the justification of individual attachments as, in general, *derivative* from the way they fit into an institutional context that advances freedom or the good overall. By contrast, I am suggesting that practical feelings of this specific kind are themselves rational attitudes because they allow us to integrate or harmonise our individuality and our personhood, and so help us achieve a more comprehensible overall self-conception. The institutions of ethical life give expression to these rational attitudes. To this extent, the alternative interpretations canvassed above get things upside down.

²² For this view see Terry Pinkard, “Virtues, Morality, and *Sittlichkeit*: From Maxims to Practices”, *European Journal of Philosophy* 7, no.2 (1999): 217-238 (228); and Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 209 fn.33.

All this will have to be taken, for now, as promissory. The full explanation of why we should think of love in this way—we might say, of love as a political virtue—will only emerge at the end of this chapter.

3. Aspects of love: recognition and unification

Love is complicated. I do not mean that it makes things complicated, but that it is a complex thing—a complex attitude made up of different aspects or “moments” (PR §158Z). Hegel saw this, and in order to try to understand its nature he distinguished between what I will call the aspect of *recognition* and that of *unification* in love, and he thought deeply about their relationship with one another. Hegel did not, however, distinguish these aspects with a huge amount of analytical care, and perhaps as a consequence he has sometimes been taken as holding that what I call the recognitive aspect is in fact exhaustive of the concept of love and sometimes as holding that what I call the unification aspect is exhaustive of it.²³ In this section I therefore set out these aspects in turn, before going on in the following section to examine how they relate to one another.²⁴

There is a strong intuition, shared by many philosophers both ancient and modern, that love, properly so called, must involve (or perhaps just *be*) a kind of caring or concern for the good of the beloved *for their own sake*.²⁵ Friendship, *philia*, Aristotle said, is wishing

²³ For the former view, see Heikki Ikäheimo, “Globalising Love: On the Nature and Scope of Love as a Form of Recognition”, *Res Publica* 18, no.1 (2012): 11-24. For the latter, see Alan Soble, “Union, Autonomy, and Concern”, in *Love Analyzed*, ed. Roger E. Lamb (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 65-92 (section 2).

²⁴ I follow Hegel in not construing love as connected essentially with sexual desire. He talks of “love for parents, relatives, friends” (EG §406Z (102)), for instance—and he is no Freud. It is plain enough that one can love those whom one does not sexually desire, just as one can sexually desire those whom one does not love.

²⁵ Cf. in this regard Wolf, “The Importance of Love”, 189; Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 42-43.

and doing what is good for the sake of one's friend.²⁶ Latterly, Alan Soble insists that “robust concern”—wanting and pursuing what is good for the beloved for their own sake—is the heart of love.²⁷ Hegel captures this intuition in seeing love as, in part, a form of recognition. In (requited)²⁸ love, “I count (*gelte*) in the other, while the other in turn comes to count in me” (PR §158Z; cf. VPG27 175/194). As I explained above (§2.4), a recognitive relationship involves acting for the sake of the other as a co-positor of value, and therefore seeing certain of their aims as giving rise to objective or agent-neutral reasons. Loving someone means caring about their good for their own sake, rather than as a means to some further end, but also as a good that one thinks anyone has reason to advance. I will suggest that we should understand the individual's good as consisting in their pursuit of the concept of their life.

As a kind of recognition, love therefore involves acting on a motive of self-forgetfulness. Self-forgetfulness is thus, Hegel says, “one moment of love ... [and] also an essential moment of ethical life” (VNS §70A). In other words, in love we attribute independent value to the good of the beloved—a value independent, that is, from my own perspective. I typically take it that the reason I have for making my loved ones happy, for seeking their good, is that I want simply *that they should be happy*. This is because we attribute objective value to their good: it would be exceedingly odd if I did not think that the value of my beloved's good could be appreciated from a perspective that transcended my own individual point of view. According to its recognitive aspect, then, love is a way of recognising others, and being recognised, as persons: “If we speak of right, ethical life, love, we know that in that we recognise the others, I recognise their complete personal independence ... Benevolence and love do not involve the submergence of my personhood” (BPhG 76/77).

²⁶ Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, revised by J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1166a.

²⁷ See Soble, “Union, Autonomy, and Concern”.

²⁸ In discussing love I will follow Hegel in taking requited love between persons as my paradigm.

At this point, we might ask what, if anything, makes love a distinctive form of recognition—distinct, for instance, from the recognition we express when we act towards one another as moral persons. For treating someone as a moral person is also a form of recognition that involves valuing a person’s good for their own sake, and so to say nothing further about love but that it involves this recognitive aspect would make it look rather limp as an account of *love*—or so we might worry. In responding to the other *qua* moral person I take myself to have reasons to promote the possibility of them pursuing their good, their individual life, for instance by at the very least not hindering them in their pursuit, but also perhaps by furnishing positive assistance where necessary. Yet we suppose, plausibly, that love involves a higher degree of intimacy. In love my woe and weal is yoked to yours, so that our lives march in step.

Here we arrive at the aspect of unification (*Vereinigung*), or what Hegel sometimes calls, not altogether illuminatingly, the moment or aspect of “passion”. If love consisted only in the aspect of recognition it would be difficult to distinguish it from other, more impersonal modes of concern, for instance moral recognition. What makes love a distinctive form of mutual recognition is that not only does a lover care for the good of the beloved for their own sake; what’s more, the lover comes in some sense to *share in* the beloved’s good. This therefore means sharing in the beloved’s *life*: the “common sharing of the ends of life in general (*Gemeinsamkeit des Lebenszwecks überhaupt*)” (PR §162 marginalia). In love:

What the one has for interests, concerns (*Sorgen*), individual existence (*individuelle Existenz*), should be for the other the ends, and the unity of the ends of life (*Lebenszweck*) is what *both know, will, and wherein they posit their self-feeling (Selbstgefühl)* (PRV21 §161, my emphasis).²⁹

²⁹ As I explained in §1.1, “self-feeling” is Hegel’s term for the relation I bear to my acts when they fit with or are in accordance with my character.

Including this aspect of unification in his account of love relates Hegel's position to another venerable tradition in Western thinking about love that stretches back at least to Plato, or specifically to Aristophanes' mythical tale in the *Symposium* about pairs of lovers really being two sundered parts of what was once just one entity, a fantastical creature with four hands, four feet and two faces, which tries desperately to reintegrate itself. The thought that love involves some such unification is very much alive in various of the metaphors we employ about it, but the question, of course, is whether we can make anything more than a metaphorical sense of the thought.³⁰

We can begin to put the thought more prosaically by saying that in love, the lover not only promotes the good of the other, but "aims at the other's good, *in just the same way that* he aims at his own good", as Roger Scruton has it.³¹ Hegel is clearer about this in his early text, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate":

"Love thy neighbour as thyself" does not mean love him as much as yourself—for self-love is a word without sense—but: love him as [the one] whom thou art (*liebe ihn als [einen,] der du ist*). Love is a feeling (*Gefühl*) of a life similar to one's own (HTJ 296/247)

A great deal will turn on how we interpret this idea of aiming at the other's good in just the same way as one aims at one's own. In what remains in this section I give an initial sketch of one way this idea might go (although Hegel will ultimately criticise this as an inadequate understanding of this process, as well shall see).

As Hegel indicates in the previous passage, aiming at the other's good in just the same way as one aims at one's own has nothing to do with the intensity or degree of our

³⁰ For contemporary views that attempt in various ways to make sense of the unification idea, see Robert C. Solomon, *About Love: Reinventing Romance for Our Times* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 194-199; Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), 230; Mark Fisher, *Personal Love* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1990), 25-28.

³¹ Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 230, my emphasis.

solicitousness towards the beloved. It is not, so to say, a quantitative matter (how many things I am prepared to do for you) but a qualitative one. Well, how is it that the individual pursues her own good? In chapter 1, I argued that for Hegel the individual's pursuit of her good is underlain by her drive to comprehend herself as the particular individual she is: acting on motivations that are more rather than less integrated into her character, seeking to make her character as a whole altogether more integrated, and so on. It is underlain, then, by a kind of concern for her individual identity, even if this is mostly inexplicit.

As it involves valuing the good of the other in just the same way as one values one's own, so it might be supposed that love must also involve a concern for the identity, and in particular the character, that underlies that good that is somehow analogous to the concern one has for one's own identity. We all come fitted with our particular concatenation of concerns, cares and attachments that constitutes our particular character. What draws us to form attachments with others will be, to a certain extent, the way we perceive another's particular concatenation as fitting in with, as being in "sympathy" with, our own (VNS §76A), which is what would make it intelligible for us to form such an attachment. This is not to say that one *thinks* in this way, of course: usually one just finds oneself drawn to people. But the suggestion is that we find ourselves drawn in this way in part because of our overarching aim of making sense of ourselves, because in finding a character in sympathy with our own we behold a kind of objective reflection of our own character. "*Friendship* rests on likeness of character and especially of interest, engagement in a common work, rather than delighting in the person of the other as such" (NP 271/51).³²

Still, souls do not simply dovetail neatly together, nor fuse "so completely that they efface the seam that joined them", as Montaigne says.³³ Differences and disharmonies

³² Hegel almost always talks of friendship and love in the same breath (e.g. PR §7Z; VPG27 175/194; VPRIII 211/285-286), so I am working under the assumption the things he says of one can be applied to the other.

³³ Michel de Montaigne, "Of friendship", in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1958), 135-144 (139).

persist between, say, two loving friends, but the very fact of their attachment itself gives rise to a pressing reason for each of them to seek a way in which such disharmonies might be eradicated. If a beloved friend cares deeply about something you abhor—which is to say, has some concern that could not be given an intelligible place in the system that constitutes your character—then the fact that they are your beloved friend (and that just because they care about this thing) gives you a reason to revisit your conflicting attitude. For as individuals driven to comprehend ourselves we strive to fit our motivations into an intelligible system, as far as this is possible; so if a friend’s character, which I otherwise find myself in sympathy with, turns out to contain such a conflicting motivation then this gives me reason to think that perhaps I am wrong to judge that this concern really is out of harmony with *my* character. The same, of course, goes for them, and the way in which these sorts of disharmonies get resolved will depend upon the facts of the particular case. Perhaps one or the other ends up revising their attitude; perhaps one or the other realises that this attitude indeed makes sense for *one* of them to hold, but not for the other, and they “agree to disagree” (which is a kind of way of achieving harmony). In his early fragment on love, Hegel describes this as the “mutual giving and taking” (HTJ 380/307) that is involved in the idea of love as unification:

This wealth of life love acquires in the exchange of all thoughts, all diverse experiences of the soul (*aller Mannigfaltigkeiten der Seele*), for it endlessly seeks out differences and endlessly finds unifications (*unendliche Unterschiede sucht, und unendliche Vereinigungen sich ausfindet*) (HTJ 380/307).

In love, or in the unificatory aspect of love under this initial conception of it, the project of making oneself more intelligible thus becomes a cooperative venture. The reason we actively *seek out* differences and find ways of resolving them, has to do, then, with our drive to comprehend ourselves, for differences and disharmonies in those with whom we otherwise find ourselves in sympathy suggest to us that our own character is perhaps less

coherent than it might be.³⁴ Consider, by contrast, if the very same value that I found abhorrent in my beloved friend belonged to someone whose other concerns, values and interests I found similarly abhorrent (that is, a person whose character I was not at all in sympathy with). It is natural to imagine that the perturbation I would have felt upon discovering this value in my beloved friend would be absent in this latter case, and this indicates that the perturbation is occasioned not by the value itself, but must in some way be a function of the context in which it was discovered. This perturbation is not mere surprise, as if I were simply shocked by the perception of my own ignorance concerning my beloved friend, since we could imagine that I had a similar amount of knowledge about my foe, and yet I think we would expect the perturbation still to be lacking in the latter case. When we say we “thought we knew” someone, this is an expression not of surprise but of dismay; and this dismay arises from the concern we have for the intelligibility of our own particular character, which is part of what it means to be beings driven to comprehend ourselves.

Through love, perhaps especially through the sort of intimacy that characterises romantic love or close friendship, it is plausible to think that this process of mutual giving and taking may become focused on a certain individual. Once this process gets going it gains a certain momentum, because the more lovers become unified, the more they realise that the consciousness of their own character that they enjoy in the other becomes unclouded by imperfections, and so an ever more perfect reflection of their own character, and so all the more indispensable in the project of rendering themselves intelligible. Through the giving and taking of love, lovers gradually come to form a new perspective, distinct from but partially continuous with their initial individual perspectives: a “we”. At

³⁴ Fisher’s account of the psychological “fusion” that love involves is pertinent here. He writes: “I will tend to absorb not only your desires but your concepts, beliefs, attitudes, conceptions, emotions and sentiments. For insofar as your desires are not simply raw, unreasoned, unaccountable urges they will be embedded in these other mental structures which give them sense in your life.” (Fisher, *Personal Love*, 27). See also Nathaniel Branden, *The Psychology of Romantic Love* (London: Bantam Books, 1980), 68-78.

some point, then, it might become sensible to start talking about *our* pooled volitional system, *our* character, rather than our individual and separate systems, and therewith a shared “life” and good, even a shared “consciousness and volition” (VG 119/100). And so too it becomes possible to start talking of actions springing from such a shared character as jointly authored. Thus the plural in the quote from Hegel above: “they posit *their* self-feeling”.

The foregoing amounts only to a brief sketch of how this process of unification might work. For all its sketchiness, what it does is establish a connection between the model of autonomous agency that I have attributed to Hegel and the idea, which also, incidentally, has its source in Aristotle, that love (or *philia*) plays a crucial role in our attaining self-knowledge, because the beloved is like a second self in whom we find ourselves “mirrored (*widergespiegelt*)” (VÄII 188/567).³⁵ Love under this initial conception of its unificatory aspect is, in this sense, a means to individual self-knowledge (VNS §73A).

4. Modern love and Romantic stubbornness

We have seen that Hegel identifies two constituent elements of the complex ethical attitude of love. On the one hand, the recognitive aspect consists in an attitude of recognition that acknowledges the objective value of the other and seeks to advance their good for their own sake. On the other hand, the unificatory aspect of love consists in a concern for the good and the identity of the other that is analogous to the concern one has in one’s own case. These two aspects can be seen as transformed versions of the motivations of personhood and individuality, respectively. However this is not yet a solution to the deep

³⁵ See the discussion of this point in Robert R Williams, “Aristotle and Hegel on Recognition and Friendship”, in *The Plural States of Recognition*, ed. Michel Seymour (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 20-36 (24-25).

motivational problem, but rather its relocation, for depending upon how we interpret these aspects, they are in tension with one another. Love, Hegel says, appears as “the most tremendous contradiction” inasmuch as one moment in love is that “I do not wish to be a self-sufficient and independent person”—that is, I seek to unify myself with someone—whereas the other moment is that “I count for something in the other”, that is to say, am recognised by them (PR §158Z). He adds: “Love is at once the production and the dissolution (*Auflösung*) of this contradiction; *as the dissolution of it, love is ethical unity.*” (ibid., my emphasis) I suggest hearing this latter remark as a kind of criterion: whichever analysis of these two moments allows us to dissolve the potential contradiction between them will be an account of properly *ethical* love.

What is needed, specifically, is an interpretation of the idea of the moment of unification that allows us to retain a sense of the objective value of the other’s good. Hegel thinks he can distinguish specific conceptions of love in terms of how they interpret these two aspects and see them as relating to one another. He focuses on two such conceptions. The first of these he believed to have attained to artistic and philosophical expression in the works of the Romantics of his day, for instance in the writings of Friedrich von Schlegel (see e.g. PR §164Z). He thus sometimes refers to this as “Romantic love” (VÄII 188/567)—that is to say, love as the Romantics conceived of it.³⁶ But Hegel thinks that this is a conception of love abroad in modern culture, not *merely* the confection of some group of artists and poets—it is love as it is “with us (*bei uns*)” (VNS §76A) or as it has been seen in “recent times (*neuern Zeiten*)” (PRV19 136). The second conception of love Hegel describes as “ethical love” (PR §172), which, I will argue, is the conception of love that, unlike the modern or Romantic conception, allows us to dissolve the contradiction between the two moments. I want to start, however, with an interpretation of what Hegel

³⁶ “Romantic love” (love as the Romantics conceived it) is not necessarily coextensive with instances of what we mean when we say “romantic love”.

understands by modern, Romantic love, because, as ever with Hegel, the shortcomings of a certain concept point the way towards a more adequate one.

What is at issue most fundamentally is, to repeat, the matter of how we are to interpret the unificatory aspect of love, the idea that love involves caring about the identity and good of the other in just the same way as one cares about one's own. In describing the idea of unification in the previous section I indicated an initial way in which this might be understood: I care about my particular character, my life and its associated activities as I am driven to comprehend myself as the particular individual I am (to posit my self-feeling). My interest in the beloved is driven by this particular self-concern, which is what draws me to them and drives the mutual giving and taking of love. Concomitantly, then, the way in which I thus care about the good of the beloved is quite literally as an extension of my concern with myself: the lover's caring about the good of the beloved *just is* a way of caring about her own good, and this is at bottom because her concern for the identity of the beloved *just is* her concern for her own identity.³⁷

The modern or Romantic conception of love understands the idea of unification in this way (PRV19 136; PRV21 §162).³⁸ Modern love is “based on the view that one's own particular properties *must be one's starting point*” (VNS §76A, emphasis added). The result is that in this kind of love one seeks a particular person who will uniquely mirror these properties: “it is the inclination of the parties which comes first, appearing in them as *these* two infinitely particularised individuals ... [in their] “*infinitely particular* distinctiveness (*Eigentümlichkeit*)” (PR §162A). In Romantic love

³⁷ Cf. again Montaigne: “In this noble relationship [friendship—TC], services and benefits, on which other friendships feed, do not even deserve to be taken into account; the reason for this is the complete fusion of our wills. For just as the friendship I feel for myself receives no increase from the help I give myself in time of need ... and as I feel no gratitude to myself for the service I do myself; so the union of such friends, being truly perfect, makes them lose the sense of such duties” (“Of friendship”, 140-141).

³⁸ A potential source of confusion in Hegel's remarks on love is that he occasionally refers to the “passion” aspect of love simply as “love” (see e.g. VNS §76A; PR §161Z).

everything turns on the fact that *this* individual loves precisely *that* individual, and vice versa. The sole reason why it is just this or that individual is grounded in [the lovers'—TC] subjective particularity (VÄII 188/567).

There are two problems with this way of understanding the idea of unification, which I will present in order of increasing importance.

First, as I explained above, there is a way in which the process of mutual giving and taking described above, the gradual shaping and fusing of the lovers' individual identities, gathers momentum as it continues, such that the longer it continues, the more indispensable the other becomes as a part of one's overall project of self-comprehension. This means that the reasons one has to concern oneself with the identity and good of the other become all the more weighty the further along one gets in the unification process. If the value of the beloved to the lover is as a kind of mirror, then this process is like polishing the mirror; and the cleaner a mirror gets, the more value it has *as* a mirror.

This entails that there is a kind of rational incentive to hold out for a beloved who already “fits”, so to speak, with one's particular identity, or at least fits better than some other potential beloved. At the limit, we might think, there is just one individual out there who perfectly reflects who we are back to us, and therefore we might take ourselves to have reason to wait until we believe ourselves to have found this one, rather than undertake the work of unification with a beloved who initially less harmoniously fits with our particular identity. The Romantic lover is “the self that wishes to receive again the feeling that is mirrored (*widergespiegelt*) from another self” (VÄII 188/567). Thus in Romantic depictions of love, Hegel says, “the position is represented to be that each must wait until his hour has struck and that one can bestow one's love only on one specific individual” (PR §162Z)—“Mr. Right”, as we sometimes call them. One is “of the opinion that one can only pass over into universality through specifically this [object].” (VNS §76A)

This way of thinking is ultimately self-undermining. The subject “does not dare to place itself in a universal relationship” (VNS §76A), for she always judges she has reason to hold out (she is another kind of “beautiful soul”, Hegel would say).³⁹ For this reason, Hegel associates the modern, Romantic conception of love with a certain kind of *stubbornness* (*Eigensinn*) or *obstinacy* (*Hartnäckigkeit*) (PRV21 §162; VÄII 189/567):

To give absolute preference to one and precisely this one is therefore a merely private matter of the subjective heart and the particularity or peculiarity (*Absonderlichkeit*) of the subject, and the infinite obstinacy (*Hartnäckigkeit*) of necessarily finding his life, his supreme (*höchstes*) consciousness, precisely in this individual shows itself to be an infinite arbitrariness of fate (*Willkür der Notwendigkeit*) (VÄII 189/567).

Second, and more importantly, this modern conception of love does not achieve the dissolution of the contradiction between the moments of recognition and unification, for which reason Hegel asserts that modern love is *not ethical* (PRV21 §162), or is less than fully ethical (PR §162A; VNS §76A). Because of the way in which it understands the moment of unification, this model cannot do justice to the moment of recognition; it represents an intolerable slight to the objective value of the beloved’s good. For with the modern conception of love, the reasons for the distinctive kind of concern evinced by a lover for her beloved spring ultimately from this special relationship that the two stand in with respect to one another, in virtue of the way their identities harmonise. “The sole reason why it is just this or that individual is grounded in subjective particularity” (VÄII 188/567). In a slightly different context, Bennett Helm puts the point like this: “Such a conception is *egocentric* insofar as the intimacy of concern is intelligible only in virtue of this connection of the object of your concern to your own identity: your concern for yourself and your own identity is thus that in terms of which we are to understand any intimate or

³⁹ See above, §3.3. And cf. Will Dudley’s example of the “inveterate bachelor”, in his *Hegel, Nietzsche, and Philosophy: Thinking Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 18.

distinctively personal concern for others.”⁴⁰ As I put it above, on this conception my concern for the good of the beloved *just is* a kind of self-concern. If my concern for the beloved is understood in this way, then the reasons I take myself (*qua* lover) to have to advance their good are still reasons of individuality; I do not regard them as reasons for anyone else to do or forbear from doing anything.

Consider that if the modern conception of love were right, there would be no difference between love and what we might call the drive exclusively to possess someone. If I loved someone, and they me, on this picture, then if you came along and took yourself to have reason to make my beloved happy, to seek to advance their good, then these would not be reasons for *me* to acquiesce in your efforts. And so I might seek to hinder you in your attempts to make them happy, to advance their good, and on this picture I would have a good reason to do so, for I cannot admit that my beloved’s pursuit of his good gives anyone else (apart from me) a reason to do anything. Now if I did that, jealously guarding the beloved from some third party’s help, then we could say perhaps that I was acting *immorally*, for I must admit that the beloved’s good, *qua* the good of a “moral person” (in Hegel’s sense), is objectively valuable, that any other moral person has a reason to advance it. But it would follow from the modern picture of love that I would not thereby be acting *unlovingly*—indeed, I would be *expressing* my love. But surely that is wrong. Of course, we understand these sorts of jealous inclinations, as manifestations of some of our baser instincts; but to act on them would not be to express love, which is importantly distinct from this jealous drive exclusively to possess. It is not just that I would be acting *immorally* if I hindered the interloper: I would be acting *unlovingly*. Love envieth not, as St. Paul said.⁴¹

What these considerations reveal is that if we are to hold on to the idea that love is a distinctive form of recognition—distinctive in virtue of somehow incorporating a

⁴⁰ Bennett W. Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no.1 (2009): 39-59 (41).

⁴¹ 1 Cor. 13:4.

moment of unification—then we cannot understand this unification in the way in which the Romantic model does. I do not suppose that my beloved’s ends only have value from my perspective or from their own. Nor does my beloved: for this would be to regard themselves as worthless, to regard their good as only having a value for others *if* others are antecedently motivated to advance it. The modern conception of love thus involves a kind of conceit, in Hegel’s sense. I must admit that the third party has reason to make you happy too, not only out of moral benevolence but also perhaps as an expression of her love. But if that is right, then what makes it that I have reason to care about the beloved’s good in just the same way I care about my own *cannot* be a matter of the way in which our particular individual identities fit together in the way that the Romantic picture envisages. I think this is what Hegel has in mind when he says:

Love now indeed has its right (*Recht*); but insofar as it appears as passion, it always mixes itself up with a particularity. When hindrances confront the passion of love, these concern only the particular interest, not at all the justification (*Berechtigung*) (PRV19 136).⁴²

The Romantic picture makes my caring about the good of the other in just the same way in which I care about my own a contingent affair, contingent upon the fact that our identities happen to bear a special kind of relationship to one another; here, “the ethical moment of love is no longer an ethical [one], but rather of a wholly contingent peculiarity. One can call it pure stubbornness (*Eigensinn*)” (PRV21 §162). It fails to explain how there could be a distinctive form of *loving recognition*—one that incorporated a moment of unification into recognition.

⁴² Cf.: “those sufferings of love, those shattering hopes, that mere being in love (*Verliebtsein*), those endless griefs felt by a lover, that endless happiness and bliss which he foresees for himself, are in themselves of no universal interest but something affecting himself alone. Every man does have a heart for love and a right to become happy through it; but if here, precisely in this instance, under such and such circumstances, he does not achieve his end in relation to precisely this girl, then no wrong (*Unrecht*) has occurred.” (VÄII 190/568)

Bertrand Russell wrote, “in sex-love benevolence will only exist where there is secure possession, since otherwise jealousy will destroy it”.⁴³ But the love that degenerates into jealousy where it cannot be sure of its exclusive possession *was not* love—was not even so-called sex-love. It was just the drive exclusively to possess someone, to be, as Hegel says, “in possession (*Besitz*) of this *one contingent* person.” (PR §162 marginalia)

5. Ethical love as overcoming stubbornness

Hegel contrasts modern love with “ethical love” (PR §172), which he ties closely to the institution of marriage, and which he believes to be a conception of love of much more ancient provenance (PRV19 136). Ethical love, I aim to show in what follows, is a conception of love that, unlike the modern conception, dissolves the contradiction between the two moments of love.

First, though, it might appear as though Hegel’s tying ethical love so closely to the institution of marriage is supposed to indicate that what he means by it is simply something like a disposition so to value *the institution* of marriage, or the family, that the particular individual with whom you enter into marriage or with whom you start a family is a matter of indifference for you (and indeed Hegel sometimes talks of ethical love as “conjugal love” (VNS §76; PRV19 136)). Such an interpretation would tend towards what I referred to above as an institutionalist strategy. But it can easily be demonstrated that this cannot be Hegel’s considered position. For Hegel repeatedly insists that what makes marriage and the family a rational and ethical institution *is* the loving bond and unity that its members have with one another—as I explained above, for Hegel, institutions will be justified because

⁴³ Bertrand Russell, *What I Believe* (London: Routledge, 1996), 11-12.

they are expressions of practical feelings that are themselves justified, rational.⁴⁴ And the argument of the previous section showed that this loving bond cannot be understood along the lines of the Romantic model, which Hegel claims is not ethical. Hegel cannot, then, on pain of a vicious circularity, go on to explain ethical love simply as an attitude that takes the institution of marriage to have a kind of overriding value, for the institution will only have value if it expresses an attitude that is itself justified. Ethical love must, therefore, be an alternative explanation *of love*, love between persons, and cannot simply be an account of a positive evaluative attitude individuals take up towards *institutions*. “Love, the ethical moment of marriage, is, as love, a feeling for actual, present individuals (*Individuen*), not for an abstraction” (PR §180A).

At issue, again, is how we are to understand my caring about the identity and the good of the beloved in such a way as to be analogous to the way in which I care about my own identity and good, but without thereby slighting the objective value of the beloved’s good, as the modern, Romantic conception ends up doing. The root of the problem with the modern conception was its *egocentricity*: that it proceeded from the idea of individuals concerned with their particular characters, with making sense of themselves as *these* individuals, and then explained the idea of aiming at the other’s good in just the same way as one aims at one’s own on this basis. This ends up not being able to incorporate recognition *into love itself*.

This suggests that we ought to look for an alternative way in which the individual might value her own identity and good that might allow her to simultaneously be concerned with the identity and good of others in just the same way as she is with her own

⁴⁴ E.g. “In self-consciousness the species is rationality knowing itself as universal; the sexes know universality, and this immediate knowing, this feeling, is love. This makes family life something rational and ethical” (VNS §76A; cf. also PR §§163, 180A; VNS §76; VPG27 59/101).

whilst recognising the objective value of the other.⁴⁵ Indeed, the first mention Hegel makes of love and friendship in the *Philosophy of Right* adverts to this possibility (and also deploys the same terminology of “stubbornness” that Hegel uses to criticise the modern, Romantic conception of love:

[In friendship and love] one is not inherently one-sided; one restricts oneself gladly in relation to another, but knows oneself as oneself in this restriction. In this determinacy a human being should not feel determined; rather, by treating the other as other, one has in the other one’s self-feeling for the first time. Thus freedom lies not in indeterminacy nor in determinacy, it is both. The will which restricts itself simply to a *this* is the will of the stubborn individual (*Eigensinnige*) who supposes that he is not free unless he has *this* will. (PR §7Z)

What is the alternative to having a concern for my will as *this* will? Generally speaking, the idea might be that I have a concern for my will as an instance of a more general type. More specifically, as Hegel puts it in the paragraph to which this note on love and friendship is attached, such a will (a “concretely universal” will) relates to itself as to “a mere *possibility* by which it is not constrained” (PR §7; cf. VNS §5, VR3 121). This is not to say that to be a concretely universal will means it being the case that I could have done otherwise than I did. This would be arbitrariness (*Willkür*), which “even when it decides in favour of what is, as regards its content, true and right, remains infected with the conceit (*Eitelkeit*) that, had it so pleased, it could also have decided in favour of something else.” (EL §145Z)⁴⁶ Hegel’s claim about the concretely universal will is a claim about how an individual thus conceived regards her identity. This suggests the following idea: the ethical being is concerned with her own particular identity and good not as *her* identity and good,

⁴⁵ Jennifer Whiting makes a similar move in her discussion of friendship; see Jennifer E. Whiting, “Impersonal Friends”, *The Monist* 74, no.1 (1991): 3-29 (10).

⁴⁶ Stephen Houlgate *does* understand PR §7 as an account of freedom of choice (in “Action, Right and Morality in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*”, in *Hegel on Action*, ed. Arto Laitinen and Constantine Sandis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 155-175 (156-157)). However, Hegel does not use the terminology of *Willkür* or *Wahl* (choice) here, and it is clear (especially from the references to love and friendship in the *Zusatz*) that this passage is intended as an account of the shape of the will that expresses itself in ethical life.

the good of *this* individual, but rather as a *possible* identity and good, which is to say, as bound up with a *possible* life (in the rich sense), a possible way in which a life might go.

Regarding myself in this way would allow for the possibility of valuing the other's good *in just the same way* as I do my own, but without thereby making my concern for beloved dependent upon the particular way in which our identities as *these* individuals happen to harmonise. It therefore avoids making my concern for the other a mere extension of my self-concern; it avoids the slighting of the objective value of the other that inevitably takes place on the Romantic picture, and thereby allows us to make sense of *love* as a distinct form of *recognition*. For whether or not the other's life is a *possible* one is a fact independent of the particular relationship I stand in with respect to them.

Possible in what sense, though? If a life is actual, then it is possible in the general sense that it can be lived, and Hegel cannot be suggesting we view our actual lives as possible in this anaemic sense.⁴⁷ In his discussion of possibility in the *Logic*, Hegel says: "Whether this or that is possible or impossible depends on the content, i.e., on the totality of the moments of actuality" (EL §143Z). To be concerned with my own good as a possible good therefore means seeing it as depending for its being possible upon the way in which it fits into some sort of totality.

Hegel's suggestion here is clear, if at first perhaps unsettling. What makes individuals' *lives* possible is an ethical community, which is their ultimate foundation (*Grundlage*) (PR §142). The possibility of my pursuing the concept of my particular life depends upon the existence of such social institutions and practices since, as I said above (§1.2), self-conceptions depend upon social institutions and practices. More specifically, Hegel thinks that for the most part these self-conceptions are attached to particular kinds of institutional social role. The significance of the spheres of family, civil society (or rather corporation membership: membership in a certain profession, roughly) and the state, I

⁴⁷ See VL 159/156; also cf. what Hegel has to say about the "abstract" notion of possibility (EL §§143, 143A, 143Z).

suggest, is just that these comprise the chief ways in which, Hegel supposes, individuals (*circa* 1821) pursued meaningful lives, pursued the concepts of their particular lives: they have close familial relationships, as daughters and fathers; they have careers as members of certain professions (*Berufe*); and finally they have some sort of civic role, they participate in the life of the state as a citizen. These are the kinds of particular attachments that, in sum, make us into the particular individuals we are, that constitute our characters.

Ethical life, ideally, is a *system* in which individuals pursue their lives in such a way that their pursuits mutually fit together into a coherent, harmonious whole. Ethical life is “the living good” (PR §142), the “system of particularisation of the good” (PR §142 marginalia). Hegel’s reference to the *living* good calls attention to one of the potentially unappealing, even sinister aspects of his political thought: his view of the ethical community as an organic whole.⁴⁸ We would do well here to recall the discussion of his views on functional teleology and living beings above (§1.3). Living beings are organised teleologically in an internal or functional sense, where their function is to maintain themselves as the kinds of things that they are: their parts subserve this aim, and their subjective ends will tend to aim at those states of affairs that are *good for* them in the functional sense. By contrast, the lives of thinking beings are organised around their characteristic activity of self-comprehension. The key point is that ethical life is a *spiritual* or *mental* living whole, not a *mere* living whole. As such its end or characteristic activity is to comprehend itself: “mind explicates (*expliziert*) itself and manifests itself in the endlessly varying forms which we call nations.” (VG 29/28) What this means is that the end subserved by the particular parts of ethical life is the overall comprehensibility or intelligibility of the whole. This is the point of Hegel’s emphasis on the *systematic* nature of

⁴⁸ “Now the individual (*Individuum*) is assigned to a particular sphere (*Kreis*) in the whole substance, he has his particular sphere (*Sphäre*). In his ethical attitude he wills the universal, but his activity—whose end is the universal—in its particularity makes it that each must do only what that standpoint requires. The whole is an organic life, in which the universal element is maintained only by each member being active in its particular function—equipping oneself for one’s particular sphere and, by being thus equipped, promoting the universal.” (VNS §70A)

Sittlichkeit: it is a form of life in which the *way* in which an individual pursues the concept of her life harmonises with every other individual's pursuit of the same, to the maximal possible extent.⁴⁹

What Hegel is suggesting, I believe, is that we understand ethical life, as a system of interconnected social roles, as akin to the volitional system that is at the heart of individual autonomous agency, *writ large*. For my life, my good, to be a *possible* one means for it to be able to have an intelligible place in this volitional system writ large: the system of ethical life. Just as what makes a motivation more or less intelligible for an individual is the way in which it harmonises with her particular volitional system, what makes a life as a whole intelligible is the way in which *it* harmonises with the totality of other lives, so as to make the whole maximally comprehensible. In both cases, it is in virtue of this harmonisation that we can understand action that issues from it (either a particular action, or the various activities in which an individual's pursuit of the concept of her life consists) as autonomous.

When I regard my own good as a possible one, in this way, then this alters what it means to unify oneself with another. Here, the process of seeking out differences and devising unifications—the giving and taking of love, as Hegel described it—would amount to the project of finding intelligible ways that our particular *lives* might harmonise with one another, notwithstanding our particular characters being quite different. This means both recognising that *my* good *and* that of the other depends for its value in part upon the way in which it harmonises with the totality.

⁴⁹ “It is the fact that the ethical is the *system* of these determinations of the idea that constitutes its *rationality*” (PR §145); “The ethical is not the abstract universal, but a system of the determinations of the will, because it is posited as identical with subjectivity.” (PRV19 122) Neuhauser gives an indication of what this demand for intelligible organisation might amount to in practice: “the social spheres must be constituted such that the kinds of identities and interests individuals acquire in each are compatible with those required in the others. Civil society, for example, must not be so competitive and individualistic that the forms of community characteristic of the family and state are made impossible.” (*Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 293)

The value of individuals (*Individuen*) thus rests on the extent to which they accord with and represent the spirit of the people, and have adopted a station within the affairs of the whole (*sich einem Stande der Geschäfte des Ganzen zugeteilt haben.*) (VG 94/80)

By contrast, the stubborn individual “clings to mere details, to the insubstantial ... Through stubbornness, this parody of character, the individuality (*Individualität*) of a human being is accentuated to a point where it spoils community (*Gemeinschaft*) with others” (EG §395Z). Ethical love involves overcoming such stubbornness, treating the other *as* other, because it recognises that the value of another’s good derives from the way in which it harmonises with the totality, not with my particular identity.

Mind is the infinite. In its higher form it is reconciliation, one does not make the other into oneself. Love and friendship are infinite. As person I am for myself, completely rigid (*spröde*). The other person is also rigid, is hostile (*feindlich*); I make the other over into myself ... Mind lies in the capacity to accommodate (*vertragen*) the other, and the ability to assimilate it. In no way is the other hostile to mind. A free human being can bear (*ertragen*) the other, can remain at rest with himself even in being with it (VL 118-119/110).

We can see now why Hegel describes the lover as only having her “self-feeling” in the beloved *insofar* as she treats the beloved *as other* (PR §7Z). The contrast here is with the Romantic self that “wishes to receive again the feeling that is mirrored (*widergespiegelt*) from another self”—but this Romantic way of understanding what it would mean to be unified with the other ends up not doing justice to the objective value of the other’s good, which means falling into conceit, which is a way of not being intelligible to myself, thus failing to act autonomously.

Viewing ourselves in this way allows us to reconcile the recognitive and unificatory aspects of love, and therewith our personhood and our individuality. I see your good as having value independently of the direct relationship of my identity to yours, independently

of any special relationship we happen to be in. For such value as it has derives from the way it fits intelligibly into actuality writ large, into ethical life. In this respect, your good, your particular *life* in the rich sense, appears to me as something I have reason to promote independently of your relation to me and of any antecedent motivations I may or may not have so to promote it: as something that has objective value. In this respect, the reasons I act on as an ethical being resemble reasons of personhood.

Still, its value is not *absolutely* independent of the relationship of my identity to yours, since my life is an ingredient in ethical life too. I remarked above (§1.2) that what an individual has reason to do, care about or value (what it is intelligible for her to do, care about or value) is holistically interdependent on all of the other things she has reason to do, care about or value; this is part of what it means to view her particular character as a system, as Hegel does. By the same token, an individual's good being a possible one, and so an intelligible and valuable one, is holistically interdependent upon all of the other lives that constitute ethical life, and on *their* being possible and valuable ones (which is in turn a matter of *their* holistic interdependence on the rest). In this sense, the value of another individual's good *is* dependent, if in an attenuated way, upon its bearing a relationship to my particular identity. This is what makes it the case that the reasons we act on as ethical beings resemble reasons of individuality. The reasons we act on as ethical beings thus integrate aspects of both reasons of personhood and of individuality.

When love is viewed in this way, as ethical love, it becomes clear that it describes the relationships Hegel thinks should hold between individuals in ethical life generally—not just family members, but members of particular estates, and citizens. It is in this respect a conception of political virtue, or what has been called “civic friendship”.⁵⁰ Hegel says:

⁵⁰ See Daniel Brudney, “Two Types of Civic Friendship”, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16, no.4 (2013): 729-743.

In the family, marriage, duty, and the state, it is not subjective feeling as such and the consequential unification with just *this* individual and no other, which should be the chief thing at issue. (VÄII 188/567)

Again, passages like this can make it seem as though what Hegel is recommending is that individuals cultivate a sort of overriding attachment towards certain institutions. And again, though, this cannot be what he means: ethical love is feeling directed at actual, present individuals. The institutions of *Sittlichkeit* have such value as they do only because these are the chief ways in which, as it happens, these actual individuals pursue the concepts of their particular lives. And so unifying myself with other individuals by, for instance, entering into marriage or joining a certain profession, is a way of valuing *their* good, valuing their pursuit of the concept of their particular life (which includes them wanting to *be a husband*, say, or *follow their calling* in a certain profession); it is not a way of valuing an institution.

This notion of ethical love, then, underlies the relationships between members of ethical life generally. It is the attitude of what Hegel calls the *concrete* (as opposed to the abstract or the moral) *person*, and it is the attitude that would give us a reason to make ourselves a “member” of the spheres of ethical life in the first place. It is this notion of love that Hegel has in mind when he mentions love and ethical life in the same breath:

Ethical life, love, is to give up one’s particularity, particular personhood (*besondere Persönlichkeit*), and to broaden it out to universality – likewise with friendship. In friendship, in love, I give up my abstract personhood (*abstrakte Persönlichkeit*) and thereby win it back as concrete. The truth of personhood is found precisely in winning it back through this immersion, this being immersed in the other. (VPRIII 211/285-286)

And this explains the fact that when Hegel is talking of the distinct attitudes proper to the particular spheres of *Sittlichkeit*, he nevertheless talks of them as types of love. *Trust*,

which is the “political attitude” (PR §268), is really just a form of love, Hegel says.⁵¹ And the individual finds in the corporation, her profession, her “second family” (PR §252; cf. PR §255), where she becomes a “*somebody*” rather than merely a particular, private individual (PR §§207Z, 253). In that concrete persons care about the lives of others in just the same way in which they care about their own—each is *somebody*—they share in one another’s ends, and this means that they can take a satisfaction in one another’s satisfactions.⁵² For this reason, Hegel says, ethical individuals feel no pride nor envy (PR §253); each is, so to speak, present in the accomplishments of the other.⁵³

It is commonly supposed that Hegel’s mature social and political thought represents the culmination of a decades-long retreat from the sort of position put forward in some of his earliest writings. For instance, in “The Spirit of Christianity”, Hegel invokes as his ethical paradigm the figure of Jesus who, against a commandment-based ancient Judaic morality, is said to present “the higher genius of reconcilability (*Versöhnlichkeit*) (a modification of love)” that renders such commandments superfluous (HTJ 269/215). By 1821, by contrast, it is supposed that Hegel advocates an institution- or role-based ethics that includes relations of love only as a subordinate moment, in the family.⁵⁴ Whilst I do not mean to underplay the dramatic shifts that take place between these early and late positions, I think what has been shown here is that this virtue of reconcilability, this virtue of love, remains at the heart of Hegel’s mature thought.⁵⁵

⁵¹ “A more specific form of love is trust in general, which relates more to particular ends, particular existence. Love is the universal; trust is the same” (PRV19 129-130).

⁵² See Daniel Brudney’s discussion of his model of a “reciprocal concern society” (which he draws from the 1844 Marx), in which, he says, individuals “would take satisfaction in others’ satisfactions.” (Daniel Brudney, “Two Types of Civic Friendship”, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16, no.4 (2013): 729-743 (734). John Rawls’s idea of society as a “social union” also expresses something like this idea (see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), §79).

⁵³ I think this is why Hegel says that a “free human being”—that is to say, an ethical being—“is not envious (*neidisch*), he readily recognises (*erkennt*) and rejoices in great individuals.” (VG 101/85-86) He rejoices in the achievements of others because he values their good in the same way in which he values his own.

⁵⁴ Cf. Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 209.

⁵⁵ Both Laura Werner, “Love at the Heart of the State: Hegel on Public-Spiritedness, Family and Political

Life”, in *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, ed. Kari Palonen, Hubertus Buchstein and Tuula Juvonen (LIT Verlag: Berlin, 2009), 123-144, and Alice Ormiston, *Love and Politics: Re-interpreting Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), argue for the centrality of love to Hegel’s mature political philosophy, although in quite different ways from how I have argued here.

Conclusion: The work of love

Robert Pippin writes that Hegel's account of ethical life is an account of a form of intelligible life, and that what makes it intelligible is that it is rational.¹ The opposite is true, though: ethical life is rational because it is intelligible, and insofar as it is intelligible. It is through ethical life that we express ethical love, which is the ultimate way of making *ourselves* intelligible. Love, thus understood, is a way of making sense of ourselves; ethical life is the way in which we express ethical love. It is thus rational: we have reason to cultivate an attitude of ethical love, and to assent to an ethical life that expresses such love.

I suggested in the introduction that any interpretation of the normative foundations of Hegel's social and political philosophy had to offer some answer to what I called the *Sittlichkeit* question: how is it that autonomous agents are committed to willing all the institutions one finds in Hegel's theory of ethical life? My answer is that affirming these institutions is just the means through which individuals express a way of valuing one another's good, ethical love, that is itself a rational attitude for us insofar as we are autonomous agents, that is, in so far as we are agents who satisfy the drive to comprehend ourselves. The significance of institutions thus lies not primarily in their acculturating or educative functions, in the fact that they are the indispensable means to us being autonomous agents in the first place. Rather, it is just because the pursuit of the concepts of our particular lives involves, as it happens, various kinds of institutional role—mothers, doctors, citizens—that *what it means* to value the good of others, in the way implied by ethical love, will mean entering into the institution of marriage with someone, joining a profession alongside others, and so on.

¹ Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 6.

Is this really an account of *love*? It might be objected that I have simply *substituted* the concept of love with some more impersonal attitude, such as “civic friendship”. But it is not that we have substituted one concept with the other. Rather, in thinking through what the concept of love intuitively demands—that it include *both* a recognitive and a unificatory component, that it must somehow manage to resolve the tension between these moments—we have reached the concept of ethical love, as I have set it out here. And ethical love is the kind of attitude that ought to hold between individuals in *Sittlichkeit* generally. We could accept that once individuals come into particular relationships, they accrue further, particular reasons that are relative to these special relationships. But the reasons we have entering into these relationships in the first place will be the reasons of ethical love, those reasons that apply to us *qua* concrete persons. Indeed, Hegel seems to have held something like this view during his Nürnberg period:

The duty of the *universal love of humanity* (allgemeinen Menschenliebe) extends to those cases in which we stand in closer relations of acquaintance and friendship. The original unity of mankind must be the basis from which arise voluntarily much closer bonds that involve more determinate duties. (NP 270-271/51)

It might be objected at this point that the very idea of a duty to love, or of there being reasons to cultivate an attitude of ethical love, is incoherent. To say there are reasons to love is to say I ought to love. But love is a feeling, and feelings cannot be mustered at will. If ought implies can, as Kant thought, then it follows that there cannot be reasons to love. There is only one place I know of where Hegel tackles this problem head on—namely, in the early “Spirit of Christianity” essay (HTJ 295-296/247). There, he wants to accept *both* that love “cannot be commanded” *and* that it still makes sense to say, for instance, “Thou shalt love” (and thus that one has reason to love) (HTJ 296/247). Although Hegel does not explicitly draw this conclusion, the only way to maintain both of

these claims is for him to deny the ought-implies-can principle. That is, it is possible that we have reasons to do things we are unable to do.

Perhaps, however, we need not concede this much. For the objection seems to misrepresent the way in which such reasons figure in our agency.² That is, we do not typically experience them as *commanding* us or *compelling* us; we rather find ourselves willingly submitting to reasons of love. The objection rests on a view of the relationship between reasons and emotions that Hegel sees as characteristic of “the understanding”:

The difficulty for the understanding consists in getting away from the separation that it has first willfully made itself between the soul-faculties, feeling, the thinking mind, and arriving at the idea that in the human being there is only *one* reason in feeling, volition, and thinking. (EG §471A)

Yet even if one can assuage these worries one might nevertheless still think the picture represents an unacceptable *instrumentalisation* of love (and ethical life). For it seems to follow that, on some level, the ultimate reason to love is that it reconciles two aspects of our identity, and so advances our deep, inescapable aim of comprehending ourselves.

Here we should return to the view expressed in §1.3. There is a way in which our actions can proceed from our aim of self-comprehension without it being the case that this is our explicit aim. Similarly, the fact that love is a rational attitude has to do, ultimately, with the fact that by acting out of an attitude of love we subserve this ultimate aim. But that is never our conscious aim. I do not love you so as better to comprehend myself. Rather, my ultimate aim of self-comprehension explains why I *find* myself with reasons to (ethically) love. Love is not, for me, an instrument or means to that ultimate aim.

We might instinctively shrink from the conservatism that seems to be implied by this picture of ethical love. It seems to make the fact of whether or not an individual’s life and

² Cf. Bennett Helm, “Love”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/love/>

good is valuable unduly dependent upon the status quo, upon whether she can fit herself in with the prevailing ways in which a particular community allows individuals to live meaningful lives. We might worry that this excludes the possibility that individuals' lives might be meaningful and valuable despite their not having an intelligible place in ethical life, as Hegel describes it.

This way of presenting the objection, however, involves a subtle but important misrepresentation of the issue. For whether or not an individual can fit their life intelligibly into the whole is holistically dependent upon the extent to which all others *strive* to fit *their* lives intelligibly into the whole. That is, the very character of the status quo is dependent upon the extent to which individuals adopt an attitude of ethical love—it is not a fixed datum. What the status quo *is* is itself the outcome of the work of mutual giving and taking that is at the heart of love; and so whether or not it is the individual or the prevailing order that is “at fault” is not something that can be settled *a priori*, since the status quo is determined by the extent to which individuals exhibit, or fail to exhibit, the virtue of reconciliability—the virtue of love. Any failure, if there is such a failure, will be a failure of love, and will be in some measure a failure of *all*.

This work of love is the project of our collective life, in a very general sense. Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* is, it can be said, a contribution to this work of love: his own attempt to show how all the particular lives he sees around him ultimately fit together into an intelligible, comprehensible whole. I have not addressed the question of whether he succeeds or fails. To the extent that we still live in the world Hegel describes, it follows from what I have argued that this would, at any rate, be *our* success, or our failure.

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