

Modern life's project of self-justification

1. Reason, science, and modern affirmations

The transition to "Reason"

After concluding the section on the "unhappy consciousness," Hegel begins an entirely new section titled "Reason." Hegel's reasons for this transition have proved puzzling to some commentators, leading some to hypothesize that the book indeed has no coherent structure and that the section on "Reason" in particular shows that Hegel changed his mind about the composition of the book while he was writing it and did not have the time to revise the whole manuscript in light of this change of plan.¹ Other commentators, noting the differences between the transition in the 1807 *Phenomenology* and in the later works, particularly the *Encyclopedia*, have concluded that Hegel in his later Heidelberg and Berlin years simply abandoned the *Phenomenology's* approach to things.²

However, Hegel's reasons for making this transition can be elicited both from the structure of the *Phenomenology* and by attention to his later writings. There are good, systemic reasons within the structure of the text of the *Phenomenology* itself for the move. In the section on "Consciousness," the issue of what counts as knowledge is treated as having to do with a kind of unreflective fusion of both the subjective and the objective points of view and a failure to distinguish them. In "Consciousness," we have an account of knowledge in terms of some kind of direct awareness of the objects of consciousness; this account undermines itself as it follows out its own logic: The direct awareness of objects in "sense-certainty" turns out really to be a perceptual awareness of objects, which itself turns out to be a more reflected awareness of supersensible entities "behind" appearance that determine the structure of perception. However, the reflective "understanding's" description of supersensible entities itself becomes contradictory and antinomial, and "the understanding's" claim that it consistently describes the world thereby also undermines itself. "Consciousness" thereby becomes *self-consciousness* in trying to give an account of how it could possibly grasp the world as it really is; rather than taking an account of knowledge as a kind of passive, direct awareness of objects as authoritative, it must instead *reflect* on the accounts it gives itself.

In "Self-Consciousness," the issue of what we take to be an authoritative reason is at first explicated from the subjective point of view, and its insufficiencies then generate the objective point of view. After the two distinct

points of view have been generated, they are then understood as being in opposition to each other in the sections that deal with stoicism, skepticism, and the "unhappy consciousness." The "unhappy consciousness," however, ends with the possibility of a unity of the objective and the subjective point of view in which the reasons that we take to be authoritative reasons are seen as subjectively determined by us but nonetheless as valid principles governing the world both in theory and in practice when seen from the detached, objective point of view.³ That is, it creates the *possibility* for the individual thinker of having it affirmed for him that the world as viewed from the standpoint of principles that he endorses from his own *individual* point of view is the same as the world as seen in terms of principles that he would adopt from a more detached standpoint, with no conception of a metaphysical "beyond" being needed to affirm for him these principles that he *takes as valid really are* valid. This unity of the two points of view is called "reason" by Hegel, for it signifies that the capacity to affirm that "this is the way the world is" is based not on our "matching up" our representations with the world "in itself" – not, that is, based on any kind of metaphysical relation between our representations and reality – but on our capacity to construct explanatory accounts about ourselves and the world that are then tested internally to see if they can make good on their claims within the terms that they set for themselves.⁴ At first, of course, this belief in "reason" is no more than a matter of faith; it is a historical *project*, an attempt to affirm a certain conception of the relation between human thought and reality that at the outset must be simply presumed and that in its development can later be demonstrated.

This is linked with the historical reasons for making the move from "Self-Consciousness" to "Reason": If the progression of history begins with the Greek attempts to work out the problems inherent in relationships of master-ship and slavery such that self-generated skeptical doubts about what the Greeks themselves had come to count as authoritative reasons were to be answered by the doctrines found in late antiquity, then what follows should be the later conceptions that historically emerged out of the earlier attempts to work out the problems inherent in the Greeks' (and the Romans') own attempts to affirm for themselves that their reasons were good ones. The various attempts found in stoicism and skepticism led of course to the "unhappy consciousness" of late antiquity and early Christianity, which were incorporated into the medieval Christian period's reflection on the problems of the "unhappy consciousness." The move to modern life, however, gets underway with the post-medieval conception of the investigation of nature through the empirical sciences, what Hegel calls in both the *Phenomenology* and elsewhere the "observation" of nature.⁵ The beginnings of experimental science in the period preceding and following the Reformation exhibited the idea that rational agents could in fact unlock the secrets of nature provided they were to follow a *method* that would be determined by their own rational powers and the force of which would provide them with a knowledge of nature that would be useful to humanity (in other words, Francis Bacon's

ideal of science).⁶ The result of the emphasis by early modernity on scientific *method* is the affirmation that humanity has within its power the capacity to determine for itself that what it takes as an authoritative reason can in fact be shown to be an authoritative reason, to be something that reveals to us the way the world is. That is, it affirms a conception of human agents' having a certain power – namely, that on their own they can develop a method that forces nature to give up its secrets. This kind of “power” spills over into the fields of social life and leads to political self-determination and, so Hegel argues, eventually to his own system of self-determining concepts.⁷

The results of the attempt to apply these methods of reason to nature and to society thus result in the formulations of the laws of nature and the laws of society, which culminate in that period of European life called “the Enlightenment.” By constructing rational methods for the observation of nature, people find that they are then led to construct a view of themselves as rational independent agents. This view of ourselves as independent agents gives rise to modern life's idea that its form of life can be completely self-justifying, that it can affirm its social and political institutions for itself without appeal to anything other than that which is demanded by human reason itself. Based on the success of the sciences of nature, modern life attempts to establish a science of human social life that would uncover the heretofore hidden laws of human social and political organization. The idea of there being a “method” appeals to a conception of impersonal reason, “the view from nowhere,” something that itself is supposedly independent of all social practices, which itself transcends history. (As the conception of impersonal reason, the “view from nowhere” thus replaces the idea advanced in the “unhappy consciousness” of the “unchangeable.”) The section on reason attempts to narrate the dialectical history of that attempt at establishing a self-justifying form of life by the application of various “methods” in order to discover the general laws of nature and social life.

Science as “observing reason”

Hegel's discussion of scientific method and the rationale of the search for various laws of nature differs from his discussion of “sense-certainty” and “perception” in that the latter concerns itself with attempts to construct forms of self-sufficient knowledge that we could in principle have independently of any social practice or historical period, and with the failures of those attempts. Hegel's discussion of modern science, on the other hand, does not treat it as a form of self-sufficient knowledge but as a form of knowledge that presupposes the background of antiquity and the “unhappy consciousness” for its own possibility. The dialectic of the “unhappy consciousness” results in a “faith” that the nature of the world is not something intrinsically alien to our own ways of thinking. That kind of “faith” is the basis of a project of extending the powers of human thought. The rise of humanism, which presupposes the outcome of the “unhappy consciousness,” gives rise to a conception of knowledge as serving human interests in which agents see themselves

as determining *for themselves* what may count as authoritative reasons for belief and action rather than thinking of the world itself as somehow making certain reasons count for them.

The idea of a self-determined “method” that underlies modern science makes possible the break from the ancients’ idea that the ends of life and knowledge are set by nature or by the cosmos – more generally, it makes possible the shift from a conception of “fate” to a conception of freedom. The world is not merely to be contemplated but studied in terms of *human* reason, that is, in terms of how well it satisfies human desires and interests, with the presumption being that by constructing a proper *method*, human agents can discover the way the world is in itself such that they can reshape that world into something that better satisfies human desires and fits human projects. In order to do this, the agents must be content not merely to describe and to classify things (even supposing that the classifications match up with natural kinds); they must get at the nature of things, their essence, and this means describing them as falling under laws – in Hegel’s terms, as bringing them to the universal.⁸ Basic to this method is observation, observing things as they are, not as we would wish them to be, and constructing our system of laws out of these observations. By making careful, controlled observation central to its method, the scientific community affirms for itself that its rational methods are indeed appropriate to the reality being studied.⁹ (Hegel seems to be describing basically what he takes to be Baconian procedures, noting all the while that many philosophers, including Bacon, take themselves *only* to be observing and describing, when in fact they are doing something more – namely, actively constructing theories and postulating entities to explain the correlations observed in their observations.)

The section on “observing reason” is the place in the *Phenomenology* in which Hegel attempts to outline his views on modern science and to come to terms with it (something he attempted later in a slightly different fashion in his *Encyclopedia* in what we now call his “Philosophy of Nature.”) Several things about Hegel’s treatment stand out. First, he does not go into much detail in the *Phenomenology* (and even less so in his later “Philosophy of Nature”) about many themes that have come to be identified with philosophy of science in our time. He does not discuss scientific method in any real detail, and he does not offer any extended philosophical treatment of the problems of induction, on questions of theory construction, on the role of theoretical terms versus observational terms in scientific theory, on the logic of discovery versus the logic of justification, although a judicious reading of the section in the *Phenomenology* could arguably find some things that at least look like a discussion of each of these topics. This is because Hegel did not think that a philosophical theory could *prescribe* to working scientists what their method should be. In that sense, he apparently did not think that questions of scientific method were per se philosophical questions. At best, philosophy can enter into a debate with the scientific community about what are the proper procedures of scientific method, and it certainly can reflect on the role that science and scientific method play in the historical and philo-

sophical development of our conception of ourselves. But the nature of scientific method is best left to the working scientists to determine for themselves; it is up to the *scientific community* (the community of researchers) to determine what is to count as a scientific reason *for them*. Philosophy can no more dictate to the scientific community what counts as an authoritative reason for them than it can dictate to painters what counts as a valid application of paint to canvas or to composers what counts as a valid construction of musical notes. Philosophy can, however, seek to understand the connections between the basic conceptions arrived at by the scientific community and the rest of our conceptions; this is what Hegel takes to be the major task of the kind of philosophy that he is pursuing, for this task helps to situate science within the larger question of the philosophical project of constructing an account of what it means for us to take something as authoritative for ourselves. Philosophy can ask why it is that we have come to accept scientific reasons as *authoritative* reasons or why the kinds of reasoning that the scientific community itself has come to accept have also come to count for the larger community as models of what we should count as authoritative reasons. That is, the Hegelian philosophy of science aims to see scientific practice as part of the overall development of reflective social practice, of “spirit.” (Needless to say, it is also part of the legitimate task of philosophy to debate with the scientific community when it starts formulating, perhaps unwittingly, meta-physical or very generally philosophical theses about what it is doing.)¹⁰

Physics and biology

Hegel argues that science, especially in the form of what we now call classical mechanics, strives for necessity and not just statistical regularity in its laws – that is, it strives for more than the kinds of statistical regularities discovered by inductive observation. Hegel also thinks, however, that what gives the necessity to the laws is that they express the essence of the things they study – for example, that stones fall to earth is a statistical regularity, but that they *necessarily* fall to earth has to do with the intrinsic nature of stones, which is their weight. (The Newtonian view, of course, sees weight as an accidental property of bodies.) Because they have weight “in and for themselves,” stones have a necessary relation to the earth. (These kinds of views of weight as an essential property account for some of Hegel’s misunderstanding of certain key Newtonian concepts.¹¹) However, Hegel’s point – which is independent of the somewhat peculiar mixture of modern and pre-modern scientific views in his conception of nature – is that modern science cannot be content with mere Baconian induction but must strive to formulate theories that lend a certain necessity to the laws they come up with. This is done in several ways. The first way in which the agents affirm these findings as adequate is through experimentation. Second, scientists introduce theoretical terms, such as “matter,” to explain the various ways in which what might look like different things and different laws can be subsumed under more general cases, thereby fitting what would otherwise only be disconnected observations into a richer

conceptual apparatus. The introduction of theoretical terms thus allows for a richer and tighter set of inferences than would be possible if the scientific accounts were left simply at the stage of inductive generalization.¹² (As modern philosophers such as Wilfrid Sellars have argued, mere collections of inductive generalizations cannot explain why the generalizations sometimes do not hold.¹³) The third way is through the construction of *theories* in which the various inductive laws are reformulated in *mathematical* form. (This is not mentioned explicitly in the *Phenomenology*, but it is implicit in Hegel's discussions there, and it later becomes explicit in his mature philosophy of nature in the Heidelberg and Berlin years.) The mathematical form of the laws gives them a necessity that they could not have as mere generalizations from experience. Situating the laws within theories of mathematical form gives them a conceptual status that a mere series of observations could not have. The mathematical formulations of the sciences of nature, along with the generalizations and inferential possibilities offered by the introduction of theoretical terms, thus serve to affirm for modern agents that their own constructions (those of mathematics) are in fact adequate to know the workings of nature, and that therefore what they count as reasons can be shown to be authoritative reasons since mathematics is a human construction that can be shown to be justified and consistent. Scientific practice in early modernity does not, of course, formulate its results in this way. Instead, it takes itself to be offering only an "observational proof" that human reason and reality are not alien to each other; it takes itself, that is, to have formulated a method for "taking in" the world as it really is.

Hegel's reflections on the role of mathematics in scientific law also led him to the belief that the science of organisms would have to take a form different from that of mechanics, since the conditions that allow the formulation of mathematical laws are not present in the study of organisms. The entities of mechanical nature are only "externally" related to each other in purely quantitative and qualitative ways; thus, mathematics is the proper language in which to give a rigorous description of them. Organisms, however, are *self-maintaining* wholes. The proper language to describe them is therefore not mathematics but the language of teleology, of purposiveness. One cannot find any purposiveness, for example, in the solar system; the planets do not orbit the sun to serve any kind of purpose. As a mechanical system, the solar system is held together by sets of countervailing forces, none of which need make reference to any sort of purpose.¹⁴ However, when one describes the system that is an organism, one must employ purposive descriptions (for example, that the heart beats in order to circulate blood, not that it just happens to circulate blood). The kinds of teleological descriptions appropriate to the description of organisms are what we would nowadays call *functional* descriptions. They are not the purposiveness of someone intentionally doing something (such as "going to the university in order to hear Hegel's lectures"). No beliefs or desires need be attributed to the organism when we describe it functionally – we say, for example, that the heart beats in order to circulate the blood, not that the heart "desires" to circulate the blood and

therefore it beats, or that the heart “believes” it must beat in order to circulate the blood.¹⁵ Because organisms require these teleological functionalist explanations, which are completely out of place in the physical explanation of inorganic nature, it follows for Hegel that biology must be a science separate from that of physics.¹⁶

Like physics, biology is based on observation, but, so Hegel argues, it is even less plausible that it could be a purely inductive science than it is that physics could be such a purely inductive science. The kind of functionalist teleology that is necessary for understanding an organism is not something that one simply observes; in order to understand an organism as an organism, one must make some extrapolations and infer to the various purposes that are served by this and that arrangement of organs. Like physics, biology looks for necessities in its subject matter, but in its case, the necessities that it reveals are the necessities to be found in functionalist teleological laws. Such laws assume the general purpose of the organism, which is that of its maintaining itself as an individual and maintaining its species, and then show that certain organs and processes can be seen to serve the attainment of those ends, even though we cannot deduce the exact nature of those organs from the functions which they serve. For example, we understand that the heart beats in order to circulate the blood only when we understand how the circulation of blood plays such and such a role within the self-maintenance of the organism.¹⁷ Everything from the heavy fur of northern animals to the nature of the internal organs can thus be understood in this fashion, even if they cannot be deduced from knowing the general ends of the organism. The success of biology, which shows that even the sphere of life may be treated scientifically, serves further to affirm for modern agents that their point of view on the world is adequate to grasp the way the world is in itself – that is, is at one with an objective point of view. (In all his discussions, Hegel argues that the reason that such laws cannot be given a mathematical formulation is because they are not mechanical but teleological, but he seems simply to assume all along that functionalist teleological laws simply cannot be given a mathematical expression, an assumption that we nowadays need not make.)

Hegel reconstructs the way in which the biological sciences of his day tried to develop the basic ends (or functions) in terms of which all organisms took on their shape (*Gestaltung*) – namely, sensibility, irritability, and reproduction (which Hegel sees as serving the logical structures of universality, particularity, and individuality). These functions flow from the general function of the organism as a self-maintaining system, and they are subsidiary functions that serve this larger function. Sensibility refers to the internal structures of feeling within the organism, irritability refers to the structures by which it can be stimulated or provoked by its environment into some kind of action or reaction, and reproduction refers to those structures that regenerate the organism on a daily basis as an individual and also serve to regenerate the species.¹⁸ (Typically for him, Hegel holds that reproduction is the unity of sensibility and irritability.) These three functions themselves then are specifiable into more detailed functional subsystems, such as the nervous system

as serving the functions of sensibility, the musculature system as serving the functions of irritability, and the intestinal system as serving the ends of reproduction. (These subsystems must be seen as serving the more general ends of the organism and not as being identical with them; moreover, taken outside of the ends they serve, they can appear only as merely inert pieces of matter, for what is important in them is not the "stuff" of which they are made, but how this "stuff" plays its role in the organism – that is, satisfies the functions that it does.¹⁹) Once again, Hegel argues that there cannot be genuine laws at work in the biological sciences (at least not in the sense that physics has laws), for one can neither deduce nor predict from the general end of sensibility, for example, that it must be specified in a nervous system, especially if some other system could serve the same end as well.²⁰

Hegel takes the so-called laws of biology as supposedly stating the necessity of the "outer" as being only the expression of the "inner." These laws are the kinds of so-called laws of development discussed by, among others, Lamarck and Buffon, in which there are "inner forms" that receive modification by the external circumstances but that effectively determine the course of development of an organism. Lamarck, for example, thought that just as there were laws of human development from child to youth to adult to elderly, animal and plant life went through a similar "law-like" development in which whole species could be seen as the "youthful" and others as the "adult" stages of animal life in general. But there can be no such laws, so Hegel argues, for what he calls the "universal individual, the earth" determines the organization of species in accidental ways that does not allow for there to be any genuine laws governing the distribution and kind of species – that is, anything like a system of laws specifying the necessity for there being such and such types of species.²¹ The arrangement of nature as a system of living things existing within a context of non-organic material factors is too full of contingency to permit us to formulate any necessary laws for it.

The sciences of biology and physics (Hegel was later to add chemistry) are, however, unsuited to treat human reality, the social world of agents, because, as Hegel puts it, that world is essentially *historical*, whereas nature has no genuine history.²² It obviously has a past, and there are obviously causal accounts of it that can be given, but it has no history because it is unintelligible how there could be any narratives that could be told of its developments that show how some later set of events can be said to be *completing* what came before them in the way that a later set of events in history can be said to be the completion of earlier events, even though the earlier events were not aiming at those later events. The teleology found in history has to do with the way in which the internal insufficiencies of a form of life's accounts of what has come to be taken as authoritative for it – the insufficiencies that generate skepticism about themselves – are resolved by those accounts given by the form of life that succeeds it; the narratives that make up history can only be understood in terms of the way in which these later accounts (as being essential to the self-identity of an age) overcome or fail to overcome the deficiencies of earlier accounts. The functional teleology inherent in biological nature is insuffi-

cient to provide the kind of narrative connection – of something’s completing something else, of bringing a story to a close – that is necessary for there to be any genuine history. History is about stories that have at least potential completions, whereas in nature there are merely endless successions about which it makes no sense to say that this or that succession of events is now complete. The French Revolution, for example, may be seen as the consummation of a series of events leading up to it in the way that a new geological formation is not the fruition of anything but simply the accidental result of a series of past causal chains that have resulted in it. Hegel argues that human agents cannot therefore find that their sense of themselves *as agents* to be completely affirmed by the rise of modern science. Modern science teaches modern agents that what they construct with their own powers of thinking – what emerges from the human, subjective point of view – is in fact in accordance with the way things are and can thus be affirmed for them as knowledge; the practice of modern science affirms for modern agents that their own “subjective” capacities of reason are in fact in harmony with the “objective” nature of the world. But it cannot affirm for them that they know themselves *as agents*, and therefore really as human.

The “science” of self-identity

The question is thus whether their own nature *as agents* is something beyond the reach of science, or whether it too can be brought under the purview of inductive and postulational science. Since the answer to this question is not obvious, it is thus logical and certainly not surprising that at a certain point in early modern history, the European community would have tried to apply the idea of scientific method to itself in order to determine the laws of social life, and, to paraphrase Kant’s description of Rousseau, to produce a “Newton of the moral world” who would thereby demonstrate the rationality of certain ways of thinking about human social life and the irrationality of others. It is this attempt that Hegel claims leads to the great crisis of modern life in its effort to justify itself by appeal to the methods of modern science.

In order to get to that point, Hegel takes a somewhat idiosyncratic detour through some contemporary (to him) attempts to apply the methods of natural science directly to human life, attempts that he thinks are not even remotely adequate for understanding the kind of historical and social character of human agency. Life, so he argues, exhibits an analogous structure to human agency in that the individual organism has, as it were, a subjective point of view, a set of drives and impulses that function together with each other that have as their goal the preservation of the organism; likewise, there is, as it were, an objective point of view on the organism, in that its various functions and drives serve to perpetuate the species without the organism’s “knowing” this. But these “as it weres” mean only that the organism does not really have anything like a unity of the subjective and the objective point of view. Such a characterization of the organism is done from *our* point of view. The various functional teleologies in nature are there *for us*, not for the

organisms themselves. We can see the various adaptive strategies exhibited by spiders, for example, as serving the purpose of preserving the individual and propagating the species, but this is not “for” the spider, any more than the function of circulating blood is “for” the heart (something that the heart is aware of).²³

The question, though, is whether there are also *laws* that govern the way in which things are *for us* – that is, whether there are the same kind of functional teleologies within our own system of thought that govern how the world can be for us without our necessarily being aware of those laws. Candidates for such laws would be inductively established psychological laws of association. Hegel alludes to what in his time was a lively attempt to construct such laws, and the logic books of his day were full of attempts to explain various laws of logic as inviolable laws of human thought in that they were taken to be the ironclad necessities of the way in which humans (as opposed to cats or monkeys) had to think. Hegel's objection to this is fairly straightforward: Even if we could demonstrate some kind of typical association of thoughts (which he does not deny), we would still not have explained one of the most distinctive aspects of human thinking – namely, that the nature of thoughts is such that they can be reflectively criticized and reformulated in terms of other thoughts. Any associationist doctrine misunderstands both the normative character of thought and its reflexivity, the way in which it is capable of modifying itself. Thought, as Hegel likes to put it, is in movement not because it consists of a set of events following each other (as an inductive characterization of “associations” would have to have it) but because it is forever modifying itself by supplying itself with new concepts and new contexts for old concepts. The nature of a thought has to do with its relationships – particularly, its normative, inferential relationships – with other thoughts, and this normative structure itself is historical and social in character. Moreover, the reflexive structure of thought is such that it can always throw into question any particular association in terms of its adequacy or fit with other thoughts. Introducing new “thoughts” (such as the divine right of kings, the principle of entropy, syncopated rhythms, or whatever) can change the context of all the other thoughts such that any previous association ceases to be valid. The various thoughts that a person can have do not come in little sacks that prevent them from being modified by the introduction of new thoughts and of new connections with other thoughts. Moreover, the attempt at prescribing some kind of associationist laws for thought is bound to confuse simple idiosyncrasy – as when one person always associates Kantianism with Lutheran piety whereas another always associates it with egalitarian humanism – with what are the genuine inferential connections among those thoughts themselves. Those latter inferential connections are not idiosyncratic to the individuals involved; they are part of the *spirit*, of the common shared set of principles, vocabularies, and beliefs that individuals as members of a determinate historical community share.²⁴ The world may impinge on *individuals* such that it creates certain associations for them; but the world's impinging on individuals does not determine the inferential connections of

human thought, which are normative, reflexive, and ultimately social in character, and which structure the community in terms of which the individual agent is a member. Thus, although we may be able to formulate associative laws for our consciousness, we cannot do so for *self*-consciousness, for self-consciousness is possible only by locating oneself in "social space," and there are no associative laws for the way in which the historical insufficiencies of certain kinds of inferential structures give way and are seen to be justifiably replaced by other forms of authoritative reasons. The world does not determine that for human agents; they collectively and historically determine it for themselves.²⁵

Hegel also takes up various pseudo-sciences of his time – handwriting analysis, physiognomy (the attempt to correlate character with particular anatomical features such as the length and the shape of the nose), and phrenology (the attempt to correlate character and intelligence with the shape of the skull and with the bumps on the skull) – in order to show how these could not be sciences and thus how the attempt to construct a "science of self-identity" would be a false start. The "science of self-identity" could not affirm for modern agents that who they took themselves to be was in fact who they are because it rests on the wrong assumptions about the nature of character and self-identity. Individual self-consciousness is one's taking oneself to be located in a determinate "social space"; an individual's self-identity is made up of his actions in that "social space" and how those actions are taken by others. The "social space" is both the basis of the principles on which actions are taken and the basis of the interpretations of those actions by others. Self-identity cannot be something determinate and "fixed" that an individual could have outside of acting in any determinate "social space." The pseudo-sciences of self-identity however, see it as exactly that: as something that is completely formed and is then *expressed* in actions. For these pseudo-sciences, self-identity (or "character") is taken by them as something formed, fixed, and *inner*, whereas its expressions are taken as something that is *outer*, something available for observation. The pseudo-sciences of self-identity thus hope to find the laws that correlate the ways in which "inner character" is necessarily expressed in outer observable behavior.

On the one hand, this might seem unexceptionable. We might take certain behavior to be explicable only as being the outward expression of the internal process of thought. For example, we might see a person look at two things on a counter in a store, wrinkle his brow, then pick out one of them, and conclude that he was thinking about which one he wanted, which was better, or whatnot. But this already imputes a public conception of thought to the person being observed, and without using this public conception, we cannot hope to conclude what "inner processes" were transpiring in the person's mind. We might postulate, that is, that he was *thinking* about such and such and that this was linked with his behavior. But the pseudo-sciences of self-identity went farther; they reasoned that since there is a necessary connection between internal process and external appearance, the connection must be such that can find determinate laws that necessarily correlate external appear-

ance with these fixed "inner processes." They claimed to find these correlations in facial shapes, handwriting, and the shapes and bumps of skulls. Behind their various proposals was the assumption that a person's character is something fixed and indifferent to its social expression such that it would be what it is without its being expressed in any actions at all. Because the pseudo-sciences of self-identity take character to be this kind of fixed, independently describable and identifiable entity, they concluded that it could be correlated with other fixed, independently describable and identifiable items like the shape and length of noses or the shape of skulls. Indeed, for there to be a lawlike connection between the two – between the "inner" and the "outer" – each would have to be independently identifiable, for only if the law correlates some independently identifiable X with some independently identifiable Y can it count as a genuine correlation. The idea that there could be such laws is thus the idea that there is some "inner" thing (one's character) that necessarily causes some "outer" thing (a shape of the face, a bump on the skull) to come into existence; in that way, the necessities of the correlations can be maintained.²⁶ However, the nature of action is such that its expression in various actions (such as a grimace) is a matter of *interpretation* by both the agent himself and by others in light of certain social norms. A person's character is inseparable from what he does, and what he does is a matter of interpretation.²⁷ Character cannot be a "thing" that exists independently of its expressions in various actions. Even what might look like a prime candidate for such "inner" things – namely, one's feelings – are themselves subject to interpretation; one must interpret one's feelings in order to know what one is feeling.²⁸ Thus, the ideal of finding lawlike correlations between the "inner facts" of one's character and its "outward expression" in the shape of the face is wrong-headed from the outset. In fact, there is no incontrovertible knowledge of character available either through introspection to the agent himself or to the observer of the agent's face or skull. Neither the agent himself nor his observers can be in a position to say indubitably that this is "who" he is outside of any social context. Each is making an interpretation based on the norms of his time, and each interpretation is fallible.²⁹ To say that it is an interpretation, however, should not suggest that there is some fixed "thing" that is being interpreted; rather, the "self" that is being interpreted is itself a *project*, something that the agent constructs within a social context and which he is not able fully to control. (In my own eyes, I might be selflessly devoted to the welfare of others, but in seeking the political power necessary to accomplish the ends connected with that I find instead that others regard me as a dangerous demagogue; or I might take myself to be devoted to the improvement of the lot of the disadvantaged only to find that I have become an arrogant paternalist.)

This necessity of this kind of interpretation in "social space" and of the self being more of a project than a fixed "thing" makes it impossible to have the kind of observational science for humanity that is possible for inorganic and organic nature. Agents do not have a character that is formed and fixed such that it can be observed and correlated with external occurrences in such a way

that one can come up with a science of character that would provide us with the laws of character. Human agents have the possibility of reflection and thus deliberation; because of this, they may be said to *act* in a genuine sense. This is not to deny that human actions are not predictable. A “person of character” is precisely a person whose actions *are* predictable. He acts “in character” when he does things that are predictable in light of what we know about what he has done in the past and the circumstances in which he did it (in short, he is predictable in light of details of his biography). A person’s character is thus a *historical* matter in that it involves knowledge of his past and how he responded in that past. This past, however, is the kind of thing that can be completed by later events; it is also a past that itself requires an interpretation by the agents confronting it, for they act in light of what they take the present situation to be, and that present situation cannot be construed except in terms of its links with its historical past and how they take that past. One cannot understand, for example, how a nineteenth-century German intellectual reacts to his time unless one also knows a bit about the Napoleonic wars, the stories that the Germans told themselves about these wars, and what the list of relevant possibilities for the future appeared to be for those people. In short, one cannot understand the person’s actions unless one has some idea of how he *takes* himself and his situation to be, and understanding that “taking” is not a matter of correlating “inner” things with “outer” things. Of course, this also implies that one cannot simply observe one’s rational agency within oneself as a datum of experience; one’s rational agency is not some internally introspectible object. To be a rational agent is to be a *self-conscious* agent, which is to assume a position in “social space.” Self-consciousness, that is, is a *doing* of something, not a *reporting* about oneself. One can report on others by taking them to be self-conscious – that is, by locating them in some kind of “social space” – but one’s own self-consciousness is neither itself a reporting on one’s inner life, nor is it imputing something to oneself; it is *doing* something.

The force of modern science was that it allowed modern agents to construct a view of themselves as capable of determining their own destinies through the application of “reason.” That is, by appeal to their own rational powers they were capable of determining for themselves what would count as authoritative for them; the success of modern science affirms for them that this is indeed a true view of themselves. Yet, so it would seem, they cannot apply the *methods* of study to themselves that they applied to nature. Thus, if they are to be able to affirm for themselves that what they take to be authoritative really is so, then they must somehow be able to affirm for themselves that they are indeed these rational agents, and they must be able to do this by appeal only to their own powers of reason, not by appeal to any kind of “fate” external to themselves. The only way in which they could do this, consistent with the historical situation in which they found themselves, is not to look for some kind of observationally based inductive science of themselves but to look to themselves to construct themselves as rational agents. By appealing only to their own powers of reason – that is, without appeal to anything

simply “given” – they must transform the “social space” in which they live and in terms of which they act and think into a properly rational set of principles and supporting institutions such that they can indeed affirm for themselves that they are indeed the independent agents they take themselves to be.³⁰ The early modern emphasis on reflective independence thus emerges with the early modern emphasis on reason and science, and the European community comes to be engaged in a political and social project of trying to show that its form of life can be justified in terms of the modern standards of reason it has set for itself. That is, it comes to be engaged in the project of showing that its form of life is rationally *self-justifying* and that the participants in that form of life are therefore truly independent.

2. Early modernity's social construction of individualism: Faustianism, sentimentalism, and natural virtue

In affirming for themselves that their form of life is itself self-justifying in terms of reason, modern agents are led to a view of themselves as independent individuals, whose own lives and values must themselves be justified purely by appeal to reason. Just as modern culture supposedly need not accept anything outside of its own resources in order to be able to justify itself, the modern individual need accept no reason that cannot count *for him*, as a rational agent, as an authoritative reason. Although reason itself as a general reflective capacity to evaluate and criticize our practices, including the practices of reason-giving itself, is something that itself has a history, for these early modern individuals it appears as something itself that is simply present within each individual. If nothing counts for an individual as an authoritative reason unless he can come to count it *for himself* as an authoritative reason, then the individual (or his “reason”) must remain the ultimate locus of authority for what does and does not count as authoritative for belief or for action. For example, early modern political theorists were led to the idea that political legitimacy must come from reason, and it must be such that each rational agent could affirm for himself that the actions and form of life generated out of this set of institutions constitute for him authoritative reasons to act in such and such a way, to feel in such and such a way, and to think in such and such a way. They were also led to present this as a kind of fictional history of how man emerged from a natural state into a political state. Moreover, the impact of modern science made it seem that individuals need only apply the *methods* of reason to human affairs in order to bring about a state of affairs in which agents could rationally affirm for themselves their view of themselves as independent agents who need accept no ends that they cannot rationally affirm for themselves.

In that context, it would be logical to take the *social* concept of individuals as a *natural* category.³¹ For example, Hobbes, one of the preeminent thinkers of the new individualism, understood the individuals of which he was speaking to be natural individuals who could be described and explained in terms

continuous with the categories of natural science, as simply endowed with natural desires that led them to do predictable things in certain types of circumstances. Given this knowledge of individuals, Hobbes argued that we could therefore rationally set up a better social order. But the Hobbesian theory could only serve as a mediating point between the culture of the past and the emerging modern self-consciousness, for it could offer no way in which these modern individuals could affirm for themselves that they really were independent, since for him they were ultimately pushed by their given desires for power and security. However, Hobbes expressed the view that what had counted as a *traditional* reason for action no longer could count as such a reason simply because it was traditional. All particular reasons for action would have to be submitted to scrutiny by “reason” itself; individuals must affirm for themselves what will henceforth count for them as valid reasons for belief and action, and something’s being the traditional “way things are done” was no longer sufficient to underwrite the normative force of any particular reason.

The Faustian project

Hegel uses Goethe’s story of Faust to illustrate the immediate way in which the self-understanding of this kind of individuality is constructed.³² Faust, a scholar offended by the fact that “theory” has not given him what he thinks it should, turns his back on science and goes forth into life to seek his pleasure, forging a kind of agreement with Mephistopheles to provide him with the powers he needs to pursue this kind of life and to affirm for himself that he is master of his own fate. Taking a witch’s brew that makes him younger and rouses his passions, by chance he runs into a young woman, Gretchen, on the street and decides that he will have her. He then seduces Gretchen and abandons her. Faust passes from his life as a scholar to the life of a hedonist, from the pursuit of science to the pursuit of pleasure.³³ Goethe’s version of the character of Faust offers a paradigm of this type of modern agent: Faust, a scientist-scholar, has found both that the practices of modern science cannot completely affirm for him what he takes himself to be (someone for whom nothing counts unless he, *as an individual*, elects to have it count for him) and that therefore neither past traditions nor contemporary mores can per se count for him as authoritative reasons. Merely describing and understanding the world in the terms of modern theory cannot satisfy Faust; not content to passively record the world, Faust attempts to establish that he is indeed independent, that he, as Faust the individual, is capable of doing as he pleases in that world. Faust takes the ideal of independence and transforms it into a pre-romantic program of self-realization and self-assertion: He will sample life and take what he elects to take. For Faust, independence is thus simply unimpeded freedom to do “as he pleases” unconstrained by past convention or mores. Faust desires to see himself affirmed as free in the sense of being unimpeded in his doing what he wants. In this way, Faust stands for the darkly self-realizational romantic side of modern

self-understanding, the desire to cast away the past and push all limits simply in order to have it affirmed for himself that he *can* do so, that there is nothing in the past or in current mores that *could* count as a reason against his doing anything. In living this life, Faust takes himself to be expanding his self, to be encompassing more possibilities in it than would be possible by adherence to tradition, contemporary mores or by being bound to "scientific method."

The scientists of modernity affirmed the modern standpoint by showing that human constructions (the theories of modern science) capture the world as it is; they demonstrate through scientific practice that there is nothing in nature that is in principle impervious to human reason. They "force" nature to yield its secrets. Faust takes this a step farther and, as a scholar turning his back on science, attempts to show that his agency itself is capable of full independence without limits, that he can force the world to give him what *he* wants. If there are no intrinsic limits to human reason in theory (that is, in science), Faust reckons that there should be no limits to the human will, or at least his (the individual's) will, in action. Although rationality in *thought* finds that it simply must take some things in nature as given (must attend to them in observation and experiment), the rational *will* finds that it has no limits of principle, that it need not take *anything* as given.

But Faust's conception of independence as "self-realization" is empty, for there is nothing specific that Faust is trying to realize. Faust is not trying to realize any determinate conception of himself: he does not wish to become a member of a just political order, a great researcher, a truly moral individual, or whatever. He has no other end than that he should be able to do as he pleases and that he should push at the limits of things. Indeed, independence for Faust seems to him only to be possible *if* there are no intrinsic limits of history or morals to what he can do, *if* nothing could count as a reason for him unless *he makes it* a reason. But he has nothing to go on except the terribly abstract (and therefore almost fully empty) idea of "making it his own," without there being any further way of specifying what belongs on the list of things that he should evaluate in order to elect some reason as his own. Gretchen, who embodies the social world of custom and piety from which Faust, the "modern individual," believes himself to be emancipated, becomes simply a vehicle for Faust's search for self-affirmation; Faust takes Gretchen out of that established world, seduces her, and in the process leads her to unwittingly kill her mother (with a sleeping potion given to her by Faust so that her mother will sleep while Faust seduces Gretchen) and then later to kill their illegitimate child after she has gone mad, the result of which is Gretchen's being condemned to execution. But for Faust, his pleasures with Gretchen at first count as affirmative for him in that they show him that he is for himself the master of his fate and that he alone determines which pleasures he will try to satisfy; using Mephistopheles' magic, he is even able to kill Gretchen's brother, Valentin, who challenges Faust before Gretchen's door. He uses Gretchen for his own pleasure, and he abandons her. However, when Faust later tries to save Gretchen from her execution (again employing Meph-

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isto's help), she refuses, and he finds himself powerless to do anything. Faust thus eventually comes up against limits he cannot override.

One way of taking the tragedy of Faust is to see it as the tragic clash between the old and the new: the old world of established values and its sense of "the way things are to be done" and the new world of unlimited freedom to do as one pleases, to challenge all accepted orthodoxy. (This reading perhaps fits Goethe's earlier version of the play – what we now call the *Urfaust* – but it does not fit the later revised version very well at all.) Hegel sees the tragedy in more general terms, as concerning itself with the *internal* conflicts within the conception of the independent subjective life that Faust embodies, not as a clash between the "old" and the "new." The Faustian agent's idea of being the "master of his own fate" is hollow and deceptive, for the tragedy of Faust lies in his discovering that he is exactly the opposite. This form of self-understanding understands there to be no moral, religious, or social limits to what it can do. The modern Faustian individual understands that since there is nothing *in the world* that sets any moral, religious, or social limits to his willing, there can be nothing beyond his own willing that can set any limits to his will, and he understands that he is under no obligation except that of realizing this conception of himself. But, having discarded the idea that the *world* can set any moral limits to his willing, the Faustian agent finds no inherent limits *within* his own willing that could set such limits. Faust thus necessarily becomes a hedonist, for having no determinate conception of a good, of a form of life, or of any specific role to play, he can only find his conception of himself confirmed in the satisfaction of his desires, in particular, the pursuit of pleasure. The content for his willing is furnished completely by desire, by what he happens to want to do.³⁴ Faust takes his subjective point of view to be the truth of the matter; Gretchen (who embodies the ethos of the pre-modern world) has a subjective point of view that Faust thinks can be simply dismissed. In this way, Faust's use of Gretchen is a modern variant on the master/slave dialectic. (The relations of power are reinforced by Faust's aristocratic looks and demeanor that contrast with Gretchen's ordinary, *bürgerlich* status, leading Gretchen to wonder how such a man could be attracted to her.) Faust seduces Gretchen, then discards her, for as a paradigmatic form of modern individuality, Faust can see no value in anything that is not for him a new "experiment" in living, that is not a means to his own self-realization.

The Faustian agent's conception of himself is thus necessarily empty.³⁵ The actualization of the form of willing *can only* be the illusory freedom and independence of hedonism; it is illusory because eventually the Faustian agent finds that his earlier acts themselves have in fact created limits to what he can now do. (Faust finds that he cannot later rescue Gretchen from prison on the night before she is to be executed, nor undo what he now regrets.) Willing in terms of a conception of lacking limits of principle in fact creates limits of principle to the willing agent, for the agent's deeds create a self-identity for himself that he cannot then disown. (When Faust learns of Gretchen's fate, he bitterly accuses Mephisto of having tricked him into it.

Mephisto answers: "I cannot undo the avenger's bonds, nor open his bolted door. – save her! – Who was it who threw her down into corruption? I or you?" Goethe's stage directions at this point simply say: "Faust looks about himself wildly."³⁶ Thus, the Faustian agent inevitably finds that he cannot undo what he has done, and that his so-called freedom eventually entraps him in a form of necessity. Rather than being the master of own fate, free of all moral and social limits, he is in fact a mere slave of desire, or, as it is put in the play, a mere slave of Mephisto, who has lured him to his downfall and, through him, Gretchen to her execution. Faust, the grand "experimenter in life," finds out that things have not worked out as he intended them, that not everything is under his control. Faust takes himself to be freely determining what he will do in his demand to have Gretchen; but Mephisto has always known this is not the case, and Faust, who had in some sense realized this earlier, now fully realizes it only when it is too late. On Hegel's view, this is not accidental to Faust nor is it simply a psychological feature of some modern individuals; it is a logical consequence of this form of self-understanding.³⁷

The freedom the Faustian agent thinks that he is to find in hedonism thus turns into a form of compulsion, of necessity. The freedom that follows from simply being an "individual" cut free from any social background or any determinate set of ends, who is absolutely free to do what he pleases and whose goal is to flout all such limits, to sample all the "experiences" that human life has to offer, is a life without direction, for the Faustian agent has only a fully empty concept of what it is to be an individual and thus an equally empty idea of what it would mean to "realize" his individuality. He seeks to actualize himself in the world as an individual, but he can give no content to that conception, since his conception both of rationality and of what it is to be an individual are so very general (so very "abstract," as Hegel puts it) that they can be filled in with anything, and, since he eschews all social and traditional limits, can in fact only be filled in by the individual's pursuing whatever desire he for whatever reason just happens to have. If science, as a human construct, can only give us truths that still take something as given, the Faustian agent reasons that practical agency can create its own truth without having to take anything other than the purely natural limitations of agency as something given. (The Faustian agent, that is, understands that he cannot fly or make himself disappear, but he also understands that there is no principled limit to what can be a legitimate object of willing.) Seeing the traditional roles of the past or the current set of mores simply as something given from outside the structure of his own willing, as something externally imposed on him, the Faustian agent concludes that what one *really* ought to do – seen from the objective point of view (from the standpoint of the "universal") – is therefore to realize one's nature as an individual, to set one's ends for oneself, and that boils down to acting out of whatever desires one has as an "individual" (with no more definiteness to the idea of "individuality" being possible for it than that). There can therefore be no desires that such an individual can identify as "his own" other than the desires that he just

happens to have. (For example, Faust is perhaps given certain desires by Mephisto in the witch's brew, and after seeing the lovely forms in the witches' mirror, he goes off in pursuit of some woman, contingently meeting Gretchen along the way, thus setting the stage for her downfall.³⁸)

What he really is as just "an individual" (what is, as Hegel puts it, his "abstract *being-in-itself*") is thus simply a person who happens to have such and such a desire, who happens to do such and such – he is no more than that. The high-sounding talk, therefore, of "realizing himself" can amount to no more than simply doing whatever it is that he happens to desire.³⁹ But this cannot give him a coherent conception of himself. Faust, for example, finds that not all the desires that simply occur to him are jointly satisfiable – he wishes to have Gretchen, then he wishes to undo what he has done. Faust also finds that he is not free from the traditions which he had claimed to throw off, that he has a certain remorse for what he has done, and that he longs for Gretchen not simply as a vehicle for satisfying a particular sexual desire but in terms of wishing to reestablish their union. For the Faustian agent himself, this outcome must always appear incomprehensible. He wishes to sample life's experiences and thereby to actualize himself as an independent individual, but he always finds that rather than being independent, he has in fact been led by *contingent* desire, such that, the world being what it is, certain things that he has not *himself* willed *necessarily* follow from his actions. The direction of his life, which he had taken to be his to determine, turns out to appear to him to be in the grip of other forces. Taking himself to be the master of his own fate means that he takes the ends that he pursues as the ends that he has *given himself*, and that the pursuit of these ends and their satisfaction is that in which his *fate* consists. However, the relation between his so-called independently determined ends and his fate split from one another; in giving himself the ends he has chosen, he finds that his fate is after all *not* chosen, and he cannot, within this form of self-understanding, understand how that could even be possible. If, after all, he chose all his ends himself, how could it be that his fate, his life, has itself not turned out to be that which he determined it to be?⁴⁰ Faust's fate – the man who has led Gretchen to be condemned to death by beheading – is not what Faust willed. By taking himself to be free from all tradition and social mores, Faust thought he had thereby made himself master of his own fate; but he finds that the social world that he nonetheless inhabits imposes a fate on him, which for him is unintelligible only because he has no concept of how anything could be imposed on him without his actually having willed it. Faust thus ends up completely *alienated* from himself, finding no way in which he can identify with who he has become. His acts do not seem to be his own, for he himself had not willed Gretchen's condemnation or the death of her brother. The pure experimentalist individualism of modern life – the casting off of everything traditional and the attempt to encompass within oneself all human possibilities by "realizing one's individuality" – not only turns out to be empty; those individuals turn out to be the opposite of what they had taken themselves to be.

Rather than the bold experiment in living it had seen itself as being,

Faustian individualism had turned out to be only empty hedonism because of its excessively abstract conception of individuality and what therefore "realizing" one's individuality actually turned out to mean. The insufficiencies of Faustian hedonism to do what it claimed to do – to provide the basis for an actualization of individuality – motivates the construction of another conception that promises to make good on that claim.⁴¹ Since Faustian hedonism cannot work, a successful form of individualism must be able to show that modern "individuals" – liberated from tradition and contemporary mores and electing to count as authoritative reasons only what each can count on his *own* terms as an authoritative reason – can indeed discover something within themselves that is only "potential" and that if "actualized" would bring to the light of day their individuality. The transition from Faustian hedonism to this other form of individualism parallels the move towards eighteenth-century sentimentalism or to the character known in that time as "the man of feeling."⁴²

Sentimentalism and emotionalism

Faustian striving thus turns into *sentimentalism*, with its emphasis on the picturesque and on such favored objects as children, peasants, and appropriately likeable animals (domestic animals, bunnies, and so on). Sentimentalism is the logical result of demanding that the "individual" must be shown to have something "within" him that he can realize as an individual and that will nonetheless be justifiable from the objective point of view. The Faustian character had thought he had done this by showing that *reason* had shown that the past per se could not be binding on him; the Faustian agent took himself to be thereby required to discard the idea that past traditions on their own could offer him any authoritative reasons for action and, in casting off the past, to accept no end that he had not willed for himself. In doing so, Faustian individualism did not think of this as any kind of idiosyncratic task but as something of universal value, of doing in practice what science had done in theory. By adopting the Baconian injunction to frame theories that will satisfy humanity's interests, and by having succeeded thereby in gradually uncovering the "secrets" of nature, the scientists of early modernity had seemingly succeeded in affirming for modern agents that not merely their *intellects* were in harmony with nature, but that their *desires* were also in harmony with it. By constructing theories for the purpose of satisfying desire, the community of scientists had affirmed that intellect and desire themselves had within their own terms produced an internally coherent picture of the way the world was in itself. Faustian agents had sought to realize that supposed harmony of desire, intellect, and the world in the kind of experimentation in living that Faust embodied. If that ideal was to succeed, therefore, there would have to be something that could be discovered within such individuals such that in realizing it they would also be realizing the professed harmony between intellect, desire, and the world, and would thereby be affirming for themselves that it was *themselves* and not something else that set their ends for them.

The participants in the form of life of early modernity therefore came to a conception of themselves as having the *laws* of feeling and pleasure within themselves as part of their natural constitution. Since nature had constructed them to have certain feelings, in following the dictates of *genuine* feeling they would provide themselves with ends that were valid for all agents (since all agents had been so similarly constructed). Just as the community of scientists had discovered the laws of nature, the sentimentalists believed themselves to have discovered the laws of the “heart.” The laws of genuine feeling express something internal to ourselves as rational agents that are unlike the blind laws of animal nature but that are nonetheless natural to us as “individuals.” Therefore, in acting on our genuine and natural feelings, we are acting on something that is *within* us and part of us, not *external* and alien to us; we are no longer caught in the throes of a blind necessity but are *expressing* ourselves and are therefore free.

The modern rejection of the idea that authoritative reasons for belief and action could be based solely on either “tradition” or “authority” (with the main target of that skepticism being, of course, church “authority”) historically came to be echoed in both popular literature and in religion by a turn toward the cult of feeling as a new source for such reasons. Religious practices such as the pietist movement in Germany (originating in the late seventeenth century and flourishing in the eighteenth) managed to build a new form of orthodoxy around the idea that the source of both belief and the motivations of action lay in attending to one’s feelings. These emotionalists rejected even the minor kinds of rapprochement which the churches had established with modern life in favor of what they took to be a more authentic form of Christianity with a grounding in the idea that individual, personal experience and a kind of emotional immediacy in faith was the key to religious life and to true morality.⁴³ These emotionalist religious movements thus shared the modern sense of authoritativeness being detached from tradition and authority and being located instead “within” the individual believer.

The failures of Faustian *hedonism* thus seem to be corrected by the doctrine of *emotionalism*. Emotionalism seemingly completes the modern idea of independence as determination by impersonal (“universal”) standards that are at the same time also deeply personal. Hegel calls this the “law of heart.”⁴⁴ The “law of the heart” – of doing that which one’s genuine emotions dictate to you – is both something that comes from within the individual (and is thus part of his *subjective* point of view) and is also something that is a *law* – that is, it is the same for all naturally constituted rational agents, and is thus something that is justifiable from the *objective* (rational) point of view.⁴⁵ As an “inner quality,” it is something that individuals can only discover by looking within themselves but that, once discovered and acted upon, has universal validity for all such rational agents. These individuals thus seem capable of doing what Faust failed at doing: realizing in their actions some part of their individuality (the “law of the heart,” emotionalism) that comes from within themselves. (The use of the phrase, “the law of the heart” is most likely an oblique reference to Pascal and his involvement with Jansenism, a

movement within the Catholic church that shared some of the emotionalist predilections of the pietists, although the two movements – Jansenism and pietism – are historically unrelated, whatever the conceptual ties between them may be.⁴⁶ Unlike the pietists, the Jansenists stressed science, thus showing themselves to be more “modern.” In the hands of Pascal, the demands of emotionalist religion were even supposed to be shown as that which “reason” itself comes to see as necessary to complement itself.⁴⁷ Pascal’s notion of reason’s recognition of its limits in the “law of the heart” thus fits the model of agency and authoritativeness that Hegel discusses.)

What had therefore seemed like *external* necessity for the Faustians now appears to their successors as *freedom* since it has been transformed into an *internal* necessity. Conceived as doing what comes from oneself, freedom is compatible with necessity, provided the necessity is internal to the self and not something imposed on the self from outside. Laws that are outside the self thus appear as alien intrusions on the freedom and independence of the individual, whereas those that come from within the self appear as freedom. Moreover, in acting on his internal freedom, his “law of the heart,” the agent appears to himself to be acting on something that is valid for all people. The *Faustian agent* acted on the basis of whatever contingent desire he happened to have; the *emotionalist*, on the other hand, seems to be acting on something valid for all agents, since it comes not just from his own idiosyncratic desires but from human *nature* itself (something that reason can affirm even if it itself cannot produce the content of these laws). The failures of the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure are corrected by an emotionalist moral calling: By following the “law of the heart,” I act not only to satisfy my desire, I act for the interests of mankind. Moreover, as a modern individual (and like the Faustian), the emotionalist is not bound by tradition or contemporary mores; what counts as an authoritative reason for him to act cannot be dictated by accepted mores and traditions but must instead be dictated (or at least affirmed) by something within him, within *his* feelings. Indeed, for the emotionalist just as much as the Faustian, the past or contemporary mores are a burden to be thrown off, since they are things imposed on him from outside his own subjectivity, not things he has willed for himself.⁴⁸ To the extent that the social laws are not identical with what the “laws of the heart” command, they can only appear as unjustifiable constraints preventing individuals both from enjoyment and from doing the right thing. The existing laws and mores of any given social order can only contingently have validity, that is, only to the extent that they happen to agree with what the “laws of the heart” command. The pietists, for example, fused the idea of individualism – a Faustian modern conception – with the idea of emotionalism as a source of reasons for belief and action, and they thus came to insist that the only truly authentic expression of piety is the production of good works (such as the founding of hospitals, orphanages, and the like), not adherence to any traditional doctrines.

The *law* of the heart is thus supposedly both universal (as being the kind of thing that people are “naturally” constituted to feel) and personal (as some-

thing that the individual can only find by looking within *his own* heart). To the extent, however, that the individual claims any kind of *general* validity for the "laws" that he finds in his own heart, he cannot make this claim as a purely personal statement. Rather, he claims to speak from the universal, objective point of view: this is what one ought to feel, not just how I happen to feel. That is, he takes his own *subjective* point of view (what *he* feels) to be normative for or revelatory of what the *universal* point of view ought to be.⁴⁹ These individuals thus naturally find themselves alienated from their social surroundings, since the laws and mores around them, even to the extent that they even contingently happen to coincide with the "laws of the heart," are nonetheless something *imposed* on them, not something they have willed themselves from within their own hearts.⁵⁰ (Thus, the pietists always had to contend with their submission to external church and secular authority and their deeply felt alienation from such authority.) Given their conception of the "law of the heart," it follows that as soon as one puts the "law of the heart" into effect – that is, as soon as it actually becomes a positive law or a valid custom – it necessarily ceases to be a law of one's *own* heart, since it now becomes a commandment from outside of oneself, something that "society" imposes on one.⁵¹ Even if the content of some established law or custom is the same as what one's "heart" tells one to do, it is still an imposition because it is not coming from within oneself, out of one's own emotions. Only that which can be freely vouched for by individuals for themselves – that is, only that which these individuals can elect to be a reason for themselves – can legitimately count for them as a reason. (Thus, pietism can be seen as an attempt to assert the "traditional" faith in terms wholly appropriate to modern life, even though the pietists would almost certainly not have put it in those terms; rather than affirm the traditional dependence of human agents on the world, they affirm the power of human agents to change and improve the world by relying on the "law of the heart.")

Not only are these people necessarily alienated from the social order around them, they are necessarily alienated from the other individuals around them. Each claims to be expressing a universal law – each finds that his emotions, for example, tell him to be kind to peasants or whatever – but each by necessity cannot take the other's assertions to be *law*, for taking whatever they say to be law would be to have the law imposed on oneself from outside one's own heart. Thus, even if two sentimentalist individuals in fact agree on something, such as charity to the peasantry, neither can take the other's pronouncement as to what *one* ought to do (or feel) to be valid simply by virtue of the fact that the other expressed it; each must feel it *for himself* for it to be valid as a law *for him*. Thus, the claims of others' "hearts" are always invalid as claims on oneself, even when they happen to be identical in content to the claims of one's own "heart."⁵²

But, on the other hand, the individual sentimentalist also must see the existing social order as springing out of the harmony engendered in him by nature. Nature, or more generally the divine order of things, produces a kind of harmony within human agents, such that each in consulting and acting on

his (subjective) emotions naturally is led to doing what from the objective point of view is the right thing. In this respect, the "law of the heart" would seem to be necessarily in harmony with the "order of things" and could not be alienated from it.⁵³ For the sentimentalists of the early eighteenth century, of whom Hegel is speaking, an attunement to one's emotions (what constituted one's "sensibility") was necessary for knowing what was (objectively) right, and it was necessary to indulge fully in those feelings if one was to be truly virtuous; a failure to indulge in those feelings was evidence even to oneself of one's lack of knowledge of the right and the good, since it disclosed one's lack of "true sensibility," which was a precondition of moral knowledge. These emotions were implanted in one by a benevolent Providence (or Nature, or whatever), and one needed to attend to them in order to be able to count something as a true moral claim. Thus, the "law of the heart" was not only something subjective, within oneself, it was also something objective, part of the order of things.

Thus, on the one hand, the "man of feeling" must take all demands others make on him to believe something or to act in a certain way to be alien to him, to be thereby invalid claims, since a claim can be valid only if it comes from *his* heart. On the other hand, the existing order of things is what gives the "law of the heart" its validity in the first place. The feelings of love for one's fellow humans and one's charitable empathy with their misfortunes were, for the sentimentalists, reflections within human hearts of divine qualities, particularly of God's love. (Leibniz's theodicy as reconciling the existing order of things with God's perfection played a role in this conception.) Thus, the "man of feeling" finds his self-conception burdened with an odd contradiction. He must see the existing order of things as something that is the basis of the "law of the heart," that gives it its validity, yet he must also see any claim made by anybody else on him as invalid because it does not come from *his* "heart."⁵⁴

Living with this kind of contradiction made these sentimentalist, emotionalist agents into slightly mad moralists. Each had to display himself to others and to himself as realizing his nature as an independent agent by displaying his sensibility in the form of indulging in certain emotions. Yet he could not find himself affirmed in any social ordering, since any such social order would necessarily be imposing its dictates on him. For such an agent, the public world must therefore seem to be devoid of feeling, alien to what he knows to be right; the only explanation for the lack of feeling in the public world would have to lie in its corruption by those who govern.⁵⁵ These agents take an authoritative reason to be one which the individual elects for himself to count as an authoritative reason, and for the sentimentalist emotionalists an authoritative reason can only be that which comes from the "heart." It can, however, only affirm for itself that its own "law of the heart" is indeed an authoritative reason by supposing that such laws are implanted in us by the objective order of things (benevolent Providence or whatever). Whereas the Faustian agent had no conception of exactly what he was trying to realize in

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realizing himself as an “individual,” the sentimentalist has a more determinate but nonetheless fully contradictory conception: He is trying to realize his nature as an individual by displaying his sensibility, all the while rejecting the justifications which he himself accepts for why he can claim any validity at all for these subjective, emotionalist “laws of the heart.” The sentimentalist thus is always turning things around on himself: He is claiming that only what counts for *him* – what comes out of his “heart” – counts at all, and that what comes from his “heart” counts because an objective order has made it that way.

A world populated by such individuals actualizing their individuality by displaying their sensibility would be a world in which such individuals would be constantly clashing with each other irrespective of whether they happened to be in substantial agreement. Each seeks to actualize himself as an independent individual by each actualizing in his or her actions and feelings his conception of themselves as “men and women of feeling.” What seems to each as something deep and emotional, and, moreover, which substantiates what counts as a universal reason for action – what Hegel calls the “heartthrob for humanity” – is in reality a form of self-conceit (*Eigendünkel*), a way of taking one’s own subjective point of view to be normative for others, to determine what the objective point of view would certify. In such a world, each would be battling with each other as to whose will, whose emotions, and whose feelings *really* counted.

Hegel’s discussion alludes to the historically less cheerful aspects of the cult of emotionalism. Although the pietist movement’s calls to action had indeed led to its founding various orphanages, workhouses, and the like, there was also in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries an emotionalist-based set of witchcraft trials and hunts for heretics.⁵⁶ During this period in France, the cult of the *devots*, both Jesuit and Jansenist, reached high levels, and there was, for example, a hotly debated matter concerning the construction of a general “hospital” in Paris, which in effect was established as a cross between a hospital and a prison in which beggars and other vagabonds – in other words, those people believed to be completely lacking in “virtue” and whose poverty was to be explained by their lack of such “virtue” – were to be forcibly housed, given exhortational religious and moral lectures, and fed and clothed badly in order to “reform” them, all in the name of Christian charity and a concern for the welfare of mankind. The cult of charity, which in France earlier had been the province of the “new saints” like de Sales, had been thereby transformed into a repressive, puritanical means of social control. The *devots* may therefore be among the examples of the “insane self-conceit” that Hegel has in mind. In any event, Hegel no doubt had in mind the Jansenist version of emotionalist religion, which in the eighteenth century became associated with reactionary aristocratic movements tied into the defense of the privileges of the aristocracy, the support of a national church against papal authority, and the incitement to mob actions having to do with hunting down of Jesuits, who were the great enemies of the Jansenists in part

because they were also the great defenders of the authority of the papacy.⁵⁷ (Pascal's appeal to the "law of the heart" was conceived in part as a defense of certain Jansenist ideas, particularly against what he saw as the Jesuits' overly secularized and corrupt conceptions of free will and reason.)

Hegel's use of Hobbesian imagery to characterize the social order of the emotionalists is also almost certainly deliberate. The emotionalists of the eighteenth century all saw Hobbes as the enemy and themselves as the proper defenders of true humanity; in their own eyes, they were the true champions of true, warm, caring humanity who were out to prove that Hobbes was wrong in his pessimistic views of human nature as selfish and desirous only of power and security. The unintended irony of their position was that in fact the logic of their views led exactly to the Hobbesian conclusions that they publicly abhorred and condemned and against which they thought they had positioned themselves.

For these early modern agents, it seems that their individualism is something that is located "potentially" within them and that they need to actualize by casting away the fetters of the past and bringing that individuality to fruition and the light of day. They operate, that is, with a sense that there is some "core" within them that only needs to be actualized. Faustianism accepts the scientific account of the world as adequate to give us knowledge of nature but finds it inadequate to guide an individual into becoming an independent agent; Faustian individualism fails to do this because of its empty conception of both what it means to be an individual and what it means to have a self-chosen reason for doing something. Sentimentalism offers a more concrete conception of what it means to choose something for oneself – namely, to consult one's "heart" and act in terms of one's cultivated sensibility – but it fails as an account of practical knowledge, since its own account of what it means to have a self-chosen reason – namely, one that the individual can endorse because it comes from within him and expresses his true, "inner self" – conflicts with its own account of why such subjective reasons could count as practical *knowledge*, as something valid for all such agents.

The sentimentalists professed Hobbes to be their enemy, but they turned out to have led themselves on their own terms (at least in that form of sentimentalism that relies on the "law of the heart") to Hobbesian conclusions. The issue for these agents, therefore, was whether their conception of *individualism* itself was viable. For it to be viable in the broad terms in which it has been framed, they would have to find some "core" within themselves that had been restrained or prevented by the weight of past religious and moral tradition from being realized. It must moreover be something that belongs to the individual himself, something that is not imposed on him by any social or divine order. Although the "law of the heart" seemed at first well-suited for this task, for it provided some definite content for the individual's thoughts and beliefs, it turned out to be inadequate in its own terms, and came to look more like a case of slightly mad self-conceit rather than as a viable form of individualism.

Sentiment and virtue

What was necessary was to unite the sentimentalist conception of feeling with the Faustian acceptance of a modern, scientific/observationalist account of nature by a transformation of the “law of the heart” into the sentiments of “natural virtue.” The account given of independent action by appeal to a “law of the heart” had failed on its own terms; therefore, if the “law of the heart” was to be an adequate account of authoritative reasons for belief and action, it needed to be amended so as to bring it into line with the modern conception of reason. Historically, this was echoed in the cultural shift towards the later Enlightenment and its culture of the *philosophe* – the period that flowered after the expulsion of the Jesuit order from France and the consequent waning of the Jansenist movement (whose strength, after all, had resided mostly in its vehement opposition to the Jesuits). The *philosophes* of the Enlightenment tried to combine a conception of modern impartial reason with the stress on sentiment and the emotions that had been constructed in the period of the preceding Jansenist controversy.

The idea was that a rational (“scientific”) observation of nature would show that the “law of the heart” and “reason” were not really at odds, that the “law of the heart” was indeed an authoritative reason for belief and action, provided it was correctly understood as an echo of that which was truly natural within us. Thus, it was argued that a rational observer would note that nature has constructed various species in such a way that their natural passions incline them to serve the common good of their “communities,” and that if one extended these observations to humanity, one would have to conclude that the *natural* thing to do (which is what leads to the individual’s own happiness) would *also* be that which benefits the community. It would follow then that the *natural* person would also be the *virtuous* person, who would also be the *happy* person. The virtuous person would then act in accordance with the natural passions, provided those natural passions had not been deformed by the social world around him. Thus, people like the Earl of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper), a figure revered among many figures of the Enlightenment, argued that insofar as one ordered one’s passions in accordance with nature, one would act virtuously (for the benefit of the common good), and one would be happy in doing so.⁵⁸ In general terms, this became a cornerstone of many Enlightenment views: Reason, emotion (particularly, sympathy), and the common good (generally taken as “utility”) were all compatible since each of them were principles “natural” to mankind. “Reason” thus showed that itself, emotion, and sociality were compatible with individualism and independence in that it demonstrated that each was natural to people.

The kind of conception embodied in the Earl of Shaftesbury’s idea of natural virtue was countered by an opposing view of what was natural to people, which seemed to trace a path back to Hobbes. Hegel calls this view the “way of the world” – namely, the idea that an impartial view of humanity

shows that by nature individuals only act in terms of rather narrowly construed self-interested passions. The partisans of virtue, like the Earl of Shaftesbury, thus attempted to show that the proponents of the "way of the world" (the Hobbesians) simply misunderstood what it meant both to act in accordance with nature and to act *self-interestedly*. The "champions of natural virtue" accused the proponents of the "way of the world" of confusing "acting in terms of one's interests" with "acting *selfishly*," for they thought they could show that in fact acting in terms of one's interests requires one to act benevolently. The "man of virtue" is indeed acting out of a desire for pleasure, but contrary to the claims of the partisans of the "way of the world," he realizes that true pleasure comes from acting benevolently rather than selfishly.⁵⁹ Doing the *natural* thing (pursuing one's pleasure) leads one to self-sacrificing virtue, not to selfish vice.

This conception of "natural virtue" is reconstructed within the *Phenomenology* as the correction to the insufficiencies of the "law of the heart" (independently of whether any of the proponents of "natural virtue" actually took themselves to be doing that). The proponents of the "law of the heart" had thought that for the "law" to count for them, it had to come from "within" them. The proponents of "natural virtue," on the other hand, held that since that "law" itself is validated by something external to the subjective point of view of the agents (by Nature, or by benevolent Providence), the individual must therefore learn to subject his subjective point of view to that of the objective law.⁶⁰ The *sentimentalism* of the "law of the heart" is thus preserved within this new conception of "natural virtue."

It is thus no accident that people like the Earl of Shaftesbury found themselves very attracted to the neo-stoicism of the day, for it offered a concrete model of what it would mean to subject one's personal point of view to the objective point of view. The individual can only know something by distancing himself from his subjective point of view and assuming the impersonal point of view (for many figures of this period, this would amount to assuming the point of view of "Nature"). Nonetheless, for these champions of "sentimentalist natural virtue," this should not entail any deep opposition between the personal and the impersonal point of view. What is virtuous from the objective point of view – namely, acting for the common good – is also what is most pleasing from the subjective point of view because the nature of human agency is such that acting on the virtues produces the best and most lasting kinds of pleasures. For example, the Earl of Shaftesbury held that the act of self-sacrifice without any hope of reward is one of the highest forms of pleasure.⁶¹ The sentimentalist person of virtue takes the validity of the laws of virtue to rest on the fact that they come from his feelings, and their nature is such that they will in fact bring him pleasure. In acting on the basis of these feelings, moreover, the individual is independent in that he is acting on the basis of something *within* himself that he can nonetheless take as authoritative for him because of its justifiability from the more *objective* point of view.

Virtue and self-interest

The “champion of natural virtue,” however, finds himself confronted with the “way of the world” that is constituted by those individuals who egoistically put their own individual interests above the common good. As noted, the “champion of natural virtue” argues that this is a mistake on their part, since by acting *selfishly*, they actually thereby fail to act *self-interestedly*. To act *truly* self-interestedly would be to act according to the principles of virtue which bring about the greatest and most enduring pleasures. The “way of the world” claims that the world consists in self-interested people selfishly pursuing their own personal ends; the “champion of natural virtue” conceives of himself as a person pursuing impersonal ends but who by doing so is actually acting in a way that satisfies his own interests better than the partisan of the “way of the world” does by acting selfishly. Indeed, the whole conception of the “champion of natural virtue” arises out of what is taken to be the insufficiencies of both the Faustian account and the “law of the heart.” Those earlier accounts had operated with the idea that there is an “individuality” (a kind of essence) within agents that needs to be “actualized,” and this “individuality” can only be actualized by discarding the weight of tradition and even contemporary mores – that is, by distancing oneself from one’s social relations in order to bring out one’s “true individuality.” The “champion of natural virtue” takes this to be wrong only in the sense that he takes these agents’ views to be self-defeating in bringing about what they claim they wish to bring about – namely, a state of affairs in which they as individuals find themselves satisfied and in which their individuality is expressed or “realized.” “True pleasure” (and the satisfaction of the desire for individuality) comes from accepting one’s sociality.⁶²

The partisans of the “way of the world” and the “champions of natural virtue” understand themselves to be at loggerheads with each other, but the question is whether there is any real difference between these two points of view. The partisans of the “way of the world” take the *subjective* point of view to be that which determines what is an authoritative reason for them to act; they act for pleasure (like the Faustian agents) or from the basis of their own emotions (like those who act out of the “law of the heart”). For the partisan of “the way of the world,” it is important that he realize *his* individuality, that his “self-conceit” be actualized in the world independently of its effect on the community at large; he takes his own individuality to be the “law” that is to be obeyed.⁶³ The “men and women of virtue,” on the other hand, take the *objective* point of view to be that which determines what is to count for them as an authoritative reason; they thus supposedly act for the sake of the common good. Both, however, take the subjective point of view – that point of view that focuses on one’s feelings and emotions – as the basis for action and belief in the practical realm. On that basis, the “champion of natural virtue” wishes to show to the egoist professing “the way of the world” that according to his own principles he should strive for self-sacrificing virtue

instead of selfish goals, since only such a pursuit would in fact achieve for him that which he wants to achieve – namely, self-satisfaction and affirmation as an individual. The “champion of natural virtue,” that is, wishes to show the egoist that the “true essence” of the world – to which the egoist appeals when making his arguments – is actually on the side of virtue.⁶⁴

The struggle between the “champions of virtue” and the partisans of the “way of the world,” (the so-called egoists) was echoed in the debate over the merits of a Shaftesbury-like account of virtue with its emphasis on sacrifice and benevolence, and the merits of the more seemingly cynical view of the way of the world, typified by Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees*. Mandeville argued against Shaftesbury’s notions of virtue and benevolence, arguing that in the “way of the world,” private vice is actually public virtue. Selfishness, a vice, turns out in free markets to be a virtue, since it produces more wealth for all concerned. Mandeville’s fable concerns a prosperous and productive hive of bees in which all measure of vice flourished. Jove, tiring of the bees’ vice (and of the ongoing complaints coming from the bees themselves about how corrupt they were), made all of the bees into virtuous, benevolent individuals. But after giving up all their vices, the bees then found that their hive was no longer as prosperous as before. All the bee merchants who had trafficked in luxury and vice went out of business, and the economic well-being of the hive precipitously declined. Mandeville’s moral was clear (even in the subtitle of his reissued version: *Private Vices, Public Benefits*): The well-being of society is best served by egoistic acts, and any attempt to make us more virtuous is bound to have contrary and deleterious effects on us. In the eighteenth-century version of the debate, as we noted, the shadow of Hobbes loomed over the whole enterprise; since for many Enlightenment figures, Hobbes was taken to be the primary enemy to be refuted, Mandeville was naturally seen as the latest reincarnation of the Hobbesian view. In order to refute the Hobbesian-Mandeville line, it thereby became important to show that what was *natural* to humanity was something more noble than the pursuit of individual gain, and the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury became the focal point for those who wished to discredit Hobbesian views. The debate extended widely throughout the eighteenth century, and it turned on whether humanity’s essence was “naturally good” or “naturally bad” (which obviously played into many Christian concerns about whether we should regard humanity as fallen and inherently sinful – and therefore Hobbesian – or whether we should regard human agents as having certain divine qualities within them – such as those sentiments of virtue such as sympathy that mirror God’s love – and being therefore more Shaftesburian).

For the “champion of natural virtue” to defeat the partisans of the “way of the world,” he must therefore be able to show that if we follow our natural inclinations, we will be led to perform virtuous acts, just as the partisans of “the way of the world” must show that following our natural inclinations leads us to perform narrowly egoistic acts. The “champion of natural virtue” must therefore be able to show the egoist that internal to the egoist’s own self-

interested structure of willing and desiring is an inclination to virtue that only needs to be actualized.⁶⁵ Moreover, what Hegel calls the “knight of virtue” – referring no doubt to Cervantes’ character of Don Quixote, the paradigmatic figure representing those who try to resurrect an outdated conception of virtue in modern conditions – must claim to know that the egoist does not actually act virtuously (that is, benevolently); otherwise, there would be no need to convince him. Thus, the idea of the natural disposition to virtue, to the Good, seems to be only a theoretical term (an “abstraction”) that the champion of natural virtue has introduced as something to be actualized, not as a fixed feature of agents that is already in place. If there were such fixed features already in place in the hearts of everyone, then any reflective, sincere egoist would already have become a virtuous agent.⁶⁶

What would these potentials for virtue be? They would generally be benevolent dispositions or talents within the agent that need to be realized in the agent’s actions and that from the objective point of view would be justified as authoritative reasons to act because of the good consequences produced by such actions. Behind these general dispositions is the desire for the agent’s satisfaction; it is therefore up to the agent himself to put these desires into effect, to act naturally. When the individual acts rationally, for the sake of his self-interest, he will act benevolently; when he acts irrationally, he will act egoistically. But this seems to mean that this desire to satisfy one’s self-interest is not enough on its own to prompt virtuous actions, since the egoist apparently *misuses* the same desire (the desire to satisfy his self-interest) to direct his actions to egoistic ends. Something else besides “natural desire” must therefore be operating to get the egoist to see that he is not in fact satisfying his natural desire to be satisfied by his egoistic actions or feelings. Thus, on the “champion of natural virtue’s” own terms, the idea of a “natural” desire to act benevolently or selfishly cannot be the full story here. The “champion of natural virtue” must therefore give some other reason to the egoist than the idea that he should act according to his natural dispositions, for that is exactly what the egoist claims to be doing.⁶⁷

Hegel argues that the “champions of natural virtue” are only engaged in “shadow-boxing” (*Spiegelfechtere*) or pretense, since they share the same assumptions as the partisans of the “way of the world.” The “champion of natural virtue” must assume that what the world is *in-itself* is something that has implanted natural desires in people to pursue their own interests. He shares with the egoist the view that people are only driven to act by “natural” desires to further their own interests; the two sides differ only in what they take to be a person’s interests and therefore what they take to be natural. Furthermore, the champion of natural virtue must believe that since virtue is *natural*, it will “naturally” win out. If, after all, it will not naturally win out, then in what sense could it be said to be natural in the first place? But if it will naturally win out, then what is there for the champion of natural virtue to do in this battle between virtue and egoism?⁶⁸

Indeed, in the debate between the egoists and the champions of virtue

(with the latter being forced to the position that people are by nature benevolent and therefore will naturally do benevolent acts), the egoists will always have the upper hand. They have no incentive to defend or to subscribe to any of the traditional virtues except as any of them assists their egoistically conceived interests. They take the idea of acting in accordance with nature as seriously as the champions of virtue, and take equally seriously the idea that there is indeed a natural way to act, interference with which leads to unhappiness. (Thus, in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, the conversion of the bees into virtuous citizens who do not lie and do not lust for objects to satisfy their pride destroys the prosperity and the livability of the hive.) Indeed, it seems that the "champion of natural virtue" is insisting on importing a conception of virtue into nature; he believes that, for example, human agents are created in the image of God's loving and thus are by nature benevolent, such that they will find their satisfaction in benevolent actions. The "champion of natural virtue" insists, therefore, just as much as does the egoist, that there is indeed a natural way to act, and that it is lodged deep within the individual's nature. Both sides hold that to gain moral knowledge, the individual must consult his feelings. The "champion of natural virtue" is thereby put into the position of having to accuse the egoist of not knowing his real feelings or mistaking them for something else. The "champion of natural virtue" originally rested his claim on the idea that moral knowledge – if this should be called "knowledge" at all – was available to an individual by virtue of his consulting his feelings, but this is exactly what the egoist claims to be doing (along with calculating his self-interest). The "champion of natural virtue's" conception of nature thus turns out not to rest on the careful *observation* of nature that he thinks is found in the practice of modern science (on which this view tries to model itself and from which it parasitically draws its authority). Rather, it is the result of *importing* into the concept of the "natural" a whole set of assumed normative concerns; not the "natural" per se but a certain abstract normative conception of the "natural" is at work there.⁶⁹ It denies that what can *actually* be observed around it – namely, the individuals of the emerging market societies of modern life acting in what seem to be egoistic ways – is in fact what "really" is the case. That is, it does not *observe* human behavior so much as it posits an underlying essence (which it calls "Nature"), which it then uses to explain how people *would* behave if indeed this *were* the essence of things.⁷⁰ The egoist takes the "champion of natural virtue's" own terms (such as "acting in accordance with nature") and then uses them in a way to defeat him, since the egoist's descriptions actually fit the way in which these people in fact act, not just the way they *would* act if they were to be fully "natural."

The egoist thus shows the "champion of natural virtue" to be not so much giving an explanation of virtue as offering a series of exhortations to get people to change their beliefs and actions, to become less self-centered and more benevolent. While this may serve certain edifying purposes, it cannot serve as an account of human behavior. The talk of "natural virtue" turns out

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just to be talk, and the neo-stoicism of the eighteenth century turns out not to be a revival of stoicism at all. Indeed, the attempt to revive an ancient conception of virtue in the conditions of modern emerging market societies is bound to fail, for it fails to take into account the new “social space” in terms of which people form their desires and their self-conceptions. The ancient world’s conception of virtue did not have any room within it for any kind of modern individualism; instead, people’s ends were given to them by the social roles in which they found themselves.⁷¹ There was no “way of the world” to combat with any high-sounding conception of “virtue” as being that which is most natural to people. The ancient world, that is, had a social conception of “the way things are done” that was shared by its citizens such that past tradition and contemporary mores were in fact *authoritative reasons* for those people. The whole point of this form of modern individualism, however, is that it rejects the idea that there is such a *social* order that includes within itself a shared conception of “the way things are done,” and that even if it did, such a conception could not serve the same function as it did for the ancient world, for the driving force of modern life is that “the way things are done,” taken as an appeal to tradition or ecclesiastical authority, *cannot* count as an authoritative reason. For something to count as an authoritative reason, it must be such that the individual can self-consciously come to count it as an authoritative reason – that is, be *independent* in what he takes to be an authoritative ground for action and belief. The modern “champions of virtue,” therefore, took a concept that was essentially social – a concept that such and such is correct simply because it is “the way things are done” – and tried to transpose it into the idiom of modern conceptions of nature, to show that people naturally act virtuously because that is just “the way that they are.”⁷²

Indeed, as the emerging market economies were showing, the so-called egoist who non-benevolently looks out for his own interests may actually be doing something that is more beneficial to the public good than the so-called “champion of natural virtue” who cultivates his feelings and claims to be acting benevolently. The Scottish economists – for example, Steuart, Ferguson, and Smith, whom Hegel studied intensely in his youth – offered a theory that showed how this transformation of private self-interest into public benefit could in fact be achieved without having to make any assumptions at all about what was “natural” in human behavior. What turned out to be at stake at this point in modern life was therefore not what was “natural” to human agency but which set of social institutions best suited modern life’s conception of itself as an independent form of life. What the debate between the so-called egoists and the so-called “champions of virtue” turned out to be about was the historical development of a new set of modern *social* institutions – the free market foremost among them – that both expressed and supported this emerging idea of independent individualism itself. What had seemed to the participants to be a debate about nature had turned out to be a debate about modern life and the direction of modern history.

III

3. The rational individual

The "fact" of individualism

The early forms of individualism in modern life, from Faustian experimentalism to that of natural virtue, had presumed that for individual agents to be independent (to be the moral agents within the "formation of consciousness" of modern *individualism*), they had to bring this about by actualizing some kind of determinate potential within them, and that the only way to do this was to free themselves both from the past and from the constraints of contemporary mores. Having taken the practices of modern science to show them that the "essence" of nature was disclosable by constructing various theories for the purpose of satisfying *human* interests, they concluded that their own individual agency should therefore be discloseable to them by their own construction of a practical world and a personal set of mores. The Faustian agent, the paradigmatic figure of early modern life, thus sets off on a voyage of self-discovery by throwing off all constraints of the past and sampling the various "experiences" that life has to offer, seeking to bring out what had been supposedly repressed by the constraints of the past. But because the Faustian agent's conception of his individual essence was too general and abstract, it therefore ended up in little more than self-defeating hedonism. The "law of the heart," with its conception of emotionalism as authoritative, undermined its own claims to authority by ending up in a self-contradictory account of why electing some particular feeling or emotion to count as a "reason" for belief and action was justifiable from the objective point of view. Finally, the "champions of virtue" of early modern life in their attempt to revivify ancient conceptions of virtue by showing that certain motives of benevolence were "natural" to individuals ended up losing the argument to the market-oriented egoists, who seemed to have a much better understanding of what it meant in modern conditions to speak of an individual satisfying himself and nonetheless promoting a common good (that is, that the followers of Mandeville won their argument with the followers of Shaftesbury).

The result of the victory of the "way of the world" over the "champions of virtue" was that individualism for these agents became secured within their self-understanding as an ineluctable feature of human agency. The project of this early modern form of life had to do with the application of reason to the observation of nature and to human social life. The underlying "faith" of that project was the belief that just as the application of reason in modern science has affirmed that human theoretical constructions can capture nature as it is, the application of modern practical reason to ourselves could capture *human* nature as it is. Because the earlier individualists had found the world confronting them as having no place for such individualism, they were led to see themselves as having to bring out this "implicit" individualism within themselves through either Faustian experimentalism, emotionalism, or by living in accordance with the precepts of a sentimentally construed nature. However, now that the Mandevillian individuals have found that the world – the emerging social world of modern market-oriented social institutions – not only has a

place for such individuals in it but also affirms for them that they are in fact such individuals, they no longer must understand themselves as having to bring something only implicit or potential within them to fruition.⁷³ The idea that there is something already potentially “in” them that has to be actualized implies that there is something about them that is simply given (their potential), and that they are self-directing only to the extent that they guide that pre-formed potential to its adequate realization. But if the nature of human agency is such that we really are independent individuals, then there is no need to construe ourselves as having to live up to some ideal of Faustian individualism, emotionalist doctrine, or an ideal of natural virtue in order to be “true” individuals; it should be enough simply to *express* the individuality within each of us.

The result of the modern constructions of individualism thus thoroughly undermines that claim that individuals “find” a potential within them that is “given” and that they must then actualize; instead, it seems to require acknowledgment of the idea that they *already are* such individuals, and social life must orient itself around this “fact” of individualism. What Faustianism, emotionalism, and sentimentalism had understood as a potential comes to be seen instead as a fixed actuality. The Faustian, emotionalist, and sentimentalist agents had understood themselves as divided within themselves; they took their self-consciousness to be structured by their social context, which in order to be “true” individuals they believed they needed to discard or transcend.⁷⁴ But the historical insufficiencies of those early modern accounts generates an account of individuals as not primarily social, “inauthentic” agents who must *make* themselves into individuals by actualizing a potential within them, or living up to an ideal; they already are such individuals, and their project must be to properly express this individuality rather than to construct it.⁷⁵

The project for this conception of individualism is to determine that part of the individual that transcends circumstances and remains constant throughout different acts and environments, since there must be some “pre-formed” part of individuality that makes it individual.⁷⁶ For this view, the past had repressed the development of individuality by submitting it to various social and religious pressures that in this view also appear as impositions on the “true nature” of humanity. Thus, true *individuality*, so it would seem, cannot lie in any social construction, for that is precisely the difficulty with the past models of agency that modern life takes itself to be rejecting. (As we might put it, it is a passage from the early modern idea of *individualism*, with its conception of each individual having an identical set of interests and liberties, to the pre-romantic idea of *individuality* – namely, the conception that each individual has a unique “nature” that cannot be commensurated with the other individual’s “natures.”)

Expressions of individuality: sincerity

Hegel’s model of such a conception of individuality is most likely the seventeenth and eighteenth-century conception of the *honnête homme* (or, in En-

gland, the "gentleman"). The *honnête homme* was considered to be a more rational way of living, more in keeping with "nature" than were previous aristocratic models of life.⁷⁷ Not an aristocrat (a *gentilhomme*), the *honnête homme* was, as his name implied, an honest or sincere person, who expressed his nature but whose reason counseled him to prudence and to accept the existing social order. Moreover, the *honnête homme* was not a specialist; he went from one subject to another without having any overall view of how the various *things* with which he was concerned fit together, seeing them only in terms of how they expressed his "sincere" wishes and plans.⁷⁸ He had to display a studied unconcern with the issues concerning the overall coherence of his various interests. The "gentleman" is sincere, and he is rational (at least in the sense of being temperate); but he is not overly concerned with whether what he says or does is rational in any deeper sense, since he is primarily concerned with expressing his individuality in a sincere manner. In the English version, the "gentleman's" origins are also obscure; he may be an aristocrat, he may be the third son of an aristocrat (and thus not be able to assume the title under the English laws of inheritance), or he may be simply a merchant or the son of one; the English "gentleman" represents the way in which one can be a "true individual" independently of one's past.

Another model for Hegel's discussion would be Rousseau as he presents himself in his autobiography, *Confessions*, a work that may be said to complete the development of that ideal of character that has to do with sincerity. The idea of the "gentleman" is a man of uncertain ancestry, who is nonetheless "sincere" and "honorable" in what he undertakes. Rousseau, of course, rejects the ideal of the "gentleman" in large part because of what he sees precisely as his *insincerity*; but Rousseau is perhaps the paradigm of the true *honnête homme*, the really "sincere," "honorable" person who only does what in his heart he takes to be best. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau attempts to show how there was a certain "nature" (himself, Jean-Jacques), who, despite all the twists and turns in his life, remained the same person throughout and who always tried to bring that same person sincerely to the light of day.⁷⁹ Thus, Rousseau, for example, takes his individual "nature" to have been corrupted in part by his upbringing and by irrational social institutions in which he was "forced" to live, even though he takes that individual "nature" to have remained constant throughout his development; he also remains convinced that by displaying his "true nature" to all, he will vindicate himself in the eyes of the public. He tries to show that even in what appear to be iniquitous acts (such as his abandonment of his five children at the door of an orphanage immediately after each one was born) really were done from good, even if misguided, intentions, and that the "self" behind all these acts was itself basically good and well-intentioned and would have to be seen as such by his readers.

Rousseau's book, *Confessions* is a particularly good model for this case, since it represents a distinctly modern turn in the writing of autobiography. Earlier models of autobiography, such as Augustine's *Confessions*, had the author talking to God; Rousseau, on the other hand, talks only to his fellow

humans. Other earlier models – for example, and perhaps most strikingly, Peter Abelard's autobiographical account in his *The Story of My Misfortunes* – take Augustine's own work as their model and try to fit the story of their life into the framework provided by Augustine: a key event, a falling away from God's favor, followed by a gradual return to true faith. These earlier works thus have the authors presenting their lives as examples of a more general framework. But Rousseau explicitly takes no model for himself, declaring that the world has never heard such a story such as he will tell, that he is absolutely unique, and that there can therefore be no prior model for the story of his life. Thus, Rousseau's *Confessions* represents a crucial literary manifestation of this turning point in the development of individualism to the idea that "an individual" is unique and is not just an instance of some more general pattern.⁸⁰ In Hegel's phrase, it marks the idea of an "individuality that takes itself to be real in and for itself."⁸¹

The goal of the individual cannot be to *become* an individual (like Faust) since he already is an individual; he must come to know himself *as* the individual he is and to express and pursue those ends that are consistent with such individuality. Indeed, because the individuality of each person is thus conceived as a "quality," something like a simple property, within them, the relation of the individual's acts to this simple quality can *only* be that of *expression*, of somehow bringing that which is subjective and "inner" into that which is "outer," into a publicly available form.⁸² The circumstances of the person's actions cannot affect the intrinsic self-identity (the "inner quality") of the agent nor his true moral character. For example, Rousseau claims that although many things he did *seemed* to be bad, once one understood the "true" self and the intentions that were behind these actions, one would see that in fact both his self and his intentions were basically well-meaning and good. Since Rousseau claimed to know that his heart was pure and his intentions only well-meaning, it followed that their expression in what seemed to be otherwise reprehensible acts had to be the result not of his "inner nature" but of the corrupting social world around him. The truth of the matter with regard to the agent's self-identity and the nature of his action would thus supposedly only have something to do with this "inner self;" the way in which his actions appear to others (the public circumstances of the actions) can therefore also only be a "mere appearance" (*Schein*), a kind of facade for or semblance of this real truth of the matter. What the action *really* is (what it is in-itself) is an expression of this "inner self;" the action is not what it appears to be in the public world.⁸³ The individual therefore thinks of himself not as having some "unique nature" within himself as a *potential* that needs to be actualized but as something already there that fits all the particular elements of the story of his life into one story and that remains constant throughout it, being *expressed* only well or badly in different circumstances.

A major issue for this view is how the individual himself can know who he is. The actions that an individual performs can be good or bad expressions of his inner nature. Bad social circumstances can inhibit or deform one's actions so that one is not expressing who one really is (the inner self); for example, in

one of the more celebrated scenes in Rousseau's *Confessions*, Rousseau relates how as a youth he got a servant girl into trouble by blaming her for stealing a ribbon that he himself had stolen, and he laments what he sees as the social pressures that, to him, forced him to do such a thing. On the one hand, therefore, it would seem that the individual must already know who he really is in order to be able to understand his own actions, in order to be able to see, for example, as Rousseau thought he had done, that blaming the servant girl for his own act of theft (and, he acknowledges, probably wrecking her life, since she would be unable to get the necessary letters of reference from her employers) was not the "real" Rousseau. Yet on the other hand, it would seem that even the individual would not be able to find out who he is except by looking at the expressions of his self-identity in his own actions, in which case it would seem that he would not be able to separate out the real from the merely apparent self. It thus seems as if such an agent might be caught in an odd circle, unable even to find out who he really is.⁸⁴

This difficulty, though, is resolved for such individuals by the concept of *interest*. The individual looks to see what in the world interests him and attracts him, assuming that this will be revelatory of what it is that he truly is "within himself." (Thus, Rousseau looks to past events to see how they appealed to him, arguing that by his paying attention to the sentiments he attached to such things, he thereby knows what he was really up to in those episodes.) The *means* of expression are the other natural attributes of the person: his abilities, talents, character, and so on. The general defining *purpose* that the individual pursues is to express his individuality. The world can either be opposed to this purpose (by thwarting the expression or deforming it), or it can be in harmony with this purpose, but it cannot define that purpose.

In acting, the agent *expresses* this inner nature in some public outward fashion, perhaps through the production of some work (such as one of Rousseau's many books). The work, of course, is a limited, determinate thing and only therefore a limited, determinate and one-sided expression of the author's true nature. (For example, Rousseau complains that he has been misunderstood by the readers of his books, who have not had the insight of seeing the author's true nature, which was only partially expressed in the books.) This view of individuality thus curiously inverts the subjective and objective points of view. The subjective point of view – one's awareness of one's individuality through attention to one's sentiments – is that which gives one authoritative reasons for belief and action (it is the "universal," in Hegel's terms), while the public world – the world as seen from an impersonal point of view – is understood as being only a world of particular things, of one-sided or incomplete (or, worse, false) expressions of one's "inner self." (Thus, Rousseau complains that even those acts that he came to regret and to admit to being wrong – such as his abandoning his five children – have been "misunderstood" because those who have accused him of being a bad man have not understood the so-called goodness of heart behind these acts.⁸⁵) The public world cannot give one an authoritative reason for belief or for action.

(Rousseau knows that many in the public world have condemned him for what naturally *seem* like selfish or hard-hearted actions, but he knows that this widespread condemnation cannot count for him as an authoritative reason for *anyone* to judge his actions to be bad, since *he* knows in his heart that his intentions were always good.) What counts as an authoritative reason for such individuals has to be that which they know “in their heart” to be true about themselves – that is, what their sentiments disclose to them of their “original, determinate nature.” The work itself cannot be judged as good or bad on its own without knowing how well it expresses or fails to express the “true, inner self” of the fabricator. Works can be bad only if the “self” that they express is itself a bad “self”; on its own, any given work is neither good nor bad.⁸⁶ To call a work bad is really to condemn the author of a work as being a bad person – for example, to decry a work as being too sentimental is really to say that the fabricator is a sentimental person and that being a sentimental person is a bad thing to be. (Voltaire, for example, attacked Rousseau for being a bad person, concluding that because of his badness, Rousseau’s claims to being a reformer could not be taken seriously.)

This is a logical development of the principle of reason that animated so much of the early modern project. To modern agents, it seemed that science had affirmed for them that their system of thoughts and desires could be structured so as to disclose the secrets of nature, that reason and reality were intrinsically one. Modern science affirmed that no claims or reasons derived from past science needed to be preserved unless they could meet the new independent criteria of induction, experiment, and the postulation of imperceptible entities to explain the correlations and regularities that induction establishes. Modern practical agents thus sought to affirm for themselves that nothing from past traditions or contemporary mores needed to be preserved for them as reasons for belief or action unless they could meet the criteria of what was necessary to “actualize” the inherent “potential” of individuality in each agent. This idea of self-realization then itself logically developed into the idea not of actualizing a potential but of *expressing* the individuality that was already there. It would thus be logical that somebody *like* Rousseau, if not exactly Rousseau himself, would have to appear on the scene to argue that it was indeed the inherited traditions and the repressive current practices of civilization that prohibited or corrupted the expressions of natural selfhood. In this view, individuality is something that is already there, fully formed more or less within each individual, and nothing can count as an authoritative reason for belief or action unless this individual can affirm it for himself as fitting who he really is “within.” It would be impossible for the individual to discover that he has turned out to be somebody different from who he originally was; the agent must be the same throughout his experiences, and although he may do many things out of keeping with his “inner nature,” he will do those things only when his actions have been forced or corrupted by a surrounding world that is hostile to the expression of that nature.⁸⁷

The issue is whether this self-conception can be *satisfactory* for the individuals who hold it – whether it can function within a structure of mutual

recognition to affirm for them who they think they are. This seems to be difficult, given the logic of this self-conception. The work (the book, the poem, the play, whatever) is the expression of the agent's individuality; it is the means by which the agent acquires a presence to others as *this* individual in the public world. *Who* he is becomes expressed to others in the work, although *who* he is must be completely independent from any of these appearances and remain constant throughout the different circumstances in which the work appears. However, the work itself, unlike the "true self" behind it, is necessarily subject to different interpretations by other agents. The work exists only in public space; it has no individuality to it other than that which is conferred on it by others. Others, in confronting the work, must interpret it in terms of their own intentions, interests, and sentiments – in short, in terms of who they are in their own "inner selves."

It follows that if the creator of the work must act according to reasons that are valid for him as the particular individual he is "in himself" (reasons that are disclosed to him by his sentiments), then others must act on the reasons valid for them in terms of the particular individuals they are "in themselves."⁸⁸ As soon as the work appears in a public space, it (or any expressive act by the individual) therefore ceases to be only the expression of the individual who authored it or created it. Having no nature of its own, it becomes only what others make of it, which, given their own distinct individualities, will be different from the way in which the creator himself had intended it.⁸⁹ The *being* of the creator (who he is in-himself) thus is necessarily opposed to what he is *doing*, even when, from his own subjective point of view, his "doings" perfectly fit his "original, determinate nature," since others must necessarily take what he does (his work) in terms of their own "inner natures," and there can be nothing *in the work itself* that can put any constraints on how these others can take it.⁹⁰ For the work itself to be able to put any constraints on its own interpretation would imply on this account that the interpreters of the work were not themselves independent individuals but could have reasons imposed on them. Thus, the work *cannot* express fully and adequately the individuality of the creator in the public world, for the determinateness of the work (what it is) is *determined* by others' interpretation of it, whereas the determinateness of the *self* of the individual (who he is, his intentions, and so on) is supposedly independent of interpretation (that is, *determination*) by others.

Each self is taken to be free of determination by anything except its own given nature, whereas its public expressions are what they are in terms of the interpretations given to them by others.⁹¹ Although the agent may wish or may try to structure his work so that it would be impossible for others to take it in ways that would lead to (doubtlessly wicked and false) interpretations of who he is, the logic of this self-conception makes that attempt impossible. There can be nothing that the creator of the work can do that would make it impossible for the work (and thereby for him) not to be taken "wrongly" by others. It can only be a matter of pure contingency if others take both the

work and the author as the author intends himself and the work to be taken.⁹² If he is to be a “true” individual, the author of the work therefore cannot concern himself with others’ reception of his own work since only he can “sincerely” decide for himself what is to count for him as a good criticism or as a just piece of praise. How he is taken by others depends on contingent factors; who he is, however, should remain steadfast in all the various circumstances in which he finds himself.

The “real thing”

The agent must therefore concern himself not with the contingencies of his reception by others but with the “real thing,” the *Sache selbst* – namely, the unity of who he *really* is in his “inner self” and his *expressions* of who he is.⁹³ The “real thing” is the “true work,” what the work “really means” from the standpoint of what the creator of the work intended it to mean as an expression of who he is, as opposed to the way in which the work and the author might *actually* be taken by others.⁹⁴ To be concerned with the “real thing” is to be concerned with what one is actually “sincerely” expressing, as opposed to what others take one to be expressing.

The question is, however: What *really* is the “real thing,” the “fact of the matter” at work here? The “real thing” would appear to be an individual sincerely expressing his own interests, desires, projects, and cares, and there can always be a difference between the individual self (or “original determinate nature”) and the way in which he is taken by others. The underlying belief for this account of the “gentleman’s” individuality is that there is a “real thing” that remains fixed and determinate throughout the contingent play of public recognition – namely, who the individual *really* is and what his works therefore *really* express. It is what binds the disparate elements of his self-identity (his talents, which ends he pursues, what he does) into a unity, as the doings and expressions of this particular individual with this particular self-identity; it is the “truth of the matter” about all these things.⁹⁵

The individual who is only concerned with the “real thing” cannot be concerned with the various contingencies that determine his description by others; only his own “sincerity” can be an issue for him. Others may take him wrongly, but if he is sincere in his expressions of himself, then he cannot be faulted for misleading anyone.⁹⁶ This preserves the non-contingency of the self (its fixed and determinate nature) from the contingent and variable surroundings in which it finds itself. Things may turn out badly for the individual, or he may commit awful acts because of various contingencies – for example, Rousseau’s claim that he blames the servant for stealing the ribbon because of his (good) desire to please and society’s (bad) compulsion to adopt false explanations – but his sincerity cannot be itself a matter of contingency. The agent himself is in full control over whether he is sincere. For contingent reasons, he may not *actually* succeed in doing good things, but he can be *sincere* about having *wished* to do the right thing (a frequent

claim made by Rousseau). Indeed, the agent can affirm for himself that it is in fact his (laudable) sincerity that provokes others of ill will to condemn him (another frequent claim made by Rousseau).

One of the problems with such a view of the "real thing" is of course its manifestly self-serving nature. Whatever happens – the individual commits a dreadful act, or the individual does nothing at all – the particular agent can always defend himself in his own eyes and to others by claiming that his inaction or his less than laudatory deed was not as it appeared and that in fact the "real fact of the matter" was something else (his good intentions coupled with various worldly contingencies that produced the wayward act, or the contingencies of the world that prevented him from acting, and social pressures that deformed his good intentions into bad expressions, and so on). This view seems to take nothing in particular to be essentially part of the "real thing" – neither the individual's willing nor his acting nor his inaction nor his circumstances nor his talents. What counts as the "real thing" is thus not any particular action, intention, or work, for any of these may fail to match up the "real, inner self" that constitutes the individuality of the agent.⁹⁷ Whatever intention the individual forms or action that he takes can for reasons external to his "self" be an inadequate expression of his real "self." The "real thing," the "truth of the matter," must appear therefore only as a kind of indeterminate ground of the individual's actions, what all these actions and expressions "really" are in themselves and not just as they appear to others; only the agent himself can know what these actions are *in themselves* because only he can know in his "heart" who he is.

In a community of such individual *honnêtes hommes*, each would present himself to the other as being only concerned with what his actions *really* meant. Each would profess to be concerned only with whether he was expressing his own "inner self," not with whether he is getting the other's intentions right. For example: one person professes an interest in social theory or music and does something (engages in a discussion, writes a piece of music, writes a book on social contract theory, whatever), which is then taken up by others. But, given the terms of this self-conception, he *cannot* be interested in the work on social contract theory per se; he can only be interested in it as it functions as a *sincere* expression of his "inner self," as expressing *his* interests. The supposed interest that he shows in the matter at hand (the book, the piece of music, the conversation, whatever) can have a significance for him only as it expresses, brings to the light of day, his own self. Thus, what may at first appear as a social or shared interest in something can in fact only be a *self-interest*, an interest in expressing one's self. This would hold not merely for the individual performing the act; it would also hold for the other participants. A conversation among such individuals over, for example, social theory might at first appear as an interchange between individuals over some matter about which they both cared; but such an appearance would be deceptive, for none of the parties *could* have a detached interest in social theory for its own sake, since the significance of social theory for each party can only be a function of how well it captures what *his* interests are. It

cannot be social theory (or music or whatever) that is the main object of concern for any of the parties; it has to be the self and what counts as an expression of the self that is the object of concern. What one has then is not so much a conversation but a series of people each simply waiting for their turn to talk, to “express themselves,” with the “self” in question being something that is defined independently of this social interchange – the “spiritual kingdom of animals,” as Hegel titles such a community.⁹⁸ One can therefore have only a serial presentation of such expressions, with none of them really affecting the other. The fate of what gets expressed, of course, escapes the individual’s control, but, by this account, that cannot be of any real concern to him; he is concerned with who he is, with what ideas, intentions, plans are really *his own*, not with what is not his own – namely, the contingent ways his expressions get taken up by others. The true “gentleman” (or *honnête homme*) is concerned with his real self, not with the contingent effects his actions may have. Moreover, for any of them to say that he, at least, was primarily concerned with the object under discussion (for example, social theory) would be deceptive, for he could not be concerned primarily with such an object but only with how well such an object expressed his own individuality.

The question is why any of these individuals should express anything to others at all. If their “original determinate natures” are independent of the contingent social circumstances in which they find themselves, then what role can *expression* play for them? If they know “in their hearts” who they are, to whom are they expressing this “inner self”? (This is problematic for Rousseau in his *Confessions*, for he claims to be telling the story of a unique life – “But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world”⁹⁹ – yet his story is also supposed to serve as a model for others that will enable them to discover their “true natural selves” within them; it thus functions both as *personal* expression and as a *universal* model for others.¹⁰⁰) Indeed, the function of this kind of expression is to make oneself visible to others, to place oneself in the public world, not merely to cultivate one’s own unique individuality; Rousseau, for example, writes his *Confessions* in order to make an apology and defense of his life *to others*. This concern with a so-called pure expression is deceptive, for the whole function of the expressive act is to place oneself in the public world, to translate one’s subjective point of view into an objective setting. It is to put the subjective point of view into a public setting such that it does not cease to be a subjective point of view but nonetheless becomes something that others can take up according to shared criteria of appraisal.¹⁰¹ What these agents take at first to be authoritative reasons – namely, those that have to do with determining what belongs to them as *their own* and what is only contingently “their own” (namely, the only contingently successful or unsuccessful expressions of that “inner self”) – turns out to be impossible to specify on their own terms. If it is true that the “real thing” is the agent’s individuality, his “self” as already formed and enduring independently of its contingent expressions, then he cannot be concerned at all with *expressing* it, for on this account, expression has no essential relation to that self. Yet, by this account, expres-

sing his individuality is what is of interest to the agent. In this "spiritual kingdom of animals," each therefore claims to be unconcerned to others with what he expresses (since each is already who he is independently of that expression), yet each claims that his basic goal is expressing himself, since it is only in expressing the self, bringing it to public presence, that he fulfills his individuality. The account of the "real self" as something that transcends and is unaffected by social circumstance begins to evaporate.

In the "spiritual kingdom of animals," each agent takes himself to be the locus of a set of mediations with others, in which each has *his own* interests, capacities, and talents, and each thus enters into a negotiation with others to preserve that independence. Yet each finds that what even counts as an interest, as a capacity, as a talent, is something already out in public space. In making an assertion, the agent finds, for example, that it is not simply his intentions that determines the meaning of the assertion but the way the assertion is taken up by others in terms of their shared public space. But to the extent that what one means is something that is just as much for others as it is "for me" implies that there is no meaningful sense of "the real self" except as a part of that "social space." What counts as the "individuality" of the individual is not something that is the "real thing" (the *Sache selbst*) that transcends contingency or circumstance; it is as much a part of the pattern of social recognition as its expressions were taken to be. The attempts by each of the "spiritual animals" to preserve a part of himself as the "real thing" turns out to be a deceptive enterprise.

The account that these individuals would have to give of what they take as authoritative reasons for belief or action demands that they shift their original self-conception into a different self-conception. They cannot conceive of themselves as fully formed individuals who merely express their already formed natures to each other but as individuals who *become* who they are in making themselves visible in the public world. Or, to put it differently, the self becomes seen as a *project*, not as a fully formed "thing," something that is constructed in the processes of mutual recognition in social life. The affirmation of themselves as independent agents is carried out not in the disinterested expression of so-called inner selves but in seeing themselves as fully social entities; their independence is something to be achieved and negotiated, not something simply to be expressed.¹⁰²

Sociality and normativity

The logical outcome of the dialectical to and fro involved in the "spiritual kingdom of animals" is therefore the development of the possibility for modern agents to form an account of spirit as reflective "social space," of their self-identities and of what they count as authoritative reasons for belief and action as being based in social practice, not as being based on any transcendent standards, or as parts of any kind of "substance."¹⁰³ The partial culmination of the development of the idea of reason in the self-undermining accounts of the "gentleman" makes it possible for the modern community itself to shift

from a conception of reason as a fixed, transcendent standard – the “view from nowhere” – to a conception of reason as a form of *social practice* in which we appraise and criticize other actions that we take individually and collectively. It moves the modern community from an account of what gives authority to any kind of reason-giving practice in terms of “substance” (whether that be “mental substance” or whatever) to that of “subject,” of collective social practice, or, as Hegel puts it, the “I” that is a “We,” and the “We” that is an “I”: that is, to understand the supporting structure of our beliefs and actions not in terms of some underlying metaphysical “essence” but in terms of the structure of self-consciousness, the assuming of a position in “social space.”¹⁰⁴ The “real thing” (the *Sache selbst*) with which the agents took themselves to be concerned comes thereby to be understood not as the “inner self,” which is detached and free from the contingencies of social interpretation in which it finds itself, but as the structure itself of this background “social space” in terms of which we are self-conscious. The “real thing” is thus *spirit* (or “spiritual substance” and “spiritual essence,” as Hegel sometimes calls it). The agents who come to this conclusion thus come to understand themselves as “moments” of this “social space” – that is, as occupying positions in it. The search for the so-called laws of the social world thus ends in an understanding that these laws are the principles in terms of which agents come to think of themselves as *self-determining* and nonetheless *social* beings. (It was with reference to this kind of understanding of human agency and sociality that Kant remarked that just as Newton had discovered the laws of the physical world, Rousseau had discovered the laws of human agency.¹⁰⁵)

This “social space” is taken as a way of directing our actions and beliefs, for even beliefs now come to be seen as a form of action, a way in which we take things to be and that is structured by the norms governing this “social space.” Significantly, Hegel calls it “ethical (*sittliche*) substance.”¹⁰⁶ In calling it “ethical,” Hegel is signaling his belief that both actions and beliefs are to be taken as *normative activities*, not as “expressions” (sincere or otherwise) of some “inner quality.” Beliefs are not best understood in terms of the subject/object model of knowledge and action, as any kind of “matching up” of metaphysically construed representations (*Vorstellung*) with the world or as “states” in which a subject construed as “mental substance” can be said to be. Believing something is rather a normative activity of those organisms that are human subjects, and the development of the conception of rationality in early modern science and in ideas of individualist expressionism provided the historical and social background in terms of which the logical development of an understanding of this normative activity as *spirit*, as reflective social practice emerged as the account that was necessary for these agents to give of the modern lives that they had come to lead.

Thus, Hegel uses various terms that have “*Sitte*” as their core (for example, the adjective, *sittlich*, and the nominative, *Sittlichkeit*) to characterize a certain kind of structure of spirit. At least in its Hegelian use, “*Sittlichkeit*” means something slightly different from its usual translation as “ethical life.” It signifies something more like an understanding within a form of life about

“the way things are done.” To say that such and such is “the way things are done” in terms of *Sittlichkeit* is to acknowledge that this idea of “the way things are done” expresses something like a convention, but it is also to acknowledge that if it is a convention, it is nonetheless a *deep* convention, unlike the *mere* conventions of “driving on the left side of the road” or “tipping one’s hat.” These deep conventions have the stronger sense of being the way things *have* to be done in *this* form of life. To the members of that form of life, such deep conventions (their “ethics,” their *Sitte*) non-reflectively appear to them as obvious and natural, as being second nature. On reflection, they can of course appear *as* conventions but they can never appear as *mere* conventions – that is, as conventions that could be changed overnight (such as changing the name of the national currency). They involve, moreover, not just the form that actions take but the kinds of feelings and emotions that are proper to those actions. They are the “conventions” that structure the subjective lives and expectations of the participants in that form of life.

To see the “real thing” (the *Sache selbst*) as a form of “social space” and to understand this “social space” as “ethical (*sittliche*) substance” is thus to understand that the baselines for the way one thinks and acts are indeed in one sense “conventional,” but it is also to understand that one need not be able to envision any concrete alternatives to this mode of acting and thinking, nor even to believe that such alternatives are *really* (as opposed, perhaps, to “logically”) possible for oneself. Understanding that being rational does not consist in expressing some natural property of oneself or adhering to some timeless, transcendent, impersonal standard but in acting in terms of the norms of one’s “social space” is therefore to come to understand *rationality* itself as a form of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), as a way of acting and thinking in terms of the “way things are done” understood as a background set of norms. The agents who understand themselves along such lines can be “at home with themselves” in their various activities; they need not be alienated from the activities structured by this form of “social space.” (They would be “with themselves” – *bei sich selbst* – as Hegel puts it), and the agents would thus find their self-consciousness in such a form of self-understanding to be “satisfied.” In Hegel’s terms, an agent who understands himself as part of an “ethical life,” of *Sittlichkeit*, will also come to understand himself as a “universal self;” his *personal* point of view on himself and the world will come to be fully congruent with his *impersonal* point of view on the same things.

Kant and the culmination of the Enlightenment

Hegel develops this idea of “ethical substance” out of a discussion of “reason as legislative” and “reason as testing laws,” the final sections of Hegel’s discussion of the role of reason in the development of modern life.¹⁰⁷ These sections have traditionally been a bit puzzling to many readers. They obviously concern themselves with a critique of the Kantian moral philosophy; yet they are

both very short, Kant is never mentioned by name, some very non-Kantian themes are brought up, and the discussion more or less ends with a (slightly amended) quotation from Sophocles. The criticisms of Kant are the kind that are by now both commonplace and have also come to be rejected by a large body of Kant scholars. At first blush, Hegel's criticism simply seems to boil down to the claims that Kant is a formalist – that is, that Kant claims that the only source of moral law is the principle of non-contradiction – and that from such a formalism nothing material follows.¹⁰⁸ (Hegel's charge of formalism is not only made against Kant's ethics but against his theoretical philosophy as well.¹⁰⁹) It thus can seem terribly haphazard, very unfair to Kant, and, even more puzzling, not necessary, since Kant comes in for longer criticisms in the later sections of the *Phenomenology* (specifically, in the section called "The Moral Worldview").

Hegel's discussion in these sections has to do, however, with the way in which the Kantian philosophy both completed the Enlightenment project and went beyond it, or, to put the same thing differently, with the way in which Kant remained a figure of the Enlightenment while at the same time pointing the way beyond it – namely, towards its and modern life's culmination in Hegelian idealism.¹¹⁰ For Hegel, the Enlightenment was that penultimate point in the development of the role of reason in modern life that cleared the way for a fully modern self-understanding. Common to a wide body of thought in the Enlightenment was a very widespread and imprecise consensus that the seemingly different ideas of reason, happiness (sometimes identified as "utility"), sentiment (and later emotion) were all in fact in harmony with each other, and that only the vagaries and prejudices of tradition and (particularly priestly) authority had prevented this harmony from establishing itself. Part of the Enlightenment's faith was that the use of *reason*, unfettered by such tradition and authority and accompanied by a proper attention to "sentiment," would be enough to put things right. What had been only a *project* for the early modern period – that reason and reality are one – seemed to come to self-conscious fruition in the Enlightenment, which produced an account of itself that took reason, in Hegel's words, to be "certain of itself as being all reality."¹¹¹ Its various accounts led to the conclusion that taking an impersonal, observational point of view (which many Enlightenment figures identified as following the dictates of reason) would eventuate in some kind of overall social and even personal "harmony." In such an enlightened world, mankind would be "at home" with itself, satisfied in its social life, secure in its knowledge.¹¹² For such an Enlightenment faith, the various ways in which society was ordered into estates (agricultural, ecclesiastical, noble, and so on) could be seen to be the result of an implicit *rational* ordering that had *naturally* divided society into those estates. There was thus much debate within Enlightenment circles about what the basic estates were – for example, the physiocrats (early defenders of market systems of exchange) argued that it had to be the agricultural estate, since (so the physiocrats believed) it best fitted the Lockean conception of "mixing one's labor" with nature to produce

property – but the conception was nonetheless widely held that the “natural” and the “rational” ways of organizing society were perfectly compatible (and that the traditional ways were also both unnatural and irrational).¹¹³

Many of the various sets of Enlightenment accounts were also held together by a belief in a beneficent Nature that had implanted certain natural passions in people, which if correctly followed would produce both a general social harmony and happiness (thus the popularity during the early Enlightenment of the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury). The Leibnizian denial of radical evil in favor of the doctrine that this was the best of all possible worlds had been taken up as a matter of doctrine. In his *Essay on Man*, Alexander Pope succinctly rendered the Enlightenment's conception of the Leibnizian theodicy: “And spite of Pride, in erring Reasons' spite,/ One truth is clear; whatever is is right.” This was not taken up as a call for quiescence but as an affirmation that the natural world was intrinsically a rational place, that Nature's “plan” for everything was fundamentally in order, and that *only* the perverting influences of tradition and authority prevented a rational (and therefore *happy*) world from coming to be.

To capture this sense of the world and nature being already “in order,” the term “optimism” was coined in this period, and the Berlin Academy of Sciences announced a prize essay competition on the theme, “All is right.” In 1755, they awarded the prize to Adolf Friederich Rheinhard. His name has been forgotten, but the event that occurred that year – the great Lisbon earthquake – has not.¹¹⁴ The Lisbon earthquake, which destroyed the third busiest port in Europe and led to rioting and looting by the inhabitants of Lisbon themselves, caused many Enlightenment thinkers to begin questioning the wisdom of what before then had been matters of faith for them: that there was a beneficent Providence and that what was “natural” was also “harmonious.” (Voltaire's *Candide* is one outcome of the disillusionment with the faith that harmony and goodness are part of the natural order.) To many Enlightenment figures, this seemed only to confirm for them that the *social* world should at least be put in order by reason even if the natural world was not as beneficent as had been supposed. However, Hume, a key figure in the Enlightenment, undermined the full faith in reason itself by seeming to have shown that what had been taken as pure deliverances of reason in fact amounted to little more than custom and habit or the result of the way in which human nature was contingently constituted to combine and associate its representations. (This is also coupled with Hume's famous dictum with regard to the role of reason in morality: “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”¹¹⁵) Finally, Rousseau had argued that self-love (*amour-propre*) leads to the domination of others and unhappiness for oneself if it is not properly socialized, and that by no means could the modern world be said to have properly socialized anybody – including, and maybe especially, Rousseau himself – and that therefore the Enlightenment's reliance on the idea that people's “natural” inclinations to self-interest would, if structured by “reason,” lead to harmony was ill-founded. It seemed, therefore, that the

project of modern life – of establishing a self-justifying form of life based on reason and of inhabiting that form of life with independent agents – was in danger of breaking down. Much was therefore riding on exactly what “reason” could and could not establish, and the person who determined that would thereby be overseeing the project of modern life itself.

In Hegel’s view, Kant in his *Critiques* of pure and practical reason both rescued modern life’s project and completed the Enlightenment’s part of the project by producing an account of reason itself. However, in completing the Enlightenment project and by demonstrating the autonomy of the experiencing and acting subject, Kant did more than just bring it to fruition; in rescuing reason from Humean skepticism, the Kantian philosophy drove what seemed to be unbridgeable wedges between reason and nature and between morality and happiness, thus cutting off what had been a major part of the Enlightenment project. Indeed, it is the subject’s active “taking up” of experience that gives experience its shape, and it is the subject’s active “taking” something to be an authoritative reason for action that accounts for the moral nature of action and for the conditions under which people can live cooperative social lives.¹¹⁶ Hume had seemingly shown that the way in which we combine our various ideas (*Vorstellungen*, as Hume’s “ideas” were translated into German) had to do with habits and natural laws of association, and not with any metaphysical relations established by “reason.” In the first *Critique*, Kant argued (1) that there are indeed determinate rules for the combination of our representations, (2) that the basic and foundationally authoritative rules come from self-grounding reason itself, and (3) that the activity of combination is the result of a self-grounding “spontaneity” on the part of the experiencing and thinking subject (although Kant was clear that part of the structure of knowledge comes from the a priori structure of the givenness of “intuition,” a Kantian doctrine notoriously hard to make sense of, about which there is more literature than can be read, and whose difficulties are best ignored here).¹¹⁷ Kant’s claim was that those rules are necessary that are derivable from the conditions under which a thinker can become aware of his own representations as belonging to one unitary consciousness, as belonging to *his* consciousness as a single consciousness over time.¹¹⁸ Nothing can therefore count *as a representation* at all for a subject unless the subject combines those representations according to the rules that are necessary for bringing all the representations to a unity of self-consciousness. This unity of self-consciousness is, as Kant argued, “synthetic” in character; it is not an “analytic truth” (not a tautology or a statement made true by virtue of what the words mean) that the “I” that “thinks” a particular representation is the same “I” that “thinks” another, different representation.¹¹⁹ Moreover, since it is a condition of any representation’s counting as a representation that it be possible that I be able to become reflectively aware of it as being *my* representation – as belonging to one consciousness – it is an a priori truth (something we know independently of experience) that we be aware of the identity of the “I.” As such, then what Kant calls the “transcendental unity of apperception” – the possibility of the reflective awareness of my representa-

tions as being all "thought" by me – is the a priori condition of all representations and therefore of all knowledge. This unity of self-consciousness is something that cannot be established by "custom," "habit" or the psychological "laws of association" but is instead a condition of the possibility of there being any psychological "laws of association" at all.

The types of rules for combining representations that are necessary for the subject to be able self-consciously to take the unities of experience (the combinations of representations, the "synthetic unity of the manifold" as Kant calls it) as belonging to his consciousness are therefore those rules that are necessary "moments" of rationality itself. The basic rules for the combination of our representations would thereby be the *categories* of experience. However, as Hegel argues in the introductory section on "Reason" in the *Phenomenology*, among other deficiencies, Kant failed to provide the necessary derivation of the categories, gleaming them instead from the table of judgments found in contemporary logic books.¹²⁰ In that way, Kant's own theoretical philosophy fails on the terms it sets for itself. Moreover, Kant explicitly argued that we could only say that this was the way in which we necessarily had to combine our representations, not that these representations matched up with the way "things in themselves" were. Thus, the Kantian philosophy concluded that we could not know things "in themselves" and therefore ended the Enlightenment's hope that we could know the world as it really was by virtue of methodical observation aided by reason. Kant's theory of knowledge thus seems directly to contradict the idea that in Hegel's own words, reason is "certain of itself as being all reality," a claim, which Hegel argues, actually underlies the Kantian philosophy's pretensions to what it is doing.¹²¹ The difficulties in which Kant's position had landed him led anti-Enlightenment figures such as F.H. Jacobi to charge Kant, that "pinnacle of Enlightenment thought" with having put himself in the paradoxical situation of claiming to know that "things in themselves" affect our intuitive faculties without us being able to say of them that they exist, and thus being forced to say that they "cause" representations to arise in us (as simply given) – which (in, for example, Jacobi's mind) is clearly to apply a category (causality) to them that on Kant's terms we cannot say applies to them.

Similar difficulties appear in Kant's moral philosophy. For Kant, the subject *acts* only to the extent that he spontaneously "takes" a maxim to be his own – that is, self-consciously takes a representation of a rule (for example, "tell no lies") as the motive that will count for him as a sufficient reason for acting. In a complex argument, Kant claims that since the agent self-consciously does this, he must be free, for there can be no external determination (determination from outside his own agency) that he take this and not that maxim as "his own" as constituting an authoritative reason for him to act. The subject chooses maxims, however, for a variety of reasons, and he chooses *autonomously* (instead of having the choice determined by something other than himself as a rational, thinking agent) when the criteria for his choice are those that he legislates for himself. Those criteria must be those of formal rationality, since no other set of criteria would be those that would fit

the subject's conception of himself as a free agent. (Any material principle, Kant argues, would be a limitation on the subject's spontaneity.)

Hegel argues that this too fails on the terms that it sets for itself as an account of moral life, for formal reason cannot generate the kind of content that Kant claims. In fact, Kant must smuggle in moral content out of the accepted norms found in the form of life in which he lived. However, in extending the idea of the subject's spontaneously taking certain representations to count for him (in this case, to be the maxims that lead him to action), Kant broke with the Enlightenment idea that the rational choice of maxims was something that emerged out of our natural dispositions. It was, rather, an act of free self-determination independent of all external grounds. Likewise, in his conception of knowledge in the first *Critique*, Kant had tried to show that the combination of representations in the mind was self-authenticating in terms of being that which was necessary to provide a unity of self-consciousness; nothing except the act of combination itself as bringing representations to a unity of consciousness was required. Only reason, and not "nature," determined the necessary structure of the combination of representations. Nonetheless, there was still an element of "givenness" (or "immediacy," in Hegel's terms) to Kantian philosophy, which Kant in his second *Critique* strikingly called "the fact of reason," itself a "given" beyond which we could not go.¹²² Since in making claims to knowledge we could only combine representations that were already given to us by our intuitive faculty, and we had no grounds for concluding that our intuitive faculty in any way gave us representations of things as they were in themselves, Kant argued in his first *Critique* that our knowledge was therefore *limited* to "appearance."¹²³ It was therefore illegitimate to ask for any further metaphysical or religious ground for the "fact of reason"; it simply had to be accepted and taken for what it was.

Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that Hegel's account of Kant in the short section of the *Phenomenology* titled "Reason as Testing Laws" is contentious and does not even approach being a detailed analysis of Kant's moral theory. Instead, Hegel seems to content himself in those passages with placing Kant in the context of the Enlightenment conception of reason and seeing where he fits into that context. Hegel takes the Kantian philosophy to be the midpoint between the earlier Enlightenment ideals of reason and harmony, and Hegel's own idealism, which he believes he can show develops directly out of the skeptical objections that Kantianism generates against itself.¹²⁴ (This is done in the later section of the *Phenomenology* entitled "The Moral Worldview.") The earlier Enlightenment conception of reason had turned out to be empty insofar as it was supposed to generate out of itself a determinate social order; the various concrete claims that early Enlightenment figures had supposedly derived from "reason and observation" had to do with the way in which they had rationalized already existing social practices or given very external critiques of those practices as failing to live up to some kinds of supposedly rational standards. Kant had seen, however, that the Enlightenment conception of reason could not withstand the internally generated skeptical objec-

tions against itself that had come from thinkers like Rousseau and Hume, and contingent events such as the Lisbon earthquake. In order to affirm what he took to be the core of the Enlightenment conception of reason, therefore, Kant was led to revise it and detach it from the idea of "natural harmony," instead making the use of reason into a self-certifying practice that relied on nothing that it itself could not for itself endorse and that therefore took nothing from "nature" as contributing to its affirmation of its own powers. Thus, Kant opposed both what he took to be pure empiricism and pure rationalism in his theoretical philosophy, and he opposed all forms of intuitionism – the idea that we can with some special moral sense intuit certain values – in his moral philosophy.

However, so Hegel argues, this new Kantian conception of reason shares with its earlier Enlightenment predecessors their inherent emptiness. The early Enlightenment did not see this because of its own "immediacy," the way in which it had simply *seemed* obvious to it – as something just "given" – that "reason" and "nature" were compatible (that what reason required of us in the way of belief and action was the same as what our passions and sentiments would impel us to do). The early Enlightenment therefore had simply maintained the modern faith in reason's being "certain of itself as being all reality." The charges by Hume and Rousseau, however, led the later Enlightenment to see that this faith needed some more vindication for itself. With his answers to Hume and Rousseau, Kant completed that part of the Enlightenment project. However, by detaching "reason" from "nature" – indeed from all forms of givenness (even "given" social practices) – Kant made the Enlightenment conception more reflective, but he left it just as impossible for reason to generate any content strictly out of itself. Without any appeal to what *has become* authoritative for a specific community, nor to what in that community's accounts of why what it has taken as authoritative really is *genuinely* authoritative, no determinate set of moral principles can be generated. Kant's achievement, therefore, was to show that reason-giving must be taken as a self-authenticating practice, as able to show that what it generates and legitimates is something that can be evaluated only in terms of the standards that it sets for itself (and not in terms of any external standards that might, for example, be "intuited"). The Kantian philosophy's insufficiencies were in making good on that claim. Hegel's way of situating Kant in the context of the Enlightenment is thus to say that Kant's conception of reason just *is* the Enlightenment's conception of reason deprived of all the external props about the "sentiments" and "nature" that had given the figures of the Enlightenment the merely apparent belief that they could produce various claims to know things purely by appeal to a combination of reason with empirical observation.¹²⁵

In Hegel's eyes, Kant had shown that the rationality of what can count as authoritative for belief or action must be derived from what is necessary for a subject to take things as autonomously counting for him as knowledge or as a valid maxim for his action. However, Kant operates with only a "formal" and not a "material" conception of rationality. There is no room in Kant's

Critiques for a conception of a developing, historically situated rationality in terms of its consisting of those standards of evaluation that we have come to take as authoritative for ourselves because of the historical insufficiencies of earlier accounts. Instead, there is only the conception of Enlightenment reason itself, abstracted out of all social and historical contexts and in Kant's case even from "nature." With such a formal conception of reason, the Kantian philosophy cannot generate any determinate content for moral willing; it may rationalize existing relations, but it cannot give any finally self-authenticating account of them.

To illustrate this, Hegel discusses the example of whether it could be permitted to steal property. In a society with institutions of property and the related social practices of acquiring it, transferring it, and cultivating it, it is certainly contradictory to the very concept of property and its proper acquisition and transference that it might permissibly be stolen. However, the more basic question is whether there should be an institution of property at all – whether we should even have that concept – and there is certainly no self-contradiction in the claim that the entire institution of property should not exist. That various injunctions having to do with property are the kind of thing that would rationally count for agents living in a society with those institutions and practices is granted; but it does not seem that a merely formal conception of reason can generate purely out of itself the kinds of determinate institutions and practices necessary to satisfy the goals that the Kantian account of morality sets for itself. As a reconstruction of some moral ideals that European culture had come to hold in the late eighteenth century (and some of which it still holds), Kantianism may, Hegel grants, be remarkably successful. But in terms of having autonomously demonstrated these ideals out of formal reason itself, it fails. In Hegel's reading, Kant thus succeeds in showing that the earlier Enlightenment conceptions of reason failed to do what they claimed to do; he succeeds in showing what would be necessary to come up with a non-Humean account of subjectivity and reason and what would be necessary to come up with an account of the moral life that could answer Rousseau's criticisms; and he shows that if the modern project of establishing a self-justifying culture based on reason (an "enlightened" culture) is therefore to succeed, its principles would have to be shown to be derived from those conditions necessary for modern agents to understand themselves as rationally self-determining agents (which is another way of putting the Kantian idea that we are "spontaneously" self-conscious). Kant thus self-consciously shows that the modern project of establishing *independent* reason (and thereby independent agents) requires an account of reason and agency as *self-determining*; Hegel's dissatisfaction with Kant thus boils down to the charge that Kant failed to deliver what he promised.

The upshot is therefore that the Enlightenment conception of an "observing reason" carefully noting "human nature" cannot produce a set of self-authenticating principles of knowledge and evaluation, and the Kantian idea of reason as "testing" – as evaluating what is to count as a valid norm for knowing or acting while eschewing any appeal to "nature" or to "intuition" –

turns out to be equally formal and incapable of fulfilling the goal that it sets for itself.¹²⁶ Both the Kantian and the early Enlightenment conceptions of the relation of reason to what is to count for modern agents as authoritative for them are therefore each one-sided, each subject to skeptical reproach. (They have, as Hegel puts it, a “negative relation to ethical substance.”¹²⁷) The early Enlightenment idea of simply “reading off” the so-called rational laws from observation of the existing set of social practices is in reality taking a particular socially and historically formed set of desires and beliefs and positing them as “universal human nature” (which was also Rousseau’s critique of the early Enlightenment project).¹²⁸ The Kantian project with its insistence on formal, self-authenticating reason detaching itself from all empirical natural and social relations finds, however, that it cannot determine any particular content at all.

If the project of modern life is to succeed, therefore, it needs a more complete integration of the early Enlightenment project and the Kantian completion of that project such that only those laws will count that can be shown to be part of actual social practice and that can be legitimated by an autonomous process of “reason.” This amounts to transforming the modern project from an account of reason as a transcendent, enduring, ahistorical standard into an account of how those agents could come to evaluate these practices in terms of whether they fit the historically developing standards of rationality themselves, with “reason” being able to show that these putatively valid standards do not then within their own terms generate any further skepticism about themselves. Or, in more general Hegelian terms, existing social practices must be integrated into an account of what an autonomous self-conscious agent could come to count as valid for himself.¹²⁹ If this were to be done, modern life would have come to be constituted as an “ethical substance,” as a form of life in which *Sittlichkeit*, “the way things are done,” would be compatible with a sense of subjects taking the “way things are done” to be continuous with their own freely chosen ends. Moreover, “the way things are done” would then be capable of giving an account of itself that would neither be subject to the kinds of “negativity” – self-undermining skepticism about itself – that had characterized past forms of life, nor to the charge of “dogmatism,” of taking certain standards of belief and evaluation as given.

If this project were to be successful, then it would show that this modern normative “social space” would be compatible with a conception of modern individuals as self-determining such that each could see the existing social practices as activities that each individual wills for himself as part of a common self-identity, rather than as being something imposed on each himself. The self-identity of each would be thereby continuous with the self-identities of others in the community, since the normative standards that make those practices into the practices that they are would be the standards that each would have come to accept as authoritative for himself; and the modern understanding of the *individuality* of agents would be preserved because these standards would count for these individuals as the standards that make

up who they are as individuals. The Kantian conception of rationality as that which is common to all subjects and that makes them self-determining *subjects* and not *substances* determined from outside themselves can therefore only be fulfilled in terms of a conception of reason as *social practice*, not in terms of reason as a principle for combining representations into coherent experience. The *representationalist* model of knowledge – that of a subject inspecting its representations of a world – must give way to a model of knowledge as *participation* in social practice, as a set of historically situated claims that can only underwrite their own authoritativeness from within the terms of a concrete, historical community.

The standpoint of “reason” defines the impersonal point of view for modern agents, which is first worked out in the development of modern science; the Kantian theory of the subject as constituting for himself what is to count for him as authoritative in belief and action articulates a conception of how identifying the impersonal point of view with the standpoint of “reason” is necessary for a conception of subjects as self-determining. The other standpoint of modern “reason” is more subjectivistic: it sees modern agents as *individuals*, as each positing his *own* ends and standards and as accepting nothing unless he can himself certify it as authoritative for him. The personal point of view, as it is underwritten and expressed in the practices, institutions and accounts of early modern individualism, and the impersonal point of view, which finds its modern culmination in Kantian philosophy, are each, taken alone, insufficient accounts of what it means to be a rational, modern agent, for each fails to succeed at the goals it sets for itself. Taken together, however, they point to a social order in which a full union of the two points of view would be established. The question then is: Do they *merely* point to it as some idealized future task for European social life, or is there in fact a genuine account that could be given of such union within modern terms? Or is this idea of a “universal reason” simply the idiosyncratic understanding of a particular community at a particular time?

For many of the people of Hegel’s generation, this question was particularly pressing, since it seemed to them that modern life’s project had itself become only a new form of dogmatism; it had simply put an abstraction called “reason” in place of the deity and then taken on faith that this “reason” could provide the social institutions and the kind of unifying account that religion had always claimed to provide, with little more indication than the generalized Enlightenment “faith” that it could indeed achieve this goal. The idea of a union of the personal and the impersonal points of view, which Kantianism and modern individualism taken together point toward, thus began to seem to some like a project that modern life *could not* fulfill. As resting on the idea of “reason” as a kind of “universal method” by which all conflicting claims could be adjudicated, modern life’s project seemed to be unable to justify itself within its own terms. Worse, there was, especially for Hegel’s generation, the nagging doubt that not only might modern life’s project not be successful, but that there was also in fact a clear theoretical alternative to it, which, although itself “dogmatic,” seemed to lack many of

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modern life's problems. This was the Greek alternative, which even if it could not be achieved in the context of modern life, nonetheless showed what a successful version of the project of uniting the two points of view would look like. The elegiac nostalgia for Greek life – beautiful, lost and irrecoverable – was a weighty feature of the intellectual atmosphere of Hegel's time. The conversion of the project of accounting for modern life from that of reliance upon "reason" as an ahistorical, transcendent standard into a reliance on reason as historically situated social practice thus looked at the outset as if it could not succeed. Therefore, as Hegel clearly saw, any account of modern life's project had to come to terms with whether the Greek alternative was really what it seemed to be to so many of his time and, we might add, what it continues to be for many of us today.