

# Hegel's Ethical Naturalism

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THESIS

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*To the memory of my grandfather, Charles Osmond (Ossie) Mills*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### ARISTOTLE

DA *De Anima*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett, 2017)

NE *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett, 2014)

### KANT

All references to the works of Kant are given according to the volume and page number of the *Akademie* edition.

A *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, in: *Anthropology, History and Education*, trans. R. Louden and G. Zöllner (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

GMS *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in: *Practical Philosophy*, trans. M. J. Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

KpV *Critique of Practical Reason*, in: *Practical Philosophy*, trans. M. J. Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

KrV *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer, and A. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

MA “Conjectural Beginning of Human History”, in: *Anthropology, History and Education*, trans. R. Louden and G. Zöllner (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

MS *Metaphysics of Morals*, in: *Practical Philosophy*, trans. M. J. Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

## ABBREVIATIONS (continued)

### HEGEL

References to the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopedia* are given by providing the paragraph number (followed by ‘A’ or ‘Z’, if the reference is to the *Anmerkung* or *Zusatz*). References to the 1827/28 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* are given by providing the page number of volume 13 of Meiner’s series *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, followed by the page number of the English translation below. References to the 1822/25 “Fragment on the Philosophy of Spirit” are given according to Petry’s bilingual edition. The remaining works are cited by providing the page number of the corresponding volume of Suhrkamp’s series *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, followed by the page number of the English translations below.

Enz *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Hackett, 1991)

*Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature: Volume III*, trans. M. Petry (Unwin Ltd, 1970)

*Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 2007)

F “Fragment on the Philosophy of Spirit”, in: *Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit: Volume One*, trans. M. J. Petry (D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1978)

NL *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, its Place in Moral Philosophy, and its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975)

PhG *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977)

PR *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1991)

### **ABBREVIATIONS (continued)**

VA *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Volume I*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford University Press, 1975)

VGPII *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume II*, trans. R. F. Brown and J. M. Stewart (Oxford University Press, 2006)

VGPIII *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume III*, trans. R. F. Brown and J. M. Stewart (Oxford University Press, 2009)

VPG *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. L. Rauch (Hackett, 1988)

VPG1827/28 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827-28*, trans. R. Williams (Oxford University Press, 2007)

WL *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Humanities Press, 1969)

## SUMMARY

Several commentators, most notably Terry Pinkard and Robert Stern, have recently suggested that Hegel's "Philosophy of Spirit" is best read as some form of "Aristotelian naturalism." However, these commentators' contributions have for the most part either remained at a programmatic level or have attributed to Hegel views that are only questionably naturalistic. There has thus not yet been a sustained and detailed attempt to read Hegel as an ethical naturalist. My dissertation aims to help fill this gap in the literature by building on the work of these other scholars. I argue, in particular, that Hegel is an ethical naturalist in that he subscribes the following two theses: First, moral requirements are grounded or have their source in human nature; that is, our nature, essence or, in Hegel's language, our "concept" sets the standard for the moral evaluation of human features and behavior. Second, an account of human nature, of features and capacities that are distinctively human, can be constructed out of more basic natural building blocks, more specifically, out of an account of capacities that we share with other animals. I refer to these theses as the essentialist thesis and the emergence thesis, respectively.

I motivate my naturalist interpretation of Hegel by considering his relation to Kant's moral philosophy. I begin, in Chapter One, by reviewing two related criticisms that Hegel levels against Kant: First, the charge that Kant's supreme moral law is insufficiently informative to guide and morally appraise our conduct and, second, the complaint that the Kantian moral "ought" represents an unattainable ideal. I argue that at the basis of both these objections is an attack on Kant's dualism of sensibility and pure reason, that is, of our animal nature, on the one hand, and a purely rational part of ourselves that owes nothing to our animal nature, on the other. Accordingly, the upshot of these objections, I suggest, is that Hegel's alternative to Kant must be

## SUMMARY (continued)

naturalistic at least in the sense that it rejects such a dualism and puts in its place a conception of human beings as creatures capable of acquiring a second, “spiritual” nature through processes of habituation. I spell out the precise sense in which Hegel’s position qualifies as naturalistic in the rest of the dissertation.

Chapters Two and Three make the case on Hegel’s behalf for what I have called the emergence thesis. In Chapter Two, I focus on Hegel’s “Anthropology,” the part of his system that avowedly traces the transition from animality to rationality, and argue that human rationality emerges for Hegel from the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals. Through processes of habituation, creatures with souls, human and subhuman, step back or “liberate” themselves from their affections, their feelings and desires. By thus “liberating” itself, the ensouled creature achieves a reflective distance or separation that is required for the distinctively human capacity to form beliefs and act in the light of recognized reasons. Because processes of habituation involve primarily the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals, Hegel’s account qualifies as naturalistic, according to the emergence thesis. In Chapter Three, I turn my attention to the will, or the capacity for practical freedom, in particular, and argue that it too qualifies as a natural power, by Hegel’s lights. First, and drawing on the remarks about ethical habit in the *Philosophy of Right*, I maintain that the behavior of what Hegel calls the “rational will” exhibits features similar to the lawlike behavior of subhuman denizens of the natural world and other law-governed natural processes. Second, by exploiting Hegel’s discussion of habit in the “Anthropology” (in a way that he himself explicitly does not), I show

## **SUMMARY (continued)**

how practical freedom emerge through processes of habituation from the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals.

Having made my case for the emergence thesis in Chapters Two and Three, in the remaining chapters I concentrate on the essentialist thesis. I argue for this thesis in two steps. In Chapter Four, I show that and how animal organisms are appropriate subjects of normative evaluation, according to the “Organics” chapter of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Nature.” An animal organism is as it ought to be when the functioning of its parts benefits, or serves the ends of, the whole to which those parts belong. More specifically, on Hegel’s account, an animal specimen is normatively successful (or defective) in that it possesses (lacks) certain features, for example, a certain number of limbs, without which its kind or species would not have been able to survive and reproduce to give rise to that animal specimen in question. In Chapter Five, I extend Hegel’s account of normative evaluation to the moral evaluation of specifically human features and behavior. For Hegel, the essence or “concept” of human beings, against which particular humans’ features and behavior are morally appraised, is freedom, and our end or purpose is the realization of freedom. Like animal organisms, the social institutions within which freedom is realized, I argue, are both teleologically structured and self-reproducing. In a manner analogous to the case of animal specimens, then, a member of such institutions is (morally) defective inasmuch as she undermines conditions that are necessary for her existence as a free individual in the first place.

## INTRODUCTION

What is the source of our moral obligations? Whence, in particular, their authority and content? In answer to these questions, some have argued that (1) our moral obligations are commanded by God. Others have held that (2) moral requirements are a function of the particular social and historical circumstances in which we find ourselves. Yet others have maintained that (3) moral obligations are the result of certain formal features of our rules of conduct: if a rule cannot be universalized, then we are morally required to refrain from acting as the rule recommends.

Hegel has been read by different commentators as variously holding highly nuanced versions of each one of the views I have just listed. For example, Charles Taylor argues that (1') our "basic identity" lies for Hegel in being "vehicles" of God or a "cosmic spirit" and that, therefore, we are morally required to act only in ways that further the mission of this "cosmic spirit" or "the march of God in the world" (*PR*, §258Z), as Hegel himself writes.<sup>1</sup> On Robert Pippin's interpretation of Hegel's practical philosophy, (2') our moral requirements are justified to the extent that they represent our society's solution to various shortcomings of previous historical epochs and the moral codes embedded within them – or, as Pippin writes, our response to "determinate insufficiencies of prior attempts at self-understanding and self-legitimation." On this interpretive approach, there is no supra-historical standard by which we can evaluate an individual's behavior or the practices under which that behavior falls.<sup>2</sup> Finally, there are those

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<sup>1</sup> For a statement of Taylor's view, see Taylor (1975), 372-376.

<sup>2</sup> Pippin (1997) formulates the view as follows: "Hegel has proposed a conception of [practical] rationality . . . that is *essentially* social and historical, rather than rule governed, or only ideally communal, or social and historical in 'application' only. What I am doing in identifying what is rationally required for me, for my own self-determination, is appealing to what would be required for any concretely represented agent, and thereby representing *what has*

such as T. M. Knox in the middle part of the last century that, notwithstanding Hegel's criticisms of Kant, maintain that (3') Hegel is best read as supplementing (and not substantially disagreeing with) Kant. Very roughly, Hegel agrees that Kant has discovered the supreme moral law or standard, but he maintains that that Kantian law, on its own, is not determinate or contentful enough to be applied to concrete cases. Accordingly, Hegel offers an account of our modern social institutions, which is meant to supply the empirical conditions that are necessary for Kant's supreme moral law to be workable or applied in particular circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

On the reading I articulate and defend in this dissertation, (i) moral requirements, for Hegel, are grounded or have their source in human nature. More specifically, our essence, nature or in Hegelian jargon our "concept," which Hegel identifies with freedom, supplies the standard for the moral evaluation of human features and behavior. This claim, which I refer to as the "essentialist thesis," is one of the two claims that comprises Hegel's ethical naturalism, as I understand it. The second of the two claims, which I refer to as the "emergence thesis," can be put succinctly as follows: (ii) Human nature is built for Hegel out of more basic natural (biological) building blocks. In particular, distinctively human capacities, like objective consciousness or most notably our capacity for practical freedom, emerge, on Hegel's account, from the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals.

Where, exactly, does my naturalist reading stand vis-à-vis the three other Hegel interpretations I have mentioned, (1')-(3')? Along with historicist and Kantian interpreters, I

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*come to count* as essential to a historical community as indispensable to such agency (e.g. voting, choosing my own spouse) versus what is marginal or insignificant" (127).

<sup>3</sup> Here is Knox (1957/58): "The general impression that Hegel was not a Kantian in ethics arises from concentrating too much attention on his commoner criticisms of Kant and too little on their context and drift. He usually indicates that his criticisms are secondary by going out of his way to pay a tribute to Kant's undying merit in ethics. The criticisms often do not affect the substance of Kant's doctrine, but only details, and more frequently still the object of Kant's attack is the insufficiency of morality as such, not of Kant's view of morality . . . Hegel's quarrel with Kant was not that Kant was mistaken about morality but that he did not clearly supplement his teaching with a doctrine of *Sittlichkeit*" (70).

reject (1') the "cosmic spirit" reading of Hegel.<sup>4</sup> In addition, I disagree with (3') Knox's view that Hegel is just supplementing Kant. The second of my two naturalist theses, the emergence thesis, in particular, is not one to which Kant and Kantians can consistently avail themselves. For the freedom that is necessary for morality, in Kant's view, is a property that we can possess only as denizens of a "noumenal," extra-spatial and extra-temporal realm, apart from the spatio-temporal realm we share with other natural beings. And no account that takes as its raw materials the capacities that we share with other denizens of the spatio-temporal realm alone, it would seem, can yield freedom understood as a noumenal property. Contra Knox and others, and along with historicist commentators like Pippin, then, I believe that Hegel offers an alternative and not just a supplement to Kant. But contra (2') the historicist interpretation, I believe Hegel does have a supra-historical standard of moral evaluation, furnished by our essence or nature, that is, by our freedom. Although our knowledge of our essence as well as the conditions for its realization have undoubtedly changed across historical epochs, I maintain that, for Hegel, the essence or nature itself by definition cannot so change.

My overall aim in this dissertation is to make good on these promissory remarks and argue contra readings (1')-(3') that Hegel is an ethical naturalist, that is, that he subscribes to the essentialist and emergence theses. I make the case for the emergence thesis in Chapters Two and Three. I do so in two steps: In Chapter Two I show how human rationality, in particular, objective consciousness, emerges for Hegel from our animal nature. In Chapter Three, I claim that the same goes for the will or our capacity for practical freedom. That capacity, too, is a natural capacity *inter alia* in the sense that it emerges from the exercise of capacities that we share with other animals. Or so I argue on Hegel's behalf. I then turn, in Chapters Four and Five, to the essentialist thesis. I make the case for this thesis, again, in two steps: In Chapter Four, I

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<sup>4</sup>For criticisms of the Taylor's "cosmic spirit" view, see Patten (1999), 19-27 and Neuhaus (2000), 50-52.

present Hegel's account of the normative evaluation of animal organisms generally, human or otherwise. In Chapter Five, I undertake the task of expanding Hegel's theory of normativity from the non-moral evaluation of merely animal features and behavior to the moral evaluation of specifically human features and behavior. Chapter One argues that Hegel's position must be naturalistic in some sense or other in an indirect way, by reviewing some of Hegel's criticisms of Kant's moral philosophy, and attempts to extract some clues or lessons from those criticisms as to what Hegel's naturalistic alternative might precisely look like.

Although clearly compatible, the essentialist thesis and the emergence thesis, theses (i) and (ii) above, are separable or independent of one another. That is to say, one can consistently hold (i) but not (ii), and vice versa. To illustrate this claim, consider the two following cases: (a) A constitutivist in metaethics can maintain that moral norms are derivable from essential or constitutive features of human or rational agency and yet also believe that what sets us humans apart from other animals is the possession of immaterial souls. Such a metaethicist accepts (i) but rejects (ii). (b) A scientist of human nature might purport to have discovered that all animals, human and nonhuman alike, are just pleasure-seeking creatures and yet also maintain (perhaps because of some religious agenda) that we humans are morally required to go against our essence or nature and so refrain from the pursuit of pleasure. Such a scientist accepts something like (ii) but rejects (i). The point I wish to extract from these two cases, (a) and (b), is that neither the view of our metaethicist nor that of our scientist of human nature can be comfortably or without equivocation described as forms of ethical naturalism. Indeed, it would seem to be a highly idiosyncratic use of the term "naturalism" to use it to describe a view on which the human soul is completely cut off from the physical or material world. It likewise appears to be a terminological stretch to describe as naturalistic a view on which we are morally required to act *against* our nature or essence. Thus, although labels (such as "naturalism") can be used in a variety of ways,

I hope cases (a) and (b) serve to suggest that a view qualifies as a form of ethical naturalism only if it holds claims in the vicinity of the essentialist and emergence theses, (i) and (ii). Or perhaps more concessively: If a view does hold something like (i) and (ii) jointly, then it qualifies as naturalistic in a stronger or more robust sense than if it only holds one but not the other of those claims. In any event, in this dissertation I aspire to show that Hegel does hold both (i) and (ii) and can therefore be counted as an ethical naturalist.

Is the aspiration I have just announced worth the interpretive effort though? In order to justify the effort in a provisional way, let me indicate how Hegel's ethical naturalism, as I have presented it so far, differs from two other prominent naturalist interpretations of Hegel, offered by Robert Stern and Terry Pinkard respectively.

In two recent papers, Robert Stern has argued (against interpretations along the lines of those exemplified by Taylor and Pippin above) that Hegel's view amounts to a form of "Aristotelian naturalism."<sup>5</sup> On the view Stern attributes to Hegel, "evaluative claims are based on comparisons between objects as they actually are and the kinds or types of objects they belong to, where the latter brings with it normative implications" (Stern [2016a], 197-198). Stern spells out Hegel's account of "evaluative claims" in the *Logic* and suggests that that account applies not just to "other natural beings" but to creatures with wills as well. This latter suggestion, however, is not one that Stern himself articulates.<sup>6</sup> By working out the details of what I have

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<sup>5</sup> Stern (2016a) refers to the views I have associated with Taylor and Pippin as "anti-naturalism" and "soft naturalism," respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Having worked through Hegel's account of the "logical structure" of evaluative claims, the most Stern says by way of an elaboration of how that account is supposed to apply to the subject matter of the *Philosophy of Right* is this: "Now, I suggest something very close to this structure can be found in Hegel's treatment of normativity in his *Philosophy of Right*, where the key starting point is his characterization of our nature as that of free rational agents, which in turn leads him to the will, and what it is to be an agent with a will that is properly structured (see PR §§5–7). Now this, of course, does not fit any purely biological taxonomy. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Hegel is denying that for us as agents rather than as merely human beings biologically conceived, there is a good and bad way for us to be, particularly concerning the structure of our wills. Indeed Hegel argues that the structure of the will should involve a characteristic kind of unity of different elements that is a commonplace in the perfectionist tradition" (Stern [2016b], 102). Stern has much more to say about the ethical views of the British idealists (but little about Hegel himself) in Stern (2015).

called the “essentialist thesis” in Chapters Four and especially Five, then, I take myself to be filling in the interpretive suggestion made by Stern. In addition, Stern’s work does not address the question: What is the connection, in Hegel’s view, between distinctively human capacities, like consciousness, self-consciousness and most importantly the capacity for practical freedom, on the one hand, and the natural endowments that we share with other animals, on the other?<sup>7</sup> This question is my focus in Chapters Two and Three, where I articulate and defend what I have called the “emergence thesis.”

Unlike Stern, Terry Pinkard does weigh in on the question about the connection between distinctively human capacities and those capacities that we share with lower animals. Indeed, one of the main claims in Pinkard’s recent, book length interpretation of Hegel as a naturalist is that “[t]here is a strong continuity between animal experience and human experience” (Pinkard [2012], 27), for Hegel.<sup>8</sup> If I understand Pinkard correctly, animal life and human spirit are continuous, according to his interpretation of Hegel, in that both non-human and human animals sense their environment and react purposively to that sensory input. Moreover, in so reacting, non-human and human animals are both “self-related,” in a sense to be spelled out below. As I explain in Chapter Two, my principal worry with Pinkard’s interpretation is that his continuity claim is too weak to capture the connection between human spirit and animal life, as Hegel understands it. For despite the continuity that Pinkard identifies between human and animal experience, the capacities that distinguish us humans could, for all his continuity claim says, be

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<sup>7</sup> Stern does rightly note: “[W]hile Hegel does not take our essential properties to all be those that would be identified in purely biological terms, he still thinks there are such essential properties, which can ground the normative claims he wants to make. In this respect, it is useful to compare the categories of “human being” and of “person”: while one can think of the former in purely biological terms, associated with various sort of biological functioning, the latter is a different notion that brings in a different conception of proper functioning and thus normativity, while equally characterizing me as a substance universal. Thus, while the category of “person” may not be a natural kind in the biological sense (it is not needed as part of biological taxonomy), it is still a natural kind in the philosophical sense, out of which a related kind of normativity can be built, qua good or bad exemplifications of personhood. In this way, our fundamental difference from animals can be marked” (Stern [2016b], 102). As I have remarked, however, Stern is silent on the question: What, if any, is the connection between our animal nature and what he here calls our “personhood”?

<sup>8</sup> See also, Pinkard (2012), 24-25.

completely cut off from any capacities that we share with lower animals. My interpretation of Hegel supplements Pinkard's reading by arguing that human experience is continuous with animal experience in a further, stronger sense to the one he seems to acknowledge, namely: Human spirit is the result or product of the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals (again, in a manner to be precisified below).<sup>9</sup>

Before closing, I wish to make two final remarks, one terminological and the other methodological. The first, terminological point concerns my use of the terms "moral" and "ethical." As is known, Hegel attacks the standpoint of what he calls *Moralität*, which he associates primarily with Kant and Fichte, on the ground that it is objectionably "formal" or "abstract." Hegel distinguishes the view, or set of views, he includes under the heading of *Moralität* from his own considered position, for which he reserves the term *Sittlichkeit* and its cognates. In what follows, I abide by ordinary as well as (non-Hegelian) philosophical parlance and employ "moral" and "ethical," the standard English translations of *moralisch* and *sittlich* respectively, interchangeably. Context will make sufficiently clear when I am using "moral" and "morality" in Hegel's narrower, technical sense, as for instance when I discuss Hegel's criticisms of Kant in Chapter One.

My second point concerns the approach I take to Hegel's texts in this dissertation. I ask a *question* that Hegel himself does *not* ask, at least not as I have posed it here, namely: What is the ground or source of moral requirements? To be sure, Hegel does tell us that the subject matter of his practical (moral as well as social and political) philosophy is the "realm of actualized freedom" (*PR*, §4), so that Hegel might seem to be raising and answering our question in a single

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<sup>9</sup> Wood (1990) describes Hegel's position as a "historicized naturalism," which he characterizes as follows: "Historicized naturalism has no general conception of the human good, but for any infant it will be born into a determinate social and historical situation, inheriting from its culture a determinate human self-understanding. Historicized naturalism tells us to choose the childrearing practices that will actualize the self of the newborn child on that understanding" (34). I tend to be in agreement with Stern (2016b), when in reaction to the passage from Wood I have just quoted, he tells us that he "would not be prepared to go even that far in a concession to Hegel's supposed historicism" (104).

breath: The source of moral requirements is freedom. But, of course, this answer raises more questions than it settles: How does Hegel understand practical freedom? What is the relation between the distinctively human capacity for practical freedom and the capacities that we share with lower animals? In what sense are we humans bound by requirements of freedom (such that failing to abide by such requirements represents some kind of normative defect or failure)? And what is Hegel's account of normative (including moral) evaluation, anyway? The *answer* I provide to this family of questions is, I believe, *Hegel's own*: It is extracted from a detailed reading of several Hegelian texts, as opposed to being based on some loosely "Hegelian" insights whose plausibility is then established in abstraction from careful textual consideration. This dissertation is thus a work of Hegel exegesis, albeit one that tries to steer clear of mere paraphrase and thereby show how Hegel's views can still be of philosophical interest today.

# 1

## **KANTIAN DUALISM, HEGELIAN ANTI-DUALISM, AND SECOND NATURE**

A longer version of Section II of this Chapter has been previously published as: Garcia Mills (2018), "Realizing the Good: Hegel's Critique of Kantian Morality", *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 26 (1), 195-212

This dissertation argues that Hegel subscribes to the following two theses: First, moral requirements are grounded in our essence or nature (essentialist thesis); second, human nature can be constructed out of capacities that we share with lower animals (emergence thesis). I articulate and defend the interpretive claim that Hegel indeed subscribes to these two theses, and therefore qualifies as an ethical naturalist, in Chapters Two through Five. In this first chapter, I begin to make my case for the claim that Hegel must be some kind of ethical naturalist in an indirect way, by examining some of his criticisms of Kant's moral philosophy. Although arguably circuitous, this route is nevertheless illuminating, for Hegel himself understood his philosophical position to a considerable extent as a critical reaction to Kant. The principal takeaway from his criticisms, I aim to show, is that Hegel's alternative to Kant turns on the (broadly Aristotelian) idea of habit as a second nature. For Hegel, human beings are not metaphysically split, between a sensible part, on the one hand, and a purely rational part that owes nothing to our animal nature, on the other. On his account, I suggest, human beings are animals that develop a second, rational nature through processes of habituation. I spell out this suggestion in Chapters Two and Three.

My discussion of the Hegelian criticisms of Kant in this chapter is organized as follows. The chapter has three sections. In sections I and II, I review two related objections against Kant's moral philosophy. They are: First, the charge that Kant's categorical imperative is insufficiently informative to guide or assess moral conduct and, second, the complaint that the Kantian moral "ought" represents an unattainable ideal. I refer to these criticisms as the emptiness objection and the realizability objection, respectively.<sup>10</sup> The first, emptiness objection has been the subject of lengthy, ongoing debate between Kant and Hegel commentators. In section I, I draw on part of the recent debate to provide an overview of the objection. The second, realizability objection has by comparison received considerably less attention, at least within recent Anglophone scholarship. In section II, I piece together my own interpretation of the objection. It is worth emphasizing at the outset that my discussions in sections I and II are not intended to provide a knock-down Hegelian argument against Kant. Although I think Hegel's objections are in part well taken, my main objective in these sections is rather to show how underlying Hegel's criticisms is one very basic complaint against Kant, namely, that his views are objectionably dualistic. Hegel's complaint about Kantian dualism yields a corresponding lesson about the positive view that we can expect to find in his texts. According to this Hegelian, anti-dualist lesson, our moral theory ought to jettison the sharp Kantian separation between our animal self

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<sup>10</sup>These two objections, of course, do not exhaust Hegel's criticisms of Kant's moral philosophy. Very briefly put, a third Hegelian objection against Kant is the accusation that the Kantian idea of duty for the sake of duty is motivationally inert. On this objection, see Westphal (1991), Pippin (2001), Ameriks (2000). A fourth (allegedly Hegelian) objection that has recently provoked much discussion is the so-called "Kantian paradox" of self-legislation. (The label is due to Pinkard [2000].) The Kantian idea of autonomy or self-legislation is paradoxical, so the Hegelian objection goes, in that it both requires and precludes constraint by some norm that holds prior to any act of self-legislation. The idea of self-legislation seems to require external constraint in order to avoid the threat of legislating from a normative void and so arbitrarily; such external constraint, however, is ruled out by the very idea that we are bound only by norms that we in some sense give ourselves. For various ways in which Kantians and Hegelians have formulated, and attempted to solve, this "paradox," see Pinkard (2002), 59, 226, 233, Pippin (2000), 192, 194, Stern (2012), 13-14, Korsgaard (1996b), 98, 235. The emptiness and realizability objections, however, suffice for my purposes in this chapter. Partly because of that, and partly because it is not clear to me what Hegel's complaint against the Kantian view of moral motivation is, exactly, or whether he really thinks that the Kantian idea of self-legislation is "paradoxical," I leave the issues of moral motivation and self-legislation out of consideration here. For a helpful overview of the emptiness, motivational, and realizability objections, see Sedgwick (2012a), 2-6.

and our purely rational self, as well as the related claim that pure practical reason is the sole source of moral requirements. In section III, I take stock of my discussion up to that point and ask: What exactly is Hegel’s alternative, non-dualistic account of who we are as creatures that can heed moral requirements? As we shall see in a provisional way in the final section of this chapter, Hegel’s answer to this question gives pride of place to the idea of habit as a second nature. Filling out the details of the role that habit plays in Hegel’s account of human nature is, as I have noted, the task of the next two chapters.

## SECTION I: THE EMPTINESS OBJECTION

### I.1 THE FORMULA OF UNIVERSAL LAW AS AN “EMPTY FORMALISM”

I begin with Hegel’s most famous (or infamous) objection against Kant’s moral philosophy, namely, the charge that the categorical imperative is an “empty formalism.” As I have just emphasized, my purpose in discussing this objection, as well as the realizability objection, is not to adjudicate between Kantians and Hegelians. My aim is rather to suggest that underlying Hegel’s criticisms is a general complaint about Kantian dualism and a corresponding lesson or clue about the positive view we can expect Hegel to espouse as his own.

Hegel formulates the emptiness objection at several points throughout his works.<sup>11</sup> The most condensed version of the objection within Hegel’s mature writings, however, is found in the “Morality” section of the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel there writes:

One may indeed bring in material *from outside* and thereby arrive at *particular* duties, but it is impossible to make the transition to particular duties from the . . . determination of duty as *absence of contradiction*, as *formal correspondence with itself*, which is no different from the specification of *abstract indeterminacy*; and even if such particular content is taken into consideration, there is no criterion within that principle for deciding whether or not this content is a duty. . . The fact that no property is present is in itself [*fürsich*] no more contradictory than the non-existence of this or that individual people,

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *NL*, 459-66 and *PhG*, Ch. V, C, b and c.

family, etc., or the complete *absence of human life*. But if it is already established or presupposed that property and human life should exist and be respected, then it is a contradiction to commit theft or murder (*PR*, §135A)<sup>12</sup>

In claiming that the “absence of contradiction” provides no “criterion” of moral evaluation, Hegel is attacking the first formulation of Kant’s categorical imperative, the so-called formula of universal law (FUL). That formulation reads: “[A]ct only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (*GMS*, 4:421).<sup>13</sup> Hegel, then, objects in the passage just quoted that the mere requirement expressed by the FUL that our maxims be universalizable consistently or without contradiction is insufficiently informative to determine whether or not a maxim is morally permissible. In addition, Kant tells us that the FUL is a principle of pure reason and so is not based on experience— in particular, it is not based on the observation of human behavior, on any desires, interests or other features of our animal nature. Thus, in charging that the FUL is an “empty formalism,” Hegel is in effect calling into question the Kantian tenet that pure reason alone, unassisted by any “material from outside,” can supply a criterion of moral evaluation.

In his discussion of the emptiness objection in the “Natural Law” essay, the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel refers (or is at least typically taken to refer) to an example Kant employs in the second *Critique*. Kant’s example describes a case in which a man has received a deposit whose owner has died without leaving any record of it.<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup>Fabian Freyenhagen has recently pointed out that there are in fact three distinct (albeit related) “emptiness” objections contained in §135A of the *PR*. My discussion here focuses on the second and third objections listed by Freyenhagen, namely, that the categorical imperative cannot serve as a criterion for morally appraising particular actions, and that Kant’s contradiction test gives both false positives and negatives. (See Freyenhagen [2011], 96.)

<sup>13</sup>See also *KpV*, 5:30.

<sup>14</sup> See *KpV*, 5: 27. In his discussion of the FUL in the *GMS*, Kant distinguishes between “strict or narrower” duties and “wide” duties. Actions whose maxim violates the former kind of duties – Kant tells us – “cannot even be *thought* without contradiction”; in the case of actions whose maxim violates the latter duties, while it is the case that they can be thought without contradiction, “it is still impossible to *will* that their maxim be raised to the universality of a law of nature” (4: 424). The deposit case, on which Hegel’s discussion centers, is opposed to a “strict” duty. The fact that Hegel’s objection explicitly targets only “strict” duties, however, can afford little solace to the Kantian. For one could hardly rest content with a theory that can at best account only for “wide” duties. (For a discussion of

maxim on which such a man considers acting is that of denying the receipt of unrecorded deposits. And the question Kant goes on to ask is: Does the FUL test, without any further presuppositions, identify such a maxim as morally impermissible? Kant, of course, believes that it does. According to Kant, the universalized maxim of denying having received a deposit for which there is no proof would “annihilate” or “destroy itself.” The universalized maxim is contradictory, and so “destroys itself,” in the following sense: on the one hand, in acting on that maxim, the man presupposes the existence of the practice of making deposits; on the other hand, if the maxim were universally adopted (that is, adopted by everyone in similar circumstances), the trust among lenders would be undermined and the practice of making deposits presupposed in the maxim would cease to exist. Our man thus implicitly wills both the existence of the practice and its disappearance –as Kant writes, in acting on the maxim about unrecorded deposits he effectively “would bring it about that there would be no deposits at all” (*KpV*, 5: 27). Upon being adopted as a universal law, then, the maxim turns out to be contradictory and thus fails the FUL test for moral permissibility.

Briefly stated, Hegel’s objection to Kant’s treatment of the deposit case consists in asking: What is contradictory about there being no deposits at all? A contradiction that “annihilates” or “destroys” the maxim of denying the receipt of unrecorded deposits arises only if we already assume that the practice of making deposits is a good and so ought to be preserved. It is only because we bring in this additional “material from outside,” Hegel argues, that we can get the desired results in applying the FUL test. But once we do bring in further assumptions “from outside,” for instance, once we presuppose that “property and human life should exist and be respected,” the FUL itself is rendered “superfluous” (*NL*, 437/78). In other words, having brought in these “material from outside,” it is then these assumptions themselves about human

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various possible interpretations of “contradiction in thought” or “contradiction in conception”, see “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law” in Korsgaard [1996a].)

life or private property, and not the mere “absence of contradiction,” that serve as our criteria of moral evaluation.

## I.2 EMPTINESS AND THE FORMULA OF HUMANITY

In addition to taking issue with the forgoing attack on the FUL itself, Kantians typically respond by arguing that even if one grants (for argument’s sake) that the emptiness objection is successful against FUL, the objection decidedly fails as soon as one turns to the other formulations of the categorical imperative, such as the so-called formula of humanity (FH).<sup>15</sup> I now briefly consider this Kantian move, as well as the Hegelian reaction to it.<sup>16</sup> For the Kantian move and the Hegelian reaction provide further support for the interpretive hypothesis that Hegel’s complaints about the emptiness of the categorical imperative are symptomatic of worries about Kant’s dualism.

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<sup>15</sup>For this kind of Kantian response, see Wood (1999), 97ff., Galvin (2009). One way to summarily recount part of the recent exchange between Kantians and Hegelians on the alleged “emptiness” of the FUL, which I am here sidestepping, goes as follows. The Kantian might immediately reply to Hegel’s objection (as I have expressed it above) by claiming that he simply misunderstands the FUL test. The contradiction for which FUL tests is internal to the will of the agent; it does not arise, as Hegel appears to assume, between the agent’s maxim and some external presupposition. Specifically, the practice of making deposits is implied by the agent’s own maxim and does not represent “material” brought in from outside. If we thus locate the contradiction within the will of the agent, then the FUL test does *pace* Hegel serve by itself (without presupposing external “material”) to determine the moral permissibility of at least some actions (See Korsgaard [1996a], 86.) Hegelians might respond to this Kantian line of defense in at least two ways. First, they might hold that it is not obvious that Hegel’s emptiness objection can be put to rest simply by observing that the contradiction is supposed to be internal to the agent’s will. Even if we grant this Kantian point, the Hegelian will argue, we will still need to rely on some external “material” if the FUL test is to produce the desired results. For absent that “material,” maxims that are morally permissible or even obligatory (such as “Help the poor,” to use Hegel’s example from the “Natural Law” essay [*NL*, 439/80]) will turn out to be morally impermissible according to the FUL test. According to a second, more general line of Hegelian defense, the Kantian qualification that the contradiction is internal to the agent’s will does nothing to remedy the inability of the FUL test to distinguish between prudential precepts and moral requirements. In acting on some maxim (for example, “I shall run fifteen kilometers each morning to stay in shape”) I may well undermine my own end (say, by enduring the soft tissue injuries in which that kind of physical exercise, let us assume, is bound to result). Although such a maxim would “destroy itself,” it appears to be perfectly permissible from a moral standpoint, even if ineffective or imprudent. (For these two points, see Sedgwick [2012b], 271-273.) Of course, Kantians might straightaway complain that “Help the poor” is an ill-formed or incomplete maxim, and that once the maxim is formulated in full, any semblance of contradictoriness disappears. (See for example Korsgaard [1996a], 87 and Wood [1990], 160.) Hegelians, in turn, will ask for a complete formulation of the maxim and then continue to press their case. And so on and so forth. But these details fall outside my main purpose in reviewing Hegel’s criticisms of Kant in this chapter.

<sup>16</sup>I say “Hegelian” because, as noted, Hegel himself explicitly considers Kant’s categorical imperative in its FUL version only.

The FH reads: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (*GMS*, 4: 429). This version of the categorical imperative certainly appears to be more informative or contentful than the FUL without requiring an appeal to any empirical “material” that would compromise that law’s universality and necessity. Indeed, the FH can be seen as derived from the bare concept of duty. Such a concept, Kant tells us, applies not to perfect or holy wills but only to finite wills like ours. Specifically, the concept of duty “contains that of a good will though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances” (4:397), that is, certain inclinations or sensible desires that possibly conflict with the demands of morality. It is these “hindrances” that account for the imperatival form of the FH and the other formulations of the categorical imperative. Kant goes on to characterize the will generally as a capacity to set and pursue ends (4: 427) and asks: Are all our ends dependent upon our sensible desires or inclinations and so contingent? Or is there any end that is furnished by reason alone and so universally and necessarily binding? That is to say, are there any “objective ends,” as he calls them? Kant answers this question in the affirmative and argues that “humanity” or “rational nature” as the capacity to set ends is precisely such an objective end, for that capacity is presupposed in the pursuit of any other (contingent) ends (4:431).

Kant, therefore, certainly introduces some further assumptions about duty and rational willing to arrive at the more contentful FH. According to Kantians, however, those assumptions do not make the command that enjoins us to respect humanity anything less than unconditionally binding. Whatever we make of Hegel’s attack on the FUL, then, at least the FH does appear to provide a contentful (that is, non-empty) moral criterion that nevertheless respects the universality and necessity required of moral laws. Kantians might even concede that we need to rely on certain “anthropological” knowledge (that is, knowledge about empirical features of

finite rational natures) to guide the application of the FH or to derive more specific duties from that general principle.<sup>17</sup> But they will insist that such knowledge is purely descriptive and so the evaluative work is performed by the categorical imperative (more specifically, the FH) alone.

How might Hegel respond to this Kantian line of thought? Hegel could well insist that the general command expressed by the FH that we respect human dignity is still too vague, at least in the sense that it will vary greatly across different societies. To borrow from another Hegel commentator: Respecting a someone's humanity "will be different in twelfth century Japanese society and twenty-first century Sweden, and it will be different in contemporary Cairo and contemporary Kaliningrad" (Freyenhagen [2011], 104). Thus, as the Kantian concedes, the FH will no doubt need to be supplemented with further "anthropological" knowledge (for example, about human neediness) as well as knowledge about the institutional setting within a given society. But Hegel or the Hegelian would insist that that "anthropological" and sociological knowledge cannot just be a matter of aiding the application of the categorical imperative. Rather, in the light of the inability of the FH to yield more specific duties on its own, that knowledge will in part determine the evaluative standards against which we measure our actions for moral permissibility. Or so the Hegelian response might go.<sup>18</sup>

### **I.3 HEGELIAN UPSHOT**

The debate between Kantians and Hegelians on the "empty formalism" charge appears to be far from over.<sup>19</sup> But instead of continuing to pursue the various lines of reply and counter-

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<sup>17</sup> See for example Herman (2007), Chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion of this Hegelian view, see Freyenhagen (2011), 104ff. Much the same points are raised against Herman (2007) by Sedgwick (2011), 40ff.

<sup>19</sup> Fabian Freyenhagen, for example, further develops the Hegelian emptiness charge by interpreting the objection as a version of the so-called "act-description problem." (See Freyenhagen [2011], 108ff.) This "act-description problem" is famously formulated in passing by Anscombe, who writes: "[Kant's] rule about universalizable maxims is useless without stipulations as to what shall count as a relevant description of an action with a view to constructing a maxim about it" (Anscombe [1958], 2).

reply by each of the sides in dispute, let us step back and consider the Hegelian upshot of the emptiness charge.

I hypothesized at the outset that one main lesson to be drawn from Hegel's criticisms of Kant's moral philosophy is an anti-dualist one. In each of his objections, that is, Hegel is ultimately targeting the Kantian separation between our sensibility and pure reason, along with the claim that pure reason alone is the source of moral requirements. Our discussion in this section provides some initial evidence in favor of this general interpretive hypothesis. As we have seen, if Hegel's "empty formalism" objection is sound, then the categorical imperative cannot serve as a criterion for moral evaluation unless additional "material" is brought in "from outside." This "material" will include knowledge of the sort Kant calls "anthropological," as well as knowledge about a society's institutional setup. Moreover, according to the Hegelian line of thought I have just rehearsed, this knowledge will partly determine the criterion against which we evaluate our actions for moral permissibility (as opposed to simply aiding the application of some purely rational criterion). And this reliance on "anthropological" and sociological knowledge, if it is not just a matter of application, indeed undermines the Kantian separation between the empirical and the purely rational, along with the associated claim that pure reason is the sole source of moral obligations.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>This upshot is shared, I believe, by the two Hegel commentators that I have mainly followed in this section. Sedgwick summarizes both the anti-dualism and sociality points I have just rehearsed when she tells us that, in arguing that the categorical imperative is an empty formalism, "Hegel's larger objective is to call into question the Kantian thesis that we possess a faculty of pure reason that can rise above history and bind us unconditionally" (Sedgwick [2012b], 278). Freyenhagen, for his part, is somewhat more circumspect when it comes to drawing these sorts of general lessons from Hegel's emptiness charge. That said, his discussion makes it clear that he reads Hegel's objection as also calling into question the possibility of drawing a clear-cut distinction between the sensible or empirical, on the one hand, and the purely rational, on the other. See especially Freyenhagen (2011), 104-5.

## SECTION II: THE REALIZABILITY OBJECTION

### II.1 A PERFORMATIVE CONTRADICTION

The second Hegelian objection I wish to consider is the realizability objection.<sup>21</sup> Tentatively stated, the realizability objection says that within the sphere of Kantian morality, the good remains an unrealizable “ought” – in other words, the Kantian moral “ought” can never become an “is.”<sup>22</sup> Hegel appears to gesture at the realizability issue, as I have just characterized it, when he writes in the “Morality” section of the *Philosophy of Right*: “[The subjective will] . . . stands in a *relationship* to the good, a relationship whereby the good *ought* to be its substantial character, whereby it ought to make the good its end and fulfill it” (§131). Earlier on in that section Hegel claims that within the standpoint of “Morality” the subjective will “should be thought of as sheer restless activity [*die reine Unruhe und Tätigkeit*] which cannot yet arrive at anything *that is*,” and accordingly complains that “[morality] is the point of view of *difference*” (§108Z).<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, the target of these meager remarks is far from obvious. Hegel seems to complain that the point of view of “Morality” objectionably separates “ought” and “is.” But in what does this separation consist? And why is such a separation objectionable, anyway? One concern that Hegel appears to be voicing is that the demands of Kantian morality cannot be fully

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<sup>21</sup> As noted, part of the material that follows in this section has previously appeared as Garcia Mills (2018).

<sup>22</sup> This objection has to my knowledge received considerably less attention than the previous two criticisms, at least within the recent Anglophone literature. (One exception to this trend is Westphal’s discussion of “The Moral Worldview” and “Dissemblance” sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. See especially Westphal [1991], 151-53.) Part of the reason for this diminished attention might be that, in the course of articulating his criticism, Hegel addresses elements of Kant’s practical philosophy (specifically, the practical postulates) that a number of contemporary Kantians (and Hegelians) perhaps regard as theological remnants from which, accordingly, they wish to distance themselves. Whatever the reason for the diminished attention, however, Hegel himself was greatly bothered by the realizability issue throughout his entire career. Hegel voices this complaint, for example, already in his 1798/99 essay “The Spirit of Christianity” and as late as the “Encyclopedia Logic” of 1831 (§234Z). Therefore, it is worth examining this objection in order to continue to get clearer on Hegel’s basic complaint against Kant’s moral theory.

<sup>23</sup> The first of the two quotations from §108Z reads in full: “In morality, self-determination should be thought of as sheer restless activity which cannot yet arrive at something *that is*.” Hegel explicitly connects the concept of self-determination with the subjective will in §107.

met or realized within the realm of the “is.” In particular, Hegel is troubled by the claim that the good remains an unrealizable “ought,” I propose, because he sees such a claim as involving a performative contradiction. The contradiction lies in, on the one hand, setting something (namely, the good) as the end of our morally worthy actions, and, on the other hand, at the same time declaring that end to be ultimately unrealizable (at least by finite rational beings like us). The underlying presupposition in this way of presenting the issue is that the setting of something as an end implies that that end is realizable. And this presupposition certainly seems to have at least some plausibility. For otherwise, that is, if the end of our morally worthy actions were ultimately unattainable, what exactly would we be acting for or towards? If the good is declared unrealizable, what is the point of our even attempting to act morally? Indeed, if the end of our morally worthy actions is unrealizable, then it seems that our actions risk becoming practically absurd or hopeless.

The point I have just made on Hegel’s behalf, however, is one to which Kant himself would subscribe. Indeed, Kant makes much the same point when he insists in the second *Critique* that the highest good must be possible or that we must think of the highest good as realizable. Kant introduces the idea of the highest good somewhat vaguely as that of “the whole *object* . . . of a pure will” (5: 109). He then describes that “object” more specifically as a state of affairs in which the ends of a fully moral agent are completely satisfied (or, as Kant also more concisely puts it, as happiness proportioned to perfect virtue).<sup>24</sup> Against the background of this characterization, he goes on to write: “If . . . the highest good is impossible in accordance with

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<sup>24</sup> In the *KrV* (A810-811/B838-839), Kant distinguishes between the “highest original good” (God) and the “highest derived good.” In the *KpV* (5:110), he divides the latter into the “highest good in a person” and the “highest good of a possible world,” both of which he characterizes in terms of the conjunction of perfect virtue and happiness. My focus here will be on the “highest derived good” and, more specifically, on its moral component (what Kant calls the “supreme good”). Accordingly, I set aside the differences between the two types of the “highest derived good,” in particular, Kant’s failure to explicitly mention the proportionality condition in the case of the “highest good in a person.” On the issue of the proportionality of virtue and happiness, see the helpful discussion in Reath (1988): 610-613.

practical rules, then the moral law, which commands us to promote it, must be fantastic and directed to empty imaginary ends and must therefore in itself be false” (5: 114).<sup>25</sup> Now since he has already purportedly shown that the moral law is not “fantastic” (and so “directed to empty imaginary ends”), the passage just quoted in effect amounts to the claim that the highest good must be practically possible. According to my remarks so far in this section, then, Hegel would seem to just be echoing Kant’s formulation of the problem of the possibility of the highest good in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

## II.2 A “WHOLE NEST OF CONTRADICTIONS”

My discussion of the realizability objection up to this point obviously gives the Kantian an opening. For the Kantian might well claim that Kant not only recognizes the realizability problem, as I characterized it above on Hegel’s behalf, but he also offers a solution in keeping with human finitude. Kant’s idea of the highest good requires that it be possible to perfect our virtue or to achieve complete conformity of our inclinations to the moral law. However, Kant notes that, as finite rational beings, we are not capable at any moment during our sensible existence of reaching such moral perfection. Therefore, in order to attain what he calls the “supreme good,” or perfect virtue, we need it to be possible to continue to morally improve in a future life beyond our sensible existence. And such a non-sensible future life presupposes the immortality of the soul. Thus, by “postulating” the immortality of the soul,<sup>26</sup> Kant makes room

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<sup>25</sup> Along similar lines, Kant also tells us, in those same pages: “the subjective effect of [the moral] law, namely the disposition conformed with it and also made necessary by it to promote the practically possible highest good . . . presupposes at least that the latter [namely, the highest good] is *possible*; in the contrary case it would be practically impossible to strive for the object of a concept [that of the highest good] that would be, at bottom, empty and without an object” (5: 143); “we *ought* to strive to promote the good (which must therefore be possible)” (5:125); “it was a duty for us to promote the highest good; hence there is in us not merely the warrant but also the necessity, as a need connected with duty, to presuppose the possibility of this highest good” (Ibid.)

<sup>26</sup> Within the context of his practical philosophy, Kant defines “postulate” as a “*theoretical* proposition, though one not demonstrable as such [i.e. theoretically], insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid *practical law*” (*KpV*, 5: 122).

for the complete conformity of our inclinations to the moral law (even if that conformity can only be thought by us in the form of an endless progress).<sup>27</sup>

It is here, however, that Hegel's frustration with Kant becomes evident. For while we might take Hegel to accept Kant's formulation of the realizability problem in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Hegel decidedly rejects Kant's solution to the problem. In objecting that the moral "ought" can never become an "is," then, Hegel is certainly doing more than simply reiterating the Kantian point about the possibility of the highest good. Kant is right to insist that the good must be possible or realizable. But he cannot, in Hegel's opinion, deliver the goods. Hegel argues, in particular, that both the Kantian idea of the highest good and the practical postulates implied by its possibility involve a "whole nest of thoughtless contradictions [*gedankenloser Widersprüche*]" (*PhG*, 453/374).<sup>28</sup>

What is the main inconsistency or "contradiction" that Hegel claims to find in the Kantian idea of the highest good and the immortality postulate? We can begin to piece together Hegel's objection against Kant by recalling how, on Kant's account, morally worthy action consists in the subordination of our inclinations to the dictates of pure reason. Fully realizing the Kantian highest good, then, must be a matter completely subordinating our inclinations to the dictates of pure reason to the point, Hegel says, of "sublating [*aufheben*]" or "eliminating [*vertilgen*]" those inclinations altogether.<sup>29</sup> But to "eliminate" our sensible desires just is to

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<sup>27</sup> A cognizer who, unlike finite rational beings, was capable of an intellectual intuition, would not be subject to this restriction, since, for such a cognizer, Kant says, "the temporal condition is nothing" (5: 123).

<sup>28</sup> See *KrV*, B637, where Kant dismissively refers to the cosmological argument in favor of the existence of God in similar terms. All quotes in this subsection are from Chapter VI, C, a-b of the *PhG*. From amongst the "nest of contradictions" Hegel claims to find in Kant, I here focus on part of Hegel's discussion and criticism of what he calls the "first postulate" and the "second postulate," namely, the idea of the highest good as the "harmony of morality and nature" (445/367), and second the "harmony of morality and the sensible will" (447/369) as well as the idea of the immortality of the soul implied by such harmony. Hegel's criticism of the "third postulate," namely, the postulate of the existence of God as a "holy moral legislator" [460/380]) relies on the distinction between "pure" and "specific" duties and the "holiness" of the former but not the latter (and vice versa). Partly because these latter distinctions and claims are not so obviously attributable to Kant, I bracket this Hegelian objection in what follows.

<sup>29</sup> Hegel's claim that the complete realization of the highest good requires that we eliminate or rid ourselves of our sensible desires deserves some comment. Why should complete conformity to the moral law, the Kantian will

eliminate or destroy morality altogether. For if morality is characterized as the subordination of our inclinations to reason, then the very idea of morality requires that our inclinations be preserved (even if only as that which is to be subordinated to the demands of pure practical reason).<sup>30</sup> The inconsistency that Hegel purports to discover in Kant can thus be formulated in terms of the conjunction of the following two sets of Kantian claims. On the one hand, at least in the case of finite rational beings, morality consists in the subordination of sensibility to pure reason and so presupposes the separation between the former and the latter. The very idea of morality, and of ourselves as finite rational beings, thus requires that our inclinations not be altogether eliminated. On the other hand, the highest good must be practically possible or realizable, lest our moral efforts become hopeless or absurd. Fully realizing the highest good, however, would eliminate the opposition that characterizes both morality (and hence also the highest good as a moral concept) and ourselves as finite rational beings. Consequently, Hegel holds that the Kantian moral agent “cannot be in earnest” (456/378) in her efforts to achieve the highest good. Hegel adds that it is precisely in order to cover up the outlined inconsistency that Kant postulates the immortality of the soul and postpones the full realization of the highest good to “the dim remoteness of infinity” (447/369) or to “a nebulous remoteness where nothing can any longer be distinguished or comprehended” (458/378).<sup>31</sup>

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wonder, eliminate our inclinations altogether? Here is how a reply to this question in line with the letter of the Kantian text might go: Kant argues that the moral law takes on an imperatival form just in case the rational being to whom it applies has a conflicting source of desire. (See, for instance, *KpV*, 5:32 and *GMS*, 4:414.) Therefore, a rational being to whom the law no longer appears in imperatival form is a being that is unaffected by inclinations or sensible desires (and so entirely rational). Moreover, since Kant tells us that only for a perfectly virtuous being the law no longer appears in the form of an imperative (*Ibid.*), to become perfectly virtuous would indeed require that we rid ourselves of sensibility altogether. This line of thought of course presupposes that at least some of our sensible desires or inclinations are opposed to the dictates of reason. (See *MS*, 6:379 and 386.) Thus, so long as we are so much as affected by sensible desires, the possibility of acting immorally remains. And such a possibility in turn implies that the moral law will continue to appear to us in the form of an imperative and, therefore, that perfect virtue (or the supreme good) has not yet been attained.

<sup>30</sup>Hegel makes a further claim at this point in his discussion, namely, that our inclinations or sensible desires are in fact the “organ” or “instrument for [the] realization” of the dictates of pure practical reason (*PhG*, 457) and so cannot be “sublated” or “destroyed.”

<sup>31</sup> The interpretation I have just sketched of Hegel’s realizability objection gives rise to various Kantian replies and Hegelian counter-replies. (i) A first line of Kantian reply might be to deny that postulating the immortality of the

### II.3 HEGELIAN UPSHOT

Having offered an overview of Hegel's realizability objection, as I understand it, let us now ask: Is it possible to accept Hegel's criticisms (and reject the highest good and postulates) while leaving Kant's dualistic framework untouched? I propose that we answer this question in the negative and claim that, as in the case of the emptiness objection, the realizability objection is ultimately taking aim at the dualism of sensibility and pure reason.

As we have just seen, Hegel's realizability criticisms against Kant arises out of the conjunction of Kant's commitment the possibility of the highest good, on the one hand, and his dualism of sensibility and reason, as well as the conception of morality as the subordination of the former to the latter, on the other. Hegel, I began by remarking, agrees with Kant that

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soul and indefinitely postponing the realization of the highest good are the result of some sort of confusion (or a mere attempt to cover up an inconsistency). It is one thing, the Kantian will say, to improve our virtue (or to morally progress); it is another thing to perfect our virtue (or fully realize the good). There is a difference between striving for moral perfection and actually attaining perfection. And Kant's demand is only that we continue to improve our virtue or morally progress. However, weakening the demand to continually improving our virtue (as opposed to perfecting virtue or fully realizing the good) is in fact inconsistent with Kant's own doctrines. For if the demand is merely that we improve our virtue, then that is something that can be done in this life (in which case there is no need to postulate the immortality of the soul). And adding that the demand is that we improve our virtue *indefinitely* will not help either. To improve our virtue indefinitely is to continue to morally progress beyond this life, in some non-bodily existence. But a non-bodily existence beyond this life is an existence absent of inclinations. As we have seen, however, morality is precisely defined for Kant as the subordination of our inclinations to reason. Therefore, in an existence absent of inclinations there is no possibility of becoming virtuous (and hence no moral improvement nor, for that matter, morality at all). In addition, the claim that we need only indefinitely improve our virtue (as opposed to perfect it) seems to fly in the face of Kant's explicit remarks that the highest good is possible (or that it must be thought to be realizable). On this first set of issues see Wood (1970), 124, Yovel (1980), 190, and Westphal (1991), 151-53. (ii) A second line of reply by the Kantian might be to simply concede the Hegelian point (namely, that if the highest good were attained, morality would somehow be "destroyed") but not to see that result as problematic. Upon realizing the highest good, our wills would be holy and, as such, they would *necessarily* conform to the practical law. To be sure, Kant tells us that in this situation of immediate and necessary conformity to the law one can no longer properly speak of duty or virtue (nor, therefore, of morality). But that in no way represents an objection to Kant's moral philosophy (or to this concept of the highest good). After all, the Kantian might continue, that concept is just meant to serve as an ideal. The Hegelian rejoinder here would consist in continuing to ask whether the Kantian concept of the highest good is sustainable, even in thought or as some sort of ideal. Hegel's question to Kant – I take it – would be the following: How can one hope to put the realizability issue to rest by appeal to a notion (such as that of the highest good) that turns out to be inconsistent with the presuppositions upon which that notion itself rests (that is, that is inconsistent with the distinction between reason and inclination)? Finally, a third line of reply to the Hegelian objection might be to suggest that we adopt a broadly Kantian moral theory that simply leaves out the highest good and the postulates. For it seems to be the concept of the highest good and the Kantian postulates that are causing all the trouble. I believe that the best way to address this reply is to show, as I attempt to do in the following subsection, that Hegel's criticism is deeper than what this final Kantian reply appears to assume.

we must think that the highest good is practically possible or realizable, lest our moral efforts become hopeless or absurd. Given this agreement, in charging that the Kantian moral “ought” can never become an “is,” Hegel must indeed be targeting Kant’s dualism of sensibility and reason and his associated conception of morality. To be sure, despite their agreement, Kant’s construal of the highest good is not one that Hegel endorses. For the Kantian highest good includes as one of its components the idea of the “supreme good” or perfect virtue, which Hegel rejects. But that idea of perfect virtue rests precisely on the dualism and the conception of morality that I am claiming Hegel targets. Thus, the principal lesson to take away from Hegel’s objection, I propose, is that it is only by calling into question the Kantian dualism of pure reason and sensibility that we can come to see how the good (on some non-Kantian construal) can be fully realized – or how we might achieve a unity of the moral “ought” and the “is.”

### **SECTION III: CONCLUSION**

#### **III.1 ANTI-DUALISM**

In the previous sections, I reviewed part of the recent scholarly debate between Kantians and Hegelians on the emptiness objection (section I) and offered my own reading of the realizability objection (section II). In this final section, I pause to take stock and tentatively identify the contours of Hegel’s positive alternative to Kant.

According to the treatment I have offered of Hegel’s criticisms, both the emptiness objection and the realizability objection ultimately target the Kantian separation between sensibility and reason, that is, between our animal nature, on the one hand, and a purely rational part of ourselves that owes nothing to that nature, on the other. In charging that Kant’s supreme moral law is an “empty formalism,” Hegel targets Kant’s dualism of sensibility and pure reason inasmuch as he calls into question Kant’s aspiration to find a purely rational criterion that can,

unassisted by empirical “material,” serve to morally evaluate our actions. As for the realizability objection, as I have just suggested, it is Kant’s dualism of sensibility and pure reason that leads to the “contradictions” that Hegel claims to find in Kant’s view.

### III.2 LIFE, HABIT, AND SECOND NATURE

Hegel’s rejection of Kant’s dualism immediately raises the question: What exactly is Hegel’s alternative, non-dualistic account of human nature? Some of the texts in which Hegel voices his disagreements with Kant also make it clear that Hegel takes on the burden of providing a positive account that will fit the anti-dualist bill and offer some clues as to just what that positive account might look like. In particular, those texts suggest that the concepts of life and second nature occupy a central place in that positive account. Thus, for instance, already in his 1798/99 essay “The Spirit of Christianity,” Hegel discusses the Kantian separation between the moral law (or what he also calls the “concept”) and our inclinations in the following terms:

Since the commands of duty presuppose a separation [between the moral law and our inclinations], and since the domination of the concept declares itself in an ‘ought’ [*in einem Sollen*], that which is raised above this separation is by contrast an ‘is’, a modification of life (“The Spirit of Christianity”, 324)<sup>32</sup>

In addition, in those same pages, Hegel further explains that by ‘life’ he understands precisely the “correspondence of law and inclination” (327) such that law and inclination are no longer simply opposed to one another from the outset.

If we now turn from his early to his mature writings, we find that Hegel contrasts Kant’s view (which he discusses under the heading of “Morality” in the *Philosophy of Right*) with his

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<sup>32</sup> In a similar vein, Hegel also tells us that virtue “is a synthesis in which the law (which, because it is universal, Kant always calls something ‘objective’) loses its universality and the subject its particularity; both lose their opposition, while in the Kantian conception of virtue the opposition remains, and the universal becomes the master and the particular the mastered. The correspondence of inclination with law is such that law and inclination are no longer different; and the expression ‘correspondence of inclination with the law’ is therefore wholly unsatisfactory because it implies that law and inclination are still particulars, still opposites” (“The Spirit of Christianity”, 326).

own position (which he articulates in “Ethical Life [*Sittlichkeit*]”). In the course of introducing his own position, Hegel writes:

[T]he ethical [*das Sittliche*], as [the individuals’] general mode of behavior, appears as *custom* [*Sitte*]; and the *habit* of the ethical appears as a *second nature* which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence [*Dasein*] (*PR*, §151)

In the “Remark” to that same paragraph, Hegel goes on to contrast his view not only with the standpoint of “Morality” but also with that of “Abstract Right,” as follows: “Just as nature has its laws . . . so is custom the law appropriate to the spirit of freedom. Custom is what [abstract] right and morality have not yet reached, namely spirit” (§151A).<sup>33</sup>

Although the passages I have just quoted from “The Spirit of Christianity” and the *Philosophy of Right* are no doubt sketchy and vague, they nonetheless provide helpful clues about the view that Hegel endorses as his own. In the light of these passages, we can provisionally characterize Hegel’s position as naturalistic at least in the minimal sense that he rejects the dualism of “law and inclination” or, more precisely, of the purely rational, lawgiving part of our nature, on the one hand, and our animal nature, on the other. In place of this view of ourselves, on which we are endowed with a power of pure reason that owes nothing of its origin to our animal nature, I take Hegel’s passages above to hint at the following view: Individuals acquire a second natural capacity to heed ethical requirements (and other rational capacities, as we will see) by undergoing processes of habituation. One of my main tasks in the next two chapters is to make good on Hegel’s hint and spell out precisely the role that habit plays in his account of human nature.

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<sup>33</sup>See also *Enz*, §513, where Hegel tells us that once the deficiencies (“one-sidednesses”) of the standpoints of “Abstract Right” and “Morality” are overcome, freedom turns out to have “its actuality as *custom* –self-conscious *freedom* become *nature*.”

## 2

### **THE EMERGENCE THESIS I:**

#### **HUMAN SPIRIT, THE ANIMAL SOUL, AND NATURE**

In the previous chapter, I argued that Hegel's criticisms of Kant's moral philosophy call into question the latter's dualism of pure reason and sensibility. I further suggested that Hegel's alternative, non-dualistic account of human nature is one on which our rational capacities, including our capacity to heed moral requirements, are second natural or in some way the upshot of processes of habituation. In the next two chapters, I attempt to make good on the promissory remarks about habit and second nature that I made on Hegel's behalf at the very end of Chapter One.

I spell out the role that habit plays in Hegel's account of human nature in the course of making my case for the claim I referred to at the outset of the dissertation as the "emergence thesis." In this and the following chapter I thus articulate and defend the view that, for Hegel, distinctively human capacities, like consciousness and the will, emerge from nature or, more precisely, from the exercise of capacities that we share with other animals. I make my case for this interpretive thesis in two steps. In this chapter, I trace the transition from animality to human rationality, or from the animal soul to human consciousness, as Hegel lays it out in his "Anthropology," the first part of the *Encyclopedia* "Philosophy of Subjective Spirit." In the next chapter, I apply some of Hegel's discussions in the "Anthropology" to the case of the will, or our capacity for practical freedom, and argue that that capacity, too, emerges for Hegel from nature.

My treatment of Hegel’s “Anthropology” in this chapter proceeds as follows. In section I, I consider some of Hegel’s most general characterizations of spirit and its relation to nature. On the basis of these characterizations, I specify the minimal sense in which both non-human and human animals count for Hegel as spirited (or, more precisely, ensouled). In section II, I turn to human animals in particular and consider the question: How do distinctively human forms of spirit emerge from nature? More precisely, how is human rationality in some sense the result of capacities that we share with other animals? As I have anticipated, one especially important piece of Hegel’s answer to this question is his account of human animals as creatures capable of acquiring a reflective distance from what he calls our “natural determinations” – sensations, feelings, impulses, urges – through processes of habituation. Accordingly, in section II, I discuss the Hegelian notion of habit and clarify the role that it plays in the emergence of human consciousness.

## **SECTION I: NATURE AND THE ANIMAL SOUL**

### **I.1 THE CONTINUITY OF NATURE AND SPIRIT**

It might appear simply misguided to argue that Hegel subscribes to anything like the emergence thesis. At first blush, Hegel seems to oppose spirit and nature (he describes them as “antithetical” at one point [VPG, 30/20]) and thereby rule out any naturalist reading of human spirit, whatever that reading more concretely amounts to. In an unpublished fragment on the philosophy of spirit, Hegel says that spirit is the “movement of liberation” from nature (F, 92-93). Along broadly similar lines, in the Introduction to the *Encyclopedia* “Philosophy of Spirit,” Hegel writes: “[F]ormally the essence of spirit is *freedom* . . . In accordance with this determination spirit *can* abstract from everything . . . from its very life,” considered as a part of nature (Enz, §382). Hegel’s further remark (from the 1827/29 *Lectures on the Philosophy of*

*Spirit*) that the “essence” of spirit consists in “freedom from *and within* the natural” (VPG1827/28, 19/71, emphasis added) is no doubt more amicable to a naturalist interpretation. At the very least, however, Hegel’s characterizations of spirit and nature in these passages raise the challenge: What exactly is the relation between spirit and that from which it progressively moves away, nature? And what does such a “movement” consist in, exactly?

By the end of the chapter, I hope to be in a position to provide an answer to these questions (in particular, an answer on which human spirit is in some sense the result of capacities that we share with lower animals). But before delving into the details of the relation between Hegelian spirit and nature, it is worth indicating in a preliminary and general way what I take to be the upshot of Hegel’s answer to the questions I have just posed. As I understand it, Hegel’s view amounts to a version of non-reductive naturalism: That is, although Hegel tells us that spirit emerges from nature, he does not believe that spirit can be fully explained with the vocabulary of the modern scientific treatment of nature alone. Hegel seems to declare his non-reductionist allegiances for instance when he claims that “spirit . . . is not the *mere* result of nature” (*Enz*, §381Z, emphasis added). We can further specify Hegel’s non-reductionism by contrasting it with a form of naturalism that figures as a foil in the work of John McDowell, namely, “bald naturalism.” On a “bald naturalist” account, human rationality is “reconstruct[ed] . . . out of the conceptual materials that already belong in a natural-scientific picture of nature” (McDowell [1994/1996], 73).<sup>34</sup> That Hegel would have little sympathy for this kind of naturalism is evident,

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<sup>34</sup> In the Introduction to *Mind and World*, McDowell similarly characterizes “bald naturalism” as the view according to which “the normative relations that constitute the logical space of reasons can be reconstructed out of conceptual materials whose home is the logical space that Sellars, wrongly on this view, contrasts with the logical space of reasons” (McDowell [1994/1996], xviii). The contrasting logical space is nature conceived as the “realm of law,” which McDowell in turn characterizes as the realm of mechanical causes. (See especially McDowell [1994/1996], 70-71.) Although the two glosses on “bald naturalism” that I have quoted definitely have a reductionist tone, I should note that McDowell does make the following concession: “In the most straightforward version of this approach [bald naturalism], the task is to *reduce* the structure of the space of reasons to something that is already unproblematically natural on the relevant conception. But I do not want to limit the approach to such reductionism. What matters is that ideas whose primary home is the space of reasons are depicted as, after all, serving to place things in nature in the relevant sense” (73).

for one thing, from the fact that the “bald naturalist” identifies nature with the realm of mechanical causes, whereas Hegel’s conception of nature includes ends or final causes as well. More significantly, however, even on this expanded picture of the natural realm, Hegel does not intend to simply explain away spirit or reduce it to nature. He does give, as we will see, an account of the onset of human spirit on the basis of capacities that belong to both human and non-human animals. However, this onset or emergence of human spirit introduces a new vocabulary that is not translatable without remainder into a natural-scientific one. Humans, unlike lower animals, do not simply react instinctively to sensations, impulses and other environmental input, but can step back and scrutinize the rational credentials of those sensations and impulses. In other words, human animals can (as other animals cannot) consider the question whether they ought to form beliefs or act on the basis of those sensations and impulses. For all the naturalist commitments that I will articulate on his behalf, Hegel wants to preserve the insight that there is something distinctive and irreducible about the human capacity to respond to reasons as such.

Having made these general, programmatic remarks about Hegel’s naturalism, I now begin to work towards providing a naturalistic answer to the questions above about the relation between Hegelian spirit and nature and the sense in which the former consists in the “movement of liberation” from the latter. I do so by noting (along with Terry Pinkard, Willem DeVries and other commentators) that the relation between Hegelian spirit and nature can be captured at least in part by the claim that nature and spirit are “continuous.”<sup>35</sup> As Hegel himself puts it: “[T]he

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<sup>35</sup> At the outset of DeVries (1988), he writes: “I read Hegel as a great naturalist, as one who saw man as arising out of and continuous with nature and capable of being understood only in this natural context. He was certainly not a total naturalist, but no ultimate break is to be found between nature and spirit in Hegel’s system” (xii). DeVries makes it clear in Chapter 3 of his book that by a “total naturalist” he means a reductive naturalist. (See DeVries [1988], 35-46.) For his part, Pinkard (2012) tells us: “[O]ur continuity with the natural world (specifically, with animals) is at the center of Hegel’s Aristotelian conception of mindful agency more than it could possibly be for either Augustine or Kant (or any one of their voluntarist comrades). In Hegel’s terms, animals [like humans] also have the capacity to be ‘at one with themselves’ and even to have both ‘selves’ and . . . ‘subjectivity’” (18). In Testa

transition from nature to spirit is not a transition to an out-and-out other” (*Enz*, §382Z). Although I think this continuity claim is interpretively correct, it is still vague. For there are at least three different Hegelian theses that might be summarized under slogan that spirit is continuous with nature. Let me, therefore, be more precise.

(i) Nature and spirit are partially overlapping: Hegel begins his treatment of spirit by considering various features common to all animals, human and non-human alike, for example, sensation, feeling and features that he labels “natural alterations” such as sleep or growth. Accordingly, one sense in which spirit is continuous with nature is that even within the natural (sub-human) world we already find some minimal forms of spirit exhibited by other ensouled creatures. Otherwise put, non-human animals, in that they have souls, provide evidence that spirit and nature are continuous in the sense that they are not disjoint but partially overlapping spheres.

(ii) Human and non-human animals’ behavior is analogous: The general claim that spirit is continuous with nature is not limited to the thesis that non-human animals exhibit some rudimentary forms of spirit, or have souls, however. The continuity claim is also a helpful gloss on the relation between animal life and specifically human forms of spirit as well. Minimally, animal life and human spirit might be said to be continuous in that both non-human and human animals take in or “register” their environment and behave in end-directed ways in response to that sensory input.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in so acting, non-human and human animals are “self-related.” To give a rather straightforward example: In “registering” the presence of some threatening feature in their external environment, both humans and other animals will presumably flee in

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(2013), we read along broadly similar lines: “Spirit . . . , far from constituting another type of thing [with respect to nature], is for Hegel nothing other than a determinate constellation of relations of nature itself as the one single reality . . . [T]here is one single reality – living reality – and different levels of description of it” (23-24). On this theme, see also Lumsden (2013) and McCumber (2014).

<sup>36</sup> In addition to the passage quoted in the previous footnote, see especially Pinkard (2012), 24-25, from which the phrases quoted in the remainder of this paragraph are taken.

order to preserve *themselves in opposition to* the external environment. If I interpret him correctly, this is the sense of continuity stressed by Pinkard in his avowedly naturalist interpretation of Hegel. But Pinkard also insists that, on this sense of continuity, there is also a “sharp break” between humans and lower animals in that we (but not them) are able to grasp the presence of that external threat as a reason for belief and action, as opposed to that feature of the environment simply triggering an automatic behavioral response. Moreover, for all the similarities between humans and lower animals, the capacities that allow us humans to step back and form beliefs and act in the light of recognized reasons might be (on this understanding of continuity) cut off from any capacities that we share with lower animals. In the light of this possibility, this sense of continuity would seem to be an arguably tenuous basis on which to ground a naturalist interpretation of Hegelian spirit.

(iii) Human spirit emerges from nature: In addition to the view that animal life and human rationality are continuous in that both lower animals and humans exhibit analogous behavior, I propose that human spirit is continuous with animal life in a further, stronger sense, namely, human spirit is the result of the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals. On the basis of features that are common to both non-human and human animals, and so not yet specific to us humans, Hegel gradually, in a step-like manner, explains the emergence of capacities that *are* distinctive of humans, such as objective consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason. This third rendering of the continuity claim is stronger than the previous proposal in that it involves a claim to the effect that human spirit depends upon nature. Human spirit, as Hegel writes, “emerges from,” and so “presupposes,” nature.<sup>37</sup> Precisely because it asserts a

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<sup>37</sup> Right at the start of the lengthy §381 of his *Encyclopedia*, Hegel writes: “*For us* spirit has *nature* as its *presupposition*.” To be fair, some passages in Pinkard (2012) suggest that he would accept the way of unpacking the continuity thesis that I am here proposing as well. See, for example, Pinkard (2012), 27. Other passages, particularly those that emphasize the “sharp break” between animal and human spirit, seem to call into question the interpretive hypothesis I have put forward.

dependence of this sort of human spirit upon nature, Hegel's account of human spirit can be accurately (even if still programmatically) described as naturalistic.<sup>38</sup>

## I.2 OBJECTIONS AND REJOINDERS

Some Hegel partisans will no doubt oppose the interpretive suggestion that human spirit emerges from nature, in the manner I have just proposed, on the ground that it flies in the face of the Hegelian text. Before moving on, I consider two objections along these lines in this subsection: (a) According to the first objection, spirit indeed presupposes, and so depends upon, nature. The sense in which spirit does so depend, however, differs from that suggested in I.1 and does not warrant any conclusions to the effect that spirit emerges from, or is in some sense the result of, nature. (b) The second objection draws attention to Hegel's claim that spirit "posits" nature and argues that the relevant dependence relation in fact runs in the reverse direction to the one I have suggested under (iii) in my discussion of the continuity thesis above. I take up each of these objections in turn.

(a) The first of the two objections begins by noting that spirit cannot be conceived otherwise than in contrast to its "other," namely, nature. As Hegel writes:

[E]very determinacy [*Bestimmtheit*] is a determinacy only in contrast to another determinacy; the determinacy of spirit in general stands in contrast initially to the determinacy of nature; the former is, therefore, to be grasped only together with the latter (*Enz*, §381Z)

According to these lines, to characterize an entity requires that the entity be circumscribed or delimited against some other contrasting entity. Spirit, Hegel in addition informs us, has nature as its contrasting "determinacy." Yet precisely in that spirit can be grasped "only together with"

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<sup>38</sup> Of course, if Hegel thought that lower animals had immaterial souls, then the sort of dependence of human spirit upon animal life that I have just described would not suffice to characterize his position as naturalistic. But as we will see, Hegel's conception of animals' souls is precisely not that of an immaterial substance or thing.

this contrasting “determinacy,” it depends upon (or, as Hegel says, “presupposes”) nature. While presumably friends and foes of a naturalist Hegel would accept this point, the second camp would surely insist that this dependence claim hardly earns us the right to ascribe anything like the emergence thesis to Hegel.

The considerations on which this first complaint is based are no doubt well taken. To be sure, spirit “presupposes” nature in that the former “determinacy” can be grasped “only together with the latter.” But these considerations do not cut any ice with the naturalist reading towards which I am working. For this dependence claim is compatible with spirit also depending on nature in some stronger sense, namely, in that the former “arises out” of, or “emerges” from, the latter.

(b) The second objection might seem more troublesome. This objection suggests that Hegel takes nature to be dependent upon spirit in such a way that any attempt to find a dependence in the opposite, naturalist direction must surely be a lost cause. The objection appears justified in that although Hegel does say that spirit “presupposes” nature, and even that spirit “arises out” of nature, he immediately qualifies these claims in a way that seems to undo those allegedly naturalist declarations. In a paradigmatic passage to this effect, we read:

[T]he emergence of spirit from nature must not be conceived as if nature were the absolutely immediate, the first, original positing agent, while spirit by contrast were only something posited by nature; it is rather nature that is posited by spirit, and spirit is what is absolutely first. Spirit that is in and for itself is not the mere result of nature, but is in truth its own result; it brings itself forth from the presuppositions that it makes for itself . . . (§381Z)

To put it mildly, it is not immediately clear what Hegel might exactly be claiming here. Nevertheless, however the hierarchical relation between nature and spirit described in these lines is to be construed, it might seem safe to read the passage as affirming a dependence of nature

upon spirit that does away with the prospects of a naturalist reading of Hegelian spirit. For how can one be a naturalist and yet claim, for instance, that nature is “posited by spirit” and that the latter is “absolutely first”?

The passage should certainly give us pause. But I do not think it is as definitive as it might appear at first blush. The passage contains several different claims, and since none of these claims are self-evident or obviously synonymous, we would do well to tease them apart and consider them one at a time. But before attempting to disentangle this Hegelian passage, I should explicitly mention a restriction on my discussion in this chapter. According to Hegel, both human spirit and absolute spirit (that is, God or some idiosyncratic version of the traditional concept thereof) “posit” nature in some sense. For instance, Hegel tells us that “God . . . decides to produce its content in nature” (*VPGI*827/28, 22/73). The question whether we should take claims like these at face value, however, is a question that I here set aside. My concern is only with the relation between *human* spirit and nature. And it is clear that human spirit (that is, human rationality as exhibited in thought and action) does *not* for Hegel materially create or somehow produce the entirety of nature.<sup>39</sup>

With this reminder in place, I now go on to dissect our passage. I consider three different claims and argue that none of them undermine a naturalist reading on which human spirit emerges from nature: (i) Spirit is not “only something posited by” or “the mere result of” nature; (ii) spirit is rather “its own result” (or, more precisely, “brings itself forth from the presuppositions it makes for itself”); finally, and moreover, (iii) spirit “posits,” and hence is “absolutely first” with respect to, nature.

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<sup>39</sup> That this is so is evident from Hegel’s discussion of “subjective idealism” in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Hegel there characterizes “subjective idealism” as the view that “[a]ll objects are our representations” (*VPGIII*, 270/364) and hence “[t]here are no external things, they are but a determination of our self” (*VGPII*, 207/189). He goes on to attack both the Berkeleyan and Humean versions of such a position (*VPGIII*, 270-280/364-375). Of course, it might be argued, subjective idealism is not (or need not) be exhausted by Berkeley and Hume. But given that Hegel contrasts subjective idealism with his own “absolute idealism,” it is clear that his position is *not* one on which external objects are somehow reduced to, or constructed out of, our mental representations.

(i) A first point to note in relation to the passage from §381Z is how Hegel appears to stress that spirit is not “a *mere* result of nature” or “*only* something posited by nature” (emphases added). A construal of spirit that did render it a “mere result” of nature would presumably count as naturalist in a reductionist sense. But spirit might be a result yet not the “*mere* result” of nature, as it were. Thus, in dismissing any such construal of the relation between nature and spirit, I suggest that Hegel is primarily speaking out against forms of straightforwardly reductive naturalism.

(ii) What could Hegel mean by claiming that spirit is “its own result”? And how is that claim compatible with my naturalist proposal that spirit emerges from nature, exactly? I hypothesize that that claim complements a previous one, namely, the claim that spirit can “be grasped only together with,” and so “presupposes,” nature. By telling us that spirit is “its own result,” Hegel is minimally claiming that the very distinction between nature and spirit is the latter’s doing. That distinction is at least one of “the presuppositions that spirit makes for itself.” In that spirit itself draws the contrast required to grasp itself as spirit, then, it is “its own result.” But this point about spirit being “its own result,” thus interpreted, is compatible with the proposal I have made in I.1 that human spirit emerges from nature (in a sense to be spelled out more precisely below).

(iii) Finally, and most pressingly perhaps, what should we make of Hegel’s remarks that spirit “posits,” and therefore is “absolutely first” with respect to, nature? If nature is “posited” by spirit, in what sense can spirit depend on (in particular, emerge from) nature? I have already ruled out the suggestion that human spirit “posits” nature in that it materially creates or produces the natural world in its entirety. What alternative account of these Hegelian remarks might we offer instead? I suggest that Hegel’s remark that spirit “posits” nature also complements the claim that spirit can “be grasped only together with” its “other.” Just as spirit can “be grasped

only together with” nature, the latter can likewise be grasped as a unified whole “only together with,” and in contrast to, spirit. In short, spirit can be “grasped only together with” nature and vice versa. But, as I have just noted, the contrast or distinction between spirit and nature is spirit’s doing. Spirit “posits” nature as its “other,” then, in the sense that it explicitly distinguishes between itself and nature.<sup>40</sup> Mere nature, for its part, cannot set itself as a unified realm over against its “other,” spirit. Precisely because it is responsible for the contrast or distinction that is required in order to grasp both spirit and nature, spirit has a kind of primacy or is “absolutely first” with respect to nature. But this point that spirit “posits” nature as its “other” and so is “absolutely first.” as I have interpreted it, is again consistent with the proposal that human forms of spirit emerge from the exercise of capacities that we share with other animals.

### **I.3 HEGEL’S ARISTOTELIANISM**

I have hypothesized that there are various senses in which spirit and nature are continuous, for Hegel. According to the first of those senses, to which I now turn, spirit is continuous with nature in that human and non-human animals have souls and so exhibit some minimal form of spirit. Having made good on this first sense of the continuity thesis, I go on (in section II) to sketch the way in which human spirit emerges for Hegel from the animal soul. Because it strikes me as tenuous enough to not warrant on its own any naturalist claims on Hegel’s behalf, I set aside the second sense of continuity from here on and focus exclusively on the first and third senses.

In order to get at the way in which both non-human and human animals count for Hegel as ensouled, it helps to explore the proximity between Aristotle’s conception of the soul and

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<sup>40</sup> As we shall see, the first form of spirit that is capable of explicitly drawing a contrast between itself and nature is consciousness (not yet the soul).

Hegelian spirit. Hegel makes no secret of his debt to Aristotle when, at the outset of the Introduction to his “Philosophy of Spirit,” he writes:

*Aristotle’s books on the soul, along with his essays on particular aspects and states of the soul, are . . . still the most admirable, perhaps the sole, work of speculative interest on this topic. The essential aim of a philosophy of spirit can only be to . . . disclose once more the sense of those Aristotelian books (Enz, §378)*

Where does Hegel’s debt to Aristotle lie, exactly? More precisely, what is Aristotle’s conception of the soul? And how is Hegel’s conception of spirit indebted to Aristotle’s conception of the soul? Very generally, Aristotle characterizes the soul as the principle in virtue of which a natural body is alive and performs the activities that are distinctive of the form of life to which it belongs.<sup>41</sup> One particularly noteworthy aspect of Aristotle’s account of the soul is that it does not involve any claim to the effect that the soul is a separate immaterial substance that continues to exist after the death of the body. Hegel follows Aristotle both in rejecting the view that spirit is an immaterial thing or substance and in claiming that spirit is closely tied to (indeed inseparable from) its body. He voices this debt to Aristotle when he writes that spirit is “not a soul-thing [*Seelending*] only externally related to the body, but inwardly bound to the body through the unity of the concept” (*Enz*, §378Z). And the similarities between Hegel and Aristotle do not end here. According to Aristotle’s characterization of the soul, human and non-human animals (and even plants) are ensouled. Although Hegel’s remark (about spirit not being a “soul-thing”) is not explicit in this regard, he in effect follows Aristotle on this point as well. On Hegel’s construal, human and non-human animals both exhibit some minimal forms of spirit. That is, both humans and other animals are ensouled, now using ‘soul’ not in Aristotle’s but in Hegel’s sense, to mark the lowest form of spirit. This interpretive hypothesis about the breadth Hegel’s notion of spirit is

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<sup>41</sup> Aristotle writes as a recapitulation of his previous characterization of the soul in technical, hylomorphic terms: “The soul is a cause and a governing principle of the living body” (*De Anima*, 415b).

supported, I believe, by his characterization of nature and spirit in terms of the distinction between “externality” and “inwardness” in the Introduction to the “Philosophy of Spirit.”

Hegel begins his discussion by telling us that nature (or “external nature”) is characterized by “the element of externality” and, in particular, that nature is “external to the inwardness that . . . constitutes the essence of spirit” (§381Z). He then goes on to add that nature is inhabited by “mutually external existences [*Existenzen*]” and offers the following helpful example:

[L]ight and the elements appear as mutually independent; similarly the planets, though attracted by the sun and despite this relationship to their centre, have the semblance of independence with respect to it and to one another; this contradiction is displayed by the motion of the planet around that sun (§381Z)

Let us set aside the “contradiction” to which Hegel points at the end of this passage and focus simply on the “mutual independence” and “externality” that characterizes natural phenomena like planetary movement. Since that movement is governed by mechanical laws, it seems plausible to gloss Hegel’s conception of “external nature” as the realm of mechanical causes. Correspondingly, Hegel’s claim that “inwardness” is a mark of spirit at the very least amounts to the view that spirited beings are purposively or teleologically structured systems. At the very least, that is, spirited beings are creatures who behave in such and such ways *in order to* achieve, or *for the sake of*, some end or other. In that both human and non-human animals are “inwardly” or teleologically structured systems in this sense just indicated, they are both spirited (even if in the case of non-human animals only in a very rudimentary way). Non-human animals, of course, are not free or capable of thought or any other higher forms of spirit. They are not even endowed

with objective consciousness in Hegel's technical sense. These animals do, however, have souls, the lowest form of spirit, according to Hegel's hierarchy.<sup>42</sup>

## SECTION II: THE ANIMAL SOUL AND HUMAN SPIRIT

### II.1 THE SOUL

I have just described how lower animals and humans are ensouled, for Hegel, in that they are both "inwardly" or purposively organized. But this similarity between human and lower animals raises the question: How does Hegel account for human rationality, for the capacity to step back and act in the light of recognized reasons, as we tend to think of it (and as Hegel thinks of it)? And how is Hegel's account naturalistic? That is, to put it in terms of the emergence thesis: How do human forms of spirit come about as the result of capacities that we share with lower animals? Hegel's extended account of higher, distinctively human forms of spirit is found in his "Philosophy of Spirit" as a whole. In accounting specifically for the step from animality to human rationality, from the soul to consciousness, however, the discussion of habituation in the "Anthropology" plays a particularly important role.<sup>43</sup> It is accordingly on that discussion that I focus in this section. To anticipate: Hegel's discussion of habituation accounts for the kind of reflective distance or separation that is necessary for distinctively human awareness or

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<sup>42</sup> What about plants? After all, changes in vegetable organisms also appear to exhibit a teleological structure, even if in this case the ends in question are strictly limited to nourishment (and other forms of maintenance) and reproduction. The main difference between plants and animals, on Hegel's account, is that (a) plant parts can often subsist apart from the whole to which they originally belong and (b) the causal role of some part within the whole can typically be carried out by other parts, thereby guaranteeing the continued existence of the whole. Because teleological systems are ones in which parts and whole are causally dependent on one another, it is unclear to what extent plants qualify as teleological systems after all, given (a) and (b). Thus, although they mark a step away from "external nature" and in the direction of spirit, plants are "inwardly" structured in a comparatively very weak or minimal sense and, on that ground, do not count for Hegel as ensouled. I touch on Hegel's account of plants again in Chapter Four.

<sup>43</sup> As I flagged at the end of Chapter One, habit plays an important role not only within the sphere of "subjective spirit," in explaining the transition from the soul to consciousness, but also within that of "objective spirit." I discuss the latter case in greater detail in the next chapter. In the light of the discussion to follow in this chapter, however, I believe McCumber (1990) goes too far when he remarks that Hegel "*restrict[s]* habit to an ethical framework" (157, emphasis added).

consciousness. Such a process of habituation qualifies as natural (and Hegel's theory of human spirit accordingly as naturalistic) in that it involves primarily the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals, in particular, the capacity to sense or register our environment and react in end-directed ways to that environmental input. Although humans can exhibit complex habitual behavior of which other animals (for all we know) are incapable, Hegel's account of habit does not rely on any capacities that are specific to humans, as we shall see.<sup>44</sup>

Before I turn to Hegel on habit, however, I briefly highlight some further features of Hegel's conception of the soul which help frame his treatment of habit. On the basis of our foregoing discussion, we can characterize the soul in general terms *inter alia* as a capacity (or set of capacities) to take in the environment and react in purposive ways in response to that environmental stimuli. In addition to this gloss, Hegel at the outset of the "Anthropology" offers two further characterizations of the soul. These characterizations provide helpful clues about the goal of the story that Hegel goes on to tell in the remainder of the "Anthropology." First, Hegel initially describes the subject matter of the "Anthropology" simply as "natural spirit [*Naturgeist*]" (§387). He then supplements this characterization by describing the soul, second, as "the absolute foundation of all particularizing and individualizing of spirit" but as yet itself only the "sleep of spirit" (§389). Let me say a little more about each of these characterizations.

The first of the two characterizations is comparatively straightforward. By telling us that the soul is "natural spirit," Hegel is claiming that the spiritual features discussed at this early stage of the "Philosophy of Spirit" are natural in that they are the most closely bound up with

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<sup>44</sup> My interpretation thus differs from those on which Hegel's treatment of sensation, feeling and habit in the "Anthropology" is concerned throughout with features and capacities that are distinctively human or otherwise already presupposes those features and capacities in some way. If I understand him correctly, one interpretation that falls in this latter camp is Haase (2017). In favor of the line of interpretation I here pursue I note only that Hegel's avowed aim in the "Anthropology" is to trace the transition from the animal soul to distinctively human forms of spirit. On pain of circularity, then, I suggest that Hegel's account of capacities shared between us and other animals in the "Anthropology" cannot take for granted or somehow presuppose the operation of capacities that are distinctively human.

various bodily processes and other environmental traits (for example, geography or climate). At this stage, Hegel writes, “spirit [is] still in the grip of nature, related to its bodiliness” (§387Z).

Hegel’s second characterization of the soul makes more precise the sense in which the soul is bound up with its body and environment and requires more comment. The passage from which the second characterization is taken reads in full:

[The soul] is the universal immateriality of nature, its simple ideal life. Soul is the *substance*, the absolute foundation of all the particularizing and individualizing of spirit, so that it is in the soul that *spirit* finds all the stuff of its determination, and the soul remains the pervading, identical ideality of this determination. But in this still abstract determination, the soul is only the *sleep* of spirit . . . (§389)

By claiming that the soul is the “universal immateriality of nature” (and precisely not, say, some immaterial entity or thing), I suggest that Hegel is making at least the following two points: First, the soul (indeed spirit generally) is distinct from any merely mechanically or “externally” structured bit of matter. This much we know from our discussion in I.3 about the Aristotelian soul and Hegelian spirit.<sup>45</sup> Second, at the same time, Hegel intimates in this passage that the soul is the simplest form of spirit in that it is the least capable of drawing distinctions, for example, between itself and its surroundings, its body and the rest of those surroundings, or between itself and its various kinds of affections. This interpretive suggestion is confirmed by Hegel’s recapitulation of one of the initial forms of the soul, namely, the sentient soul: “[T]he opposition between a senser and a sensed, a subjective and an objective, still remains foreign to mere sensation . . . This distinction belongs only to *consciousness*.”<sup>46</sup> According to this passage, the soul, at least in its initial stages, does not yet distinguish between itself, as a subject, and an

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<sup>45</sup> As noted in the context of our discussion of §387, and as §389A emphasizes, in characterizing the soul as “immaterial,” Hegel decidedly does not mean to buy into any traditional view of the soul as a thing or substance of a special sort, namely, immaterial, simple and immortal. For a careful and detailed reading of the paragraph I have just quoted, see especially Wolff (1992).

<sup>46</sup> In the same vein, Hegel writes of the first stage in his treatment of the soul: “In this first spiritual life no distinction is posited, either of individuality in contrast to universality or of soul in contrast to the natural” (§390Z)

objective world that is distinct from and exists independently of it. I take Hegel to be making this point (about the soul's relative inability to draw distinctions) in the above quote from §389 when he suggests that although the soul is the "absolute foundation of all the particularizing and individualizing of spirit," it is not initially itself a particularized or individualized form of spirit – specifically, as Hegel indicates at the end of the quote, the soul is not yet conscious or "awake."<sup>47</sup>

## II.2 HABIT AND OBJECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

With all this said, we can now turn to habit. As I noted earlier, habit partly accounts for the transition from the soul to objective consciousness (or from animality to distinctively human forms of spirit). In the light of our foregoing discussion of the soul, the transition to objective consciousness can now be put as a move from a stage within which spirit is capable of drawing only very minimal distinctions (between itself and its surroundings, for instance) to a higher stage within which spirit explicitly distinguishes itself from an external world that exists independently of it. But how does habit fulfill this transitional role? And what is Hegel's conception of habit, anyway? I begin with the latter of these two questions.

Briefly, the process of habituation consists in Hegel's view of two components: repetition and practice. An ensouled creature acquires habits by being repeatedly exposed to similar stimuli

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<sup>47</sup> Two issues call for clarification: First, what is the connection between objective consciousness and "particularized" or "individualized" forms of spirit? More precisely, why are pre-conscious forms of spirit not yet "particularized"? As we have seen above, any "determinacy," including therefore spirit, can "be grasped only together with" its "other" or contrasting "determinacy," in this case, nature (§381Z). In the absence of a contrast between spirit and nature, spirit would thus remain "indeterminate" or would not yet be "particularized." The distinction between the subjective and the objective, or between spirit and nature, however, is first clearly drawn consciousness. "Slumbering" (that is, pre-conscious) forms of spirit are in this sense not yet "particularized." Second, and more generally, Hegel's conception of the soul as I have here introduced it is liable to generate confusion. Specifically, it is perhaps not fully clear from my characterization whether the soul is capable of drawing any distinctions at all between itself and its surroundings (and, if so, which ones exactly). Hegel's view appears to be that by "registering" its environment through sensation, the soul *is* indeed capable of drawing some such distinction. For example, a prey will either flee or continue to graze peacefully depending on the absence or presence of a predator in its nearby surroundings. But this sub-human awareness of what is "other" is bound to the animal's own sensations, desires or urges. As Hegel later puts it (§410), the sentient soul is still "absorbed in" or somehow identifies with those feelings and sensations. In particular, this "other" is not yet recognized as having an existence independent of those sensations (§400Z) or as an individual falling under a universal (§390Z).

and adjusting its behavioral responses accordingly. As a result of the process of habit acquisition, this creature's behavior comes to seem automatic and unreflective. In acting habitually, that is, the ensouled creature appears to act "mechanically" or "without thought," as Hegel puts it in different places. To give just one example: If I have become habituated to playing a piano piece in a certain way, then my performing that piece in just that way will come to seem automatic and unreflective (both to others and to me). The short answer to our question about Hegel's conception of habit, then, is this: A habit is a "mechanical" or automatic pattern of behavior acquired through repetition.

Now, in the "Anthropology," Hegel distinguishes between three main types of habits: First, what he calls habits of hardening (*Abhärtung*) against external sensations; second, habits of indifference towards the satisfaction of desires or impulses; and, third, habits of dexterity or skill (*Geschicklichkeit*).<sup>48</sup> For our purposes, it bears underscoring that the relative weight of the two components of habituation, namely, repetition and practice, can vary greatly across these different types of habit. Consider, for example, complex end-directed behavior, such as the use of tools or the mastery of a musical instrument like the piano. Habits of this sort (Hegel's "habits of dexterity") require a great deal of exercise and practice. At the other end of the spectrum, Hegel tells us that the continued exposure to cold temperatures weakens the soul's sensitivity towards such external conditions. The form of habituation that results from this kind of exposure (what Hegel calls "habits of hardening") requires very little active effort or practice on the part of the ensouled creature. Even if animals are not capable of playing complex musical pieces, they do seem capable of acquiring at least some habits, namely, habits of hardening and perhaps some habits of skill. And that is no surprise. For the capacities primarily involved in the acquisition of

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<sup>48</sup> This threefold division of habit corresponds to the 1830 *Encyclopedia*. Interestingly, in his 1827/28 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel explicitly distinguishes only two types (or "aspects") of habit, namely, habits of hardening and dexterity (*VPG1827/28*, 154/126). In these lectures, he seems to regard indifference towards the satisfactions of desires as the practical analog or a subspecies of habits of hardening.

habit, as I have here described it, the capacities to sense and react to the environment, are common to humans and other animals. Moreover, there seems to be by Hegel's lights no principled reason to rule out the possibility that other, non-human animal organisms might also be capable of the complex habitual behavior necessary for objective consciousness.<sup>49</sup> But how does objective consciousness arise out of habit, according to Hegel, anyway? That is, what is the answer to our other question about habit above?

In Hegel's own words, the principal function of his treatment of habit in the "Anthropology" is to account for "the soul's liberation" and "its attainment of objective consciousness" (§410Z). As we have seen, as a result of the repeated exposure to similar stimuli the ensouled creature develops a "mechanical" or automatic pattern of behavior. Perhaps more importantly, however, that creature thereby also acquires a capacity to "withdraw" or "liberate" itself from such stimuli, from its sensations, urges or desires – what Hegel refers to as its "natural determinations." How does this "withdrawal" occur? On account of its repeated exposure to these "natural determinations," the soul is no longer "absorbed in them" or even "interested in or occupied with them," as Hegel writes. To continue with a straightforward example: In being repeatedly exposed to the cold, the soul is "liberated" in that it no longer focuses its attention entirely on the corresponding sensations (or it is no longer completely "absorbed" by them). By thus "liberating" itself, the soul achieves a separation from its affections or determinations that is

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<sup>49</sup> Somewhat surprisingly in view of what I have just said, in the 1825 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* we read: "The animal does not have habits, it does not habituate itself to anything. One can certainly habituate it to many things, train [*dressiren*] it, but this [the training] is human" (VPSG1825, 367, translation mine). In the 1827/28 *Lectures*, while he seems to stop short of attributing to non-human animals habits in some full, human sense, he nevertheless concedes: "We speak about animals and ascribe habits to them, or rather adroitnesses [*Geschicklichkeiten*]. Animals are trained [*abgerichtet*] to do some things, and this training consists in an affection of some sort being produced in them and connected with this activity. The animal is capable of this sort of connection because it is a self . . . Ordinarily the stimulation of the connection occurs by means of a feeling coming from without, namely the training. This training can go pretty far in approaching the miraculous, even the human sphere. Their clever stunts [*Kunststücke*] occur not through signals of their owners, of that one can easily convince oneself." (VPG1827/28, 130-131). More importantly, whatever we make of Hegel's apparent hesitation in these pronouncements about habit and non-human animals, there seems to be no reason by his own lights for denying that these animals might be capable of acquiring at least some types of habit.

required for the kind of awareness that Hegel associates with objective consciousness. The soul no longer identifies itself with its sensations or other affections but sees itself rather as their bearer, and so as related to, yet distinct from, those affections.<sup>50</sup> Briefly, then, the answer to our question about the role of habit is this: Through habituation, the ensouled creature acquires the reflective distance from its natural determinations that is necessary for the distinctively human capacity to form beliefs and act in the light of recognized reasons.<sup>51</sup>

In the light of our answer to the two questions about habit, about its nature and function respectively, we can now also understand the sense in which Hegel tells us that habit “has rightly been called a second nature” (*Enz*, §410A). It is a kind of *nature* both in that it *comes from* nature (from the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals) and *is like* nature (a “mechanical” or automatic occurrence). Habit is a *second* nature in that it presupposes a *liberation from* our “natural determinations” (sensations, urges, desires).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> With the onset of objective consciousness and other higher forms of spirit, humans in turn become capable of acquiring further habits that are unavailable to lower, non-rational animals (for example, ethical habits).

<sup>51</sup> I should note that my discussion of Hegel on habit does not give the full account of the transition from the soul to objective consciousness. The conception of the self that emerges from Hegel’s discussion of habit (what he calls the “actual soul [*wirkliche Seele*]”) is one that “takes possession of” its bodily determinations and consequently regards its body as an “instrument” of the soul’s skilled activities (§410Z). This self, however, is not yet identical with objective consciousness, which Hegel appears to characterize as a kind of disembodied self. Briefly, here is how the last step in the move to objective consciousness is supposed to go: Although the actual soul relates to its body as a means or instrument, its bodily determinations are never thoroughly permeated by, or totally under the control of, the soul’s dictates. In the face of this resistance, the subject comes to regard its body (and nature generally) as foreign and opposed to it – “[the soul] expels bodiliness from itself” (§412Z), Hegel writes. This relation of opposition between the subject, on the one hand, and its body (and the rest of nature), on the other, is characteristic precisely of the form of spirit that Hegel discusses under the heading of “Consciousness.” Because the subject thus conceives itself in opposition to nature, the transition to consciousness might be characterized as a move to a conception of the self as a point of view on the world that does not take itself to be part of that natural or objective world. For a different reading of the transition to objective consciousness, see Forman (2010). Forman brushes aside Hegel’s discussion of habits of skill. He tells us “habits of skill are not essential in Hegel’s own account of the transition from nature to spirit” (338). This remark is in tension with the Hegelian text, however. For the self that emerges from Hegel’s discussion of habit (the “actual soul”) is an embodied self that is tied precisely to the soul’s capacity for skilled activity, as we have just seen.

<sup>52</sup> This gloss on the phrase “second nature” points again to a disagreement with Forman (2010). In explaining the role that habit plays in the emergence of objective consciousness, Forman distinguishes between two general sorts of habits, namely: on the one hand, those that go from the natural to the spiritual or conscious and, on the other, those that go from the latter to the former. He then further claims that only the first sort of habits are relevant in accounting for the emergence of objective consciousness. On Forman’s reading, habit is a form of nature in that it *comes from* nature, but not necessarily in the sense that habitual behavior itself *like* nature (that is, an automatic or “mechanical” occurrence). But, according to the Hegelian text, processes of habituation *in general* result in some form of natural (mechanical) behavior. Hegel for example writes: “[H]abit is the determinacy of feeling (as well as

Before closing, I address the following question, to which my reading of Hegel on habit gives rise: If lower animals are capable of at least some habits, for example a habit of hardening to the sensation of cold, and if consciousness is supposed to arise out of processes of habituation, then what is the difference between humans and lower animals? Why are humans but not other animals conscious, in Hegel's sense? In a nutshell, the answer to this question lies in the extent to which habit figures in our lives, on the one hand, and in the lives of lower animals, on the other. In particular, we can acquire habits much more varied and complex than what other animals are capable of acquiring. Other animals do not seem capable of habits of skill as sophisticated as ours. Again, think of the performance of a complicated musical piece on the piano. And whereas other animals seem capable of becoming habituated only to some very specific set of processes or stimuli, we can become habituated to a very wide range of processes. Hegel tells us that "habit is the most essential feature of the existence of *all* spiritual life in the individual subject" and that it "embraces all kinds and stages of spirit's activity" (§410Z). Even standing up is a result of habit, according to Hegel. In short, habit permeates our lives. The upshot of this difference between us and other animals is that other animals, despite any specific habits of which they are capable, are still "absorbed by" or identify themselves with the vast majority of their "natural determinations." Consequently, lower animals lack the pervasive or widespread distance from those natural determinations that is required in order to acquire an enduring and stable conception of the self like we enjoy. So the story I have told about Hegel on habit certainly does not erase the difference between us and other animals.

To conclude, I pick up on some of the quotations about nature and spirit with which we began. According to one of the quotations, spirit consists in the "movement of liberation" from nature. According to another passage, the "essence" of spirit, according to that citation lies for

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of intelligence, will, etc., in so far as they belong to self-feeling) made into something that is natural, mechanical" (*Enz*, §410Z).

Hegel in “freedom [1] from and [2] within the natural” (VPG1827/28, 19/71). Our preceding discussion of habituation vindicates these characterizations of spirit and its relation to nature. Indeed, [1] distinctively human forms of spirit presuppose a liberation *from* our first natural determinations, sensations, urges, desires, as we have just seen. But that “movement” away (F, 92-93) or process of liberation *from* our immediate determinations occurs, and its result remains, [2] *within* nature. Rational animals are for Hegel creatures capable of undergoing complicated processes of habituation. Because such processes involve primarily the exercise of capacities shared by human and lower animals (to sense and respond purposively to our environment), habituation counts as a natural process and Hegel’s theory of human rationality accordingly as naturalistic.

### 3

#### THE EMERGENCE THESIS II:

#### HEGELIAN PRACTICAL FREEDOM AND NATURE

In the previous chapter, I offered an account of the transition from the soul to objectiveness consciousness, as Hegel spells out that transition in his “Anthropology.” My main objective in this chapter is to complete my case for the emergence thesis by arguing that the will, as Hegel describes it in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, emerges also from the exercise of capacities that we share with other animals. Inasmuch as it emerges in this way, I argue that the will qualifies for Hegel as a natural power or capacity. In addition, I argue on Hegel’s behalf in this chapter that the will, understood as a capacity to heed ethical requirements, qualifies as natural in the following, further respect, namely: In the optimal or virtuous case, the exercises of our practical freedom exhibit certain features (in particular, a lack of inner conflict and regularity) similar to the lawlike behavior of subhuman denizens of the natural world and other law-governed natural processes.

As an initial approximation, we might characterize the topic of this chapter, the freedom that belongs to the will or what Hegel also calls “practical spirit,” by reference to the following two features.<sup>53</sup> First, freedom generally (practical or otherwise) consists in the absence of external domination or constraint by anything “other.” In Hegelian jargon, freedom is a matter of “being-with-oneself” or “being-at-home-with-oneself [*Beisichselbstsein*].” As Hegel elaborates: An entity is free just in case it is “completely with itself [*bei sich*] because it has reference to

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<sup>53</sup> On the two points that follow, see Neuhouser (2000), 18-24.

nothing other than itself, so that every relationship of dependence on something *other* than itself is thereby eliminated” (*PR*, §23).

Despite what the quote just given (taken by itself) suggests, freedom qua lack of external constraint does not imply a complete independence or absence of a relation to anything “other.” To put the point quite abstractly for now: Freedom consists, rather, in relating to that “other” in such a way that it no longer appears as something foreign or alien but as a part or extension of oneself, in a sense to be spelled out below. That a reference to the “other” is indeed part of Hegel’s conception of freedom is evident from his addition to the bit of jargon I have just introduced: Freedom for Hegel is a matter of “being-with-oneself in an other [*Beisichselbstsein in einem Anderen*]” (*PR*, §7Z).

The second of the two features I mentioned above, by reference to which we can give an initial definition of practical freedom, allows us to characterize freedom as specifically practical. Practical freedom is practical in that it involves a translation of something “inner” into something “outer.” Less abstractly, exercises of practical freedom involve the pursuit of various purposes (“inner”) whose attainment results in modifications of the external world (“outer”). The will – Hegel writes – “is the process of translating the *subjective end* into *objectivity*” (*PR*, §8).<sup>54</sup>

With this general characterization of practical freedom in place, we can now divide the general task of this chapter into the following two questions: What does Hegel’s conception of practical freedom, as a form of *Beisichselbstsein*, more concretely amount to? And how might that conception of practical freedom or the will be naturalized? I take up these questions in sections I and II respectively. Section I follows closely Hegel’s own discussion of the will in

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<sup>54</sup> In his treatment of the will in the *Encyclopedia* “Philosophy of Spirit,” Hegel writes along similar lines: “The will heads . . . towards the *objectification* of its inwardness that is still burdened with the form of subjectivity” (*Enz*, §469Z)

§§5-29 of the *Philosophy of Right* and §§469-482 of the *Encyclopedia*.<sup>55</sup> Section II is more reconstructive in character and exploits Hegel's account of habit in the "Anthropology" as well as his scattered remarks about the habit of the ethical in the *Philosophy of Right*.<sup>56</sup>

## SECTION I: THE WILL AND THE RATIONAL WILL

### I.1 "MOMENTS" OF THE CONCEPT OF THE WILL

In opposing nature and practical freedom, as he often does, Hegel appears to be contrasting the former specifically with what he calls the "first moment" (*PR*, §5) of the will, namely, with practical freedom as a capacity for a certain kind of abstraction. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the context of the discussion of nature and spirit at the outset of his "Philosophy of Spirit," Hegel writes: "[F]ormally the essence of spirit is freedom . . . In accordance with this formal determination spirit *can* abstract from everything external . . . This possibility is its intrinsic abstract universality" (*Enz*, §382). The passage just quoted indeed echoes Hegel's characterization of the "first moment," or the "moment of universality," in his discussion of the will in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*. Here is that characterization:

The will contains . . . the element of *pure indeterminacy* . . . in which every limitation, every content, whether presently immediately through nature, through needs, desires, and

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<sup>55</sup> My understanding of this material has benefited from Neuhauser (2000), Chapter I and especially Alznauer (2015), Chapter I.

<sup>56</sup> I should note a limitation on my discussion of Hegelian practical freedom. Although I will have a good deal to say about Hegel on practical freedom and its relation to nature, I will not directly consider his take on the traditional problem of freedom of the will, namely, the problem of whether freedom as a capacity to do otherwise is compatible with the causal determinism of nature. However, if my discussion in what follows is roughly on the right track, then Hegel must clearly be a soft determinist or compatibilist of some sort. I am thus in broad agreement with the brief remarks by Kreines (2013) on this issue: "Hegel advocates a metaphysics that is compatibilist . . . So we should expect Hegel to have a similar metaphysical approach to our freedom . . ." (152-153). See also Kreines (2015), Chapter 9. For a more detailed treatment of Hegel on the traditional problem of free will, see Yeomans (2011).

drives, or given and determined in some other way, is dissolved; this is the limitless infinity of *absolute abstraction* or *universality* . . . (PR, §5)

Although the first passage speaks of freedom in general whereas the second passage speaks of practical freedom or the will in particular, the similarity between the two should be evident. According to the first passage, freedom in general involves a capacity to “abstract from everything external” or natural. According to the second passage, the first moment of the will is the moment of “*absolute abstraction* or *universality*.” Our first task in getting to grips with Hegel’s account of practical freedom, and its relation to nature, then, is to answer the following pair of questions: What are the other “moments” of the will, in addition to the “moment of universality”? And how does that first moment of universality or abstraction hang together with the other moments or marks of the concept of the will? Having addressed these questions, we will then be in a position to turn to the further questions: What are the different “shapes [*Gestaltungen*]” (PR, §10A) or species of the general concept of the will, according to Hegel? And why does Hegel think that the “shape” he calls the “rational will” (*Enz*, §482 and PR, §29A) or the “will which has being in and for itself [*der an und für sich seiende Wille*]” (PR, §21A) is the “true” shape of the will (PR, §10A), in the sense that it most fully exemplifies the “moments” of the general concept of the will? I tackle the first set of questions in this subsection. I turn to the second set of questions in I.2.

In addition to the moment of universality, Hegel characterizes the will in terms of two further moments, which he associates with the categories of particularity and individuality respectively. According to the first moment, as we have just seen in the passage above, the capacity to abstract from or “dissolve” our desires, urges and impulses is necessary for freedom. Lacking that capacity, our desires or wants would dictate our conduct. In such a situation, our conduct would be merely instinctive, as Hegel says of animal behavior (PR, §4Z), and not an

exercise of the will at all. Indeed, as instinctive, our conduct would be wholly determined by something “other,” namely, our wants or impulses, and thus unfree according to our initial characterization of practical freedom above.

This first moment of the concept of the will is insufficient to account for our capacity for practical freedom, however. For the bare exercise of the capacity to step back or abstract from our desires by itself yields no determinate course of action. In Hegel’s words: “A will which . . . wills only the abstract universal wills *nothing* and therefore is not a will at all” (*PR*, §6Z). In addition to stepping back and reflecting on its wants, then, a creature with a will *acts* only insofar as she settles on and pursues some particular desire or sets some specific end for herself. The requirement that the will set some specific end for itself or, as Hegel puts it, the will’s “positing of a determinacy” (*PR*, §6) constitutes the “second moment” of the will or the moment of particularity.

Finally, Hegel claims that the capacities described in the first two moments are not discrete or independent of one another but rather form a unity, and that this unity represents the third moment of the concept of the will, the moment of individuality. The moments of universality and particularity are not separate or even opposed features but make up a unity – Hegel tells us – in the following sense: In acting on some particular desire, or in setting some specific end, the will does not thereby become identical to that desire and so surrender its capacity for abstraction or reflection. Again, our wills are not just bundles of desires and urges that dictate our conduct. Any ends that the will sets for itself are its own product and so expressive or reflective of the will –but the will itself “stands above” (*PR*, §§11Z, 14), or retains a capacity to step back from, its “determinacy,” its desires or ends. I take Hegel to be claiming that the will sees its ends or “determinacy” as expressive of itself all the while “standing above” that “determinacy” when he writes: “[The will] knows [its determinacy] as its own and . . . as a

mere *possibility* by which it is not restricted but in which it finds itself merely because it posits itself in it” (*PR*, §7).

Hegel maintains, as we have just seen, that the third moment of the will (moment of individuality) represents the unity of the previous two. In the light of the “unity” captured by this third moment, we can now summarily characterize the will as a capacity to “posit” some specific end or act on some particular desire (moment of particularity) while remaining *bei sich*, not “restricted” to, or determined by, its desires or urges (moment of universality).

## **I.2 THE RATIONAL WILL AS THE “TRUE” SHAPE OF THE WILL**

Both in the *Philosophy of Right* and in the *Encyclopedia* Hegel describes various “shapes” (*PR*, §10A) or species of the general concept of the will. The question on which I now focus is: Out of the various shapes of the will that Hegel considers, why does he privilege what he calls the “rational will” (*PR*, §29A and *Enz*, §482), or the “will which has being in and for itself” (*PR*, §21A), over other species of practical freedom, such as freedom as arbitrariness or the mere capacity “to do as one pleases” (*PR*, §15A)? In what sense, that is, is the “rational will” the “true” shape of the will, as Hegel puts it?

In order to answer this question, we first of all need to understand what makes a shape of the will the “true” shape of the will, for Hegel. A shape of the will qualifies as the “true” shape of the will only if “it has freedom as its object and *is* freedom” (*PR*, §10Z). The true shape of the will, in other words, corresponds to its concept in that it “wills the free will” (*PR*, §27).<sup>57</sup> Of course, this characterization of the “true” shape of the will, as one that “wills the free will,” just prompts the further question: How, exactly, should we understand this requirement from §§10Z and 27 of the *Philosophy of Right*, and in what sense is it fulfilled by the rational will but not by

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<sup>57</sup> I consider Hegel’s notion of truth as the correspondence between an object and the concept, or between a thing and its kind, in more detail in Chapter Four. For the moment, I believe, these brief remarks suffice.

what he calls the “arbitrary will [*Willkür*]” (*PR*, §§12-19 and *Enz*, §§477-79)? I begin by providing a negative answer to this question. The requirement to have “freedom as its object” should *not* be understood to imply that the true shape of the will can have no specific end but simply freedom in general as its object, whatever we more precisely take that to mean. If that were our interpretation of §§10Z and 27, then the true shape of the will would not satisfy the second moment of the concept of the will (that is, it would not “posit” any specific ends) and so would not qualify as a shape of the will at all, let alone the most adequate of such shapes.

In order to provide a positive answer to the question of how the rational will fulfills the requirement expressed in §§10Z and 27, and what that requirement more precisely amounts to, it helps to take a closer look at the contrast between the rational will and one of the other shapes of the will that Hegel considers, namely, the “arbitrary will” or “resolving will [*der beschließende Wille*].”<sup>58</sup> The arbitrary will can step back and reflect upon its desires and decide which among those desires to act upon. By thus stepping back, the arbitrary will satisfies the first moment of the concept of the will. But its freedom (in particular, its capacity for abstraction or reflection) is circumscribed to those desires; more specifically, the freedom of the arbitrary will consists merely in selecting some “determinacy” from among the wants, desires or urges that it finds

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<sup>58</sup> In addition to the arbitrary and rational wills, Hegel in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* considers what he calls the “natural will.” This shape of the will – Hegel writes – “finds itself naturally determined” by “drives, desires and inclinations” (*PR*, §11). Given this characterization of the natural will, it is unclear whether and in what sense its exercises count as free and not merely instinctive behavior. In short, how is the natural will a shape of the will at all? Alznauer (2015) provides a solution to this puzzle by noting that the natural will is (as mere animals are not) minimally free in at least the following sense: “[The natural will] has a self-conception and knows what it is doing: as Hegel puts it, it knows its ends as ends. If you ask why it is reaching for that apple, it can tell you, for it knows that the reason it is reaching for the apple is because it is hungry . . . The natural will should be understood, then, as a human will that conceives itself as a mere desire-satisfying animal, one that tacitly identifies its will, or its reasons to act, with its desires” (46). This line of interpretation seems to be supported by Hegel’s own claim that for the natural will its “content is . . . entirely [its own]” (*PR*, §11), as well as by his previous assertion that “an animal has no will, because it does not represent to itself what it desires” (*PR*, §4Z). (On this issue, see also Peperzak [2001], 201.) Whatever the verdict on the question whether the natural will already really constitutes a shape of the will proper, for our purposes what matters more about Hegel’s treatment of what he calls the “natural will” is the following. The natural will counts as natural, according to Hegel’s description, in that it amounts to a form of instinctive, or quasi-instinctive, behavior. But the identification of ‘natural’ with ‘instinctive’ that that description presupposes, leaves open the possibility of construing the rational will as a natural power under a different reading of ‘natural’, according to which it is not synonymous with ‘instinctive’. I attempt to sketch such a construal in section II.

within itself. The ends of the arbitrary will are therefore fixed by the set of its given desires. And the arbitrary will itself is just that: for that shape of the will, it does not matter what desires it chooses; in acting upon some desire, the arbitrary will need not be following any criterion other than its own fancy. Having an arbitrary will indeed just “consists in being able to do as one pleases” (*PR*, §15A).<sup>59</sup>

Unlike the arbitrary will, the rational will does not act on the basis of its fancy but in the light of the idea of freedom. To be sure, like the arbitrary will, the rational will seeks to satisfy some particular desire or sets some specific ends. This much we know from Hegel’s threefold discussion of the concept of the will. But the rational will acts on some particular desire only insofar as it takes the satisfaction of that desire to conform to the conditions or requirements of freedom. To give just one example: The rational will makes claims over some part of the external world (that is, it exercises what Hegel calls the “freedom of personhood”) only under the condition that those claims are compatible with everyone also expressing their freedom in a similar way. Thus, the rational will is not simply constrained, but rather willingly constrained by, and so embraces, principles such as “respect others as persons” (*PR*, §36).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Alznauer (2015) nicely puts the points I have just tried to highlight in my gloss on the arbitrary will as follows: “[I]ts desires appear not as the immediate content of its will but as potential reasons to act, as a kind of menu of options that it can choose from. The arbitrary will does not identify its will with its immediate desires but rather takes any determination of its ends to be up to it . . . Though it depends on the givenness of its desires to provide *possible* reasons, it takes itself to be unconstrained in which of these it will take as its *actual* end” (57). For a similar characterization of the arbitrary will, see Patten (1999), 50.

<sup>60</sup> As I noted in passing above, Hegel also (and more frequently) describes the rational will as the “will which has being in and for itself [*der an und für sich seiende Wille*]” (*PR*, §21A). Our foregoing discussion puts us in a position to begin to elucidate the phrase I have just quoted. Both the rational and the arbitrary wills are free *an sich* in that they exhibit (albeit in different manners) the three marks or moments of the concept of the will. But in what sense is the rational will also free *für sich*? Hegel’s usage of the locution ‘for itself X’ often (though by no means always) appears to be roughly synonymous with ‘reflectively, self-consciously or knowingly X’. (For an instance of this usage of the expression ‘for itself’, see *PR*, §10.) Accordingly, the rational will is free *für sich* in that it is more acutely aware of, or has deeper insight into, what our capacity for practical freedom requires. Specifically, the rational will recognizes that practical freedom is not just a matter of “doing as one pleases” (*PR*, §15) but brings with it certain constraints, for example, the duty to respect others as persons. Finally, what the rational will is *an sich* and what it is *für sich* are connected. More specifically, what the will *takes itself to be* (what it is *für sich*) bears on what the will *is* (*an sich*). In acknowledging, and making its own, the requirements of freedom, the rational will resists not only some particular desires X, Y and Z in favor of some further desire W; rather, the rational will is capable of abstracting from its given desires and impulses altogether and considering the question whether a certain

How does the distinction between the two forms of the will that I have just described provide us with the materials for answering our question above about the rational will “willing the free will”? The rational will, I have said, acts in the light of the idea of freedom. This shape of the will pursues specific ends and seeks to satisfy particular desires. In contrast to the arbitrary will, however, it does so only insofar as it takes those ends and desires to conform to the requirements of freedom. Over and above any specific objects or ends it might have, then, the rational will “has freedom as its object,” it embodies or “is” freedom (*PR*, §10Z). In this way, I submit, Hegel manages to square the claim that the rational will is “the free will which wills the free will” with the assumption that, as a shape of the will, it involves the “positing of a determinacy” (*PR*, §6).

Precisely because it “wills the free will” or “has freedom as its object,” in the sense I have just explained, the rational will is freer or “truer” than the arbitrary will, understood as a capacity “to do as one pleases” (*PR*, §15A). Recall our initial characterization of freedom as absence of external domination. The rational will is freer than the arbitrary will in that it is not determined by anything alien or merely given –it is, in Hegelian jargon, “completely with itself [*bei sich*]” (*PR*, §23). In particular, contrary to the arbitrary will, the ends of the rational will are not fixed or determined by its given set of desires. Additionally, although the rational will is constrained by certain requirements (for example, the duty to respect others as persons), it acknowledges and affirms this and other duties as its own, as a necessary condition of itself and others expressing their freedom. For the rational will, “its object is itself [namely, freedom] and therefore not something that it sees as *other* or as a *limitation*” (*PR*, §22). Thus, for a will that is truly free, ethical requirements, understood as requirements of freedom, do not represent an

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end or purpose conforms to the requirements of freedom. Only inasmuch as it so conforms, does the rational will pursue the end in question. For a helpful overview of Hegel’s employment of the expressions ‘in itself’, ‘for itself’ and ‘in and for itself’ across his writings, see Inwood (1992), 133ff.

external constraint on the will. As Hegel later sums up the point: “[The ethical laws and powers] are not something *alien* to the subject. On the contrary, the subject bears *spiritual witness* to them as to its *own essence*, in which it . . . lives as in its element which is not distinct from itself” (*PR*, §147).<sup>61</sup>

The claim that the rational will relates to ethical laws as to “its own essence” means that the arbitrary will is, in fact, doubly unfree (or less than fully free) in the sense that it is determined by something “other.” First, the arbitrary will is less than fully free, as we have seen, in that its ends are fixed or determined by its given set of desires. Second, because it does not recognize, or does not affirm as its own, the requirements of freedom, the arbitrary will is further unfree in that it is subject to those requirements as an external or alien force.<sup>62</sup>

## SECTION II: THE RATIONAL WILL AS A NATURAL POWER

### II.1 THE RATIONAL WILL AS NATURALLY LAWLIKE

In section I, I reviewed Hegel’s most general, threefold characterization of the will and attempted to elucidate his thesis that the rational will is the “true” shape of the will. In getting to grips with this thesis, I relied on Hegel’s distinction between the arbitrary and rational wills. The contrast between these two shapes of the will allows us to frame the task of naturalizing Hegel’s account of the rational will in this section in terms of his relation to Kant. For, like Hegel, Kant distinguishes between the mere freedom “to do as one pleases” (*PR*, §15) and “true” freedom, or between the freedom of mere *Willkür* and *Wille*. Moreover, like Hegel, Kant also characterizes freedom proper as the capacity to subject oneself to, and affirm, requirements that are in some

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<sup>61</sup> The “subject” of which Hegel speaks in this quote is the denizen of the modern social world, and the “ethical powers” include the social institutions (the family, civil society and the state) that he examines in the third and final part of the *Philosophy of Right*.

<sup>62</sup> See *PR*, §149. I take Patten (1999) to be describing the first form of unfreedom when he claims that the arbitrary will is less than fully *bei sich* or “self-determining, because the material of [its] reflection and deliberation, the menu from which it chooses, is given by nature” (50).

sense one's own –or, in his preferred term, “autonomous.” So the question arises: Other than details of presentation or terminology, what distinguishes Hegel's general conception of practical freedom and the will from Kant's? One crucial difference is that Kant takes the task of explaining our capacity to heed ethical requirements to involve an appeal to an entirely non-empirical or “supernatural” capacity. Contrary to Kant, Hegel makes no such appeal and instead construes the rational will as a natural capacity of sorts. I attempt to spell out and defend this claim on Hegel's behalf in the remainder of the chapter.

I propose that the rational will, understood as a capacity to respond to ethical requirements or duties, counts for Hegel as natural in the following two respects: First, our responsiveness to ethical requirements exhibits features similar to the lawlike behavior of subhuman denizens of the natural world and other law-governed natural processes. Second, and more importantly, our capacity for practical freedom arises out of, or emerges from, the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals.

Let us begin in this subsection with the first thesis. For Hegel, there are – I submit – two respects in which practical freedom qualifies as naturally lawlike: (i) In the optimal or virtuous case, our responsiveness to ethical requirements manifests a resoluteness or lack of inner conflict similar to the behavior of subhuman denizens of the natural world, and (ii) that responsiveness exhibits a regularity like that of other natural processes. I take up each of these two more specific points, (i) and (ii), in turn.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>It bears underscoring that my first thesis is that the behavior of the rational will is *naturally* lawlike, that is, that it exhibits features similar to the lawlike behavior of non-human animals and other law-governed natural processes. Thus, claiming that, for Kant, for example, ethical requirements are lawlike (by which he means universally and necessarily binding) without issuing from nature would not seem to spoil the connection between freedom and nature that I am aiming to draw here on Hegel's behalf. More to the point is the claim that the behavior of the Kantian holy will is (or would be) both unconflicted and regular – a holy will, Kant tells us, would always and infallibly follow the moral law. In other words, such a holy will would exhibit features like those I highlight in the behavior of non-human animals and other natural phenomena. As we will see, however, the behavior of the holy will would be decidedly non-natural according to the second, and more important, of the two theses I have announced. Our capacity for practical freedom, I argue in II.2, arises out of the exercise of capacities that we share with other animals; however we are to understand the freedom of the holy will, it presumably does not arise in this way.

(i) In a passage I have already quoted from the “Ethical Life [*Sittlichkeit*]” section of his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel tells us that, for the virtuous agent, acting as one ought to is a matter of habit or second nature. He writes:

[T]he ethical [*das Sittliche*], as [the individuals’] general mode of behavior, appears as *custom* [*Sitte*]; and the *habit* of the ethical appears as a *second nature* which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence [*Dasein*] (*PR*, §151)<sup>64</sup>

One point that Hegel means to make with this characterization of virtue as second nature, and which I have not yet highlighted, is that the virtuous agent does not experience the kind of struggle or inner conflict to which the Kantian agent is by definition condemned. The Hegelian virtuous agent exhibits a resoluteness and psychological harmony that is unavailable to her Kantian counterpart. Writing of “rational *natural* beings” like us, Kant claims that “even when they do obey the [moral] law, they do it *reluctantly* (in the face of opposition from their inclinations)” (*MS*, 6:379) or, as we might say, with some degree of pain or displeasure.<sup>65</sup> Contrast Aristotle’s characterization of ethical virtue, to which Hegel is indebted in describing virtuous behavior as second nature.<sup>66</sup> Taking temperance to stand in for virtue generally,<sup>67</sup> Aristotle writes: “[T]he temperate person is the sort to feel no pleasure contrary to reason, while

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<sup>64</sup> In the previous paragraph, Hegel explicitly connects “the ethical” and virtue: “The ethical, in so far as it is reflected in the naturally determined character of the individual as such, is *virtue*” (§150). Along lines broadly similar to those of his remarks in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel tells us in the *Encyclopedia* that, within “Ethical Life,” practical freedom or the rational will “has its operation and immediate universal *actuality* [*Wirklichkeit*] as *custom* –self-conscious *freedom* become *nature*” (§513). The issues I consider in what follows under (i) overlap in part with Novakovic (2017), Chapter I, especially 48-53, from whose discussion I have benefitted.

<sup>65</sup> The Kantian passage reads in full: “Rational *natural* beings . . . are unholy enough that pleasure can induce them to break the moral law, even though they recognize its authority; and even when they do obey the law, they do it *reluctantly* (in the face of opposition from their inclinations)” (*MS*, 6:379). In a similar vein, Kant explicitly characterizes virtue as follows: “[T]he capacity and considered resolve to withstand a strong but unjust opponent is *fortitude* (*fortitudo*) and, with respect to what opposes the moral disposition *within us*, virtue (*virtus*, *fortitudo moralis*)” (*MS*, 6:380).

<sup>66</sup> Hegel explicitly mentions Aristotle in the context of his remarks about ethical habit as a second nature at §150Z. In a similar vein, Hegel’s treatment of Aristotle’s ethics in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* begins by approvingly noting: “The manner of treatment is almost invariably speculative, and sound understanding is displayed throughout” (*VPGII*, 198/180).

<sup>67</sup> Given Aristotle’s so-called thesis of the unity of the virtues, a person cannot be temperate without possessing the rest of the virtues of character anyway. See *NE*, Book VI, Chapter 13.

the self-controlled [continent] person is the sort to feel such pleasure but not to be led by it” (1152a). In other words, the continent person is the sort to follow the requirements of morality reluctantly or with a certain amount of displeasure. Kant’s notion of virtue thus falls short of its Aristotelian (and Hegelian) counterpart, and is closer to continence, understood as a capacity to reluctantly or begrudgingly follow moral requirements, than it is to virtue proper.

Of course, Kantians will straightaway rejoin that the unfavorable comparison I have just made is based upon a misinterpretation. It is no part of Kant’s considered view, they will argue, that a dutiful action must be done reluctantly or under psychological duress if it is to have moral worth. As long as an action is done from the motive of duty, it can be accompanied by feelings of pleasure, and so be performed happily or absent any inner struggle, without the action’s moral worth being diminished in any way. Crucially for our purposes here, however, on the Kantian picture, such a conviction or lack of inner struggle in the performance of a dutiful action does not increase its moral worth. But at least part of Hegel’s (and Aristotle’s) point in describing virtuous action as second natural seems to be that the resoluteness or absence of inner conflict in the performance of an action that conforms to the requirements of morality *does* positively affect the action’s moral worth.

Moreover, although the Kantian agent might on occasion act from duty without experiencing inner struggle or psychological conflict, Kant’s own text suggests that he does not (indeed cannot) regard psychological harmony as a stable or enduring state of the moral agent. For one thing, given the imperatival character with which moral requirements appear to us humans, as well as the dualism of sensibility and reason on which such a character is based, it would appear that Kant is indeed committed to a view of the self whereby one part of the self is

perpetually monitoring or ruling over the other part.<sup>68</sup> And an agent that is split in this way, with one, higher part keeping in check another, lower part, would after all seem to be at best capable of continence, as I have described it above. For another thing, and more importantly, inborn or instinctive behaviors aside, a bit of behavior can become resolute, or reveal a psychological harmony on the part of the agent, only as a result of repetition or habituation. This is a point on which Aristotle insists in his practical philosophy. But the claim that repetition makes a bit of behavior come more easily to us is a point with which we are presumably familiar from our own experience, more or less uncontroversial and accepted by both sides (Aristotle and Hegel, on the one hand, Kant, on the other) of our dispute. Kant, however, is adamant that dutiful action can never become habitual without losing all moral worth. Therefore, by *modus tollens*, the Kantian virtuous agent cannot exhibit psychological harmony or be unconflicted, at least not in a way that is stable or long-lasting.

Allow me to briefly pause to examine the incompatibility Kant claims to find between habitual and morally worthy action, as it is that claim that is crucial to the argument I have just sketched. If an action is to have any moral worth for Kant, then it cannot be the result of the agent's habitually carrying on as she has in the past; rather, Kant holds that the virtuous agent must act from scratch or afresh every time, so to speak. More precisely, the Kantian agent must on every occasion (perhaps implicitly or less than fully consciously) monitor her behavior and consider whether she has acted from duty. Kant articulates the claim that habitual and morally worthy action are incompatible as unequivocally as one could hope in his *Anthropology*:

*Habit . . . is a physical inner necessitation to proceed in the same manner as one has proceeded until now. It deprives even good actions of their moral worth because it impairs the freedom of the mind and, moreover, leads to thoughtless repetition of the very same act (monotony) . . . (A, 7:149)*

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<sup>68</sup> For evidence of the claim that moral requirements *always* appear in imperatival form for us humans, and so that that feature is not one that can ever be dropped or somehow overcome, see for example *KpV*, 5:32-33.

Earlier in that same section of the *Anthropology*, Kant writes in similar spirit: “Virtue is *moral strength* in adherence to one’s duty, which should never become habit but should always emerge entirely new and original from one’s way of thinking” (A, 7:147). Both these passages make it clear that Kant takes habit and moral worth to be incompatible. In addition, and more interestingly, the first passage gives us a better idea as to *why* Kant has that view of habit. The assumption that underlies Kant’s condemnation of habit is that habitual behavior is incompatible with freedom. In acting habitually, Kant tells us, we “impair the freedom of the mind.”<sup>69</sup> Since freedom is a necessary condition of an action’s having any moral worth, habitual behavior is devoid of any such worth.<sup>70</sup> Precisely this assumption is one that I take Hegel’s account of ethical habit to be targeting. As I will argue in II.2, habituation for Hegel is compatible with, and even necessary for, practical freedom.

So far in this section, I have tried to show that the behavior of the Hegelian virtuous agent is resolute or harmonious in a way that the behavior of her Kantian counterpart is not. In characterizing the behavior of the Hegelian virtuous agent in this way, I am in effect making the case that that behavior is natural at least in the sense that it exhibits features analogous to those exhibited by the lawlike behavior of lower animals. Consider, for example, a predator chasing its prey. The predator acts on instinct and so automatically; in chasing its prey, the predator exhibits no inner struggle resulting from the weighing up of different courses of action. To be sure, virtuous agents are unlike lower animals in that they act rationally or reflectively and not instinctively. But the point of the comparison does not concern the sources (reason, on the one

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<sup>69</sup> This assumption is even clearer, perhaps, in Kant’s remarks on habit in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. I have in mind two passages in particular: “*Habit* . . . [is] a uniformity in action that has become *necessity* through frequent repetition, it is not one that proceeds from freedom and therefore not a moral aptitude” (6:407); “[I]f the practice of virtue were to become a habit the subject would suffer loss to that *freedom* in adopting his maxims which distinguishes an action done from duty” (6:409).

<sup>70</sup> Matters, in fact, are worse still. Since freedom seems to be a condition of *any* action, a habitual action does not qualify as an action at all, morally worthy or otherwise.

hand, instinct, on the other) of virtuous and merely animal behavior respectively. The point of the comparison is rather to signal a similarity on account of which both behaviors might be characterized as natural, namely, a lack of inner interference or conflict.

Before turning to the second point above about regularity, (ii), I address two objections to my claims about resoluteness or lack of inner conflict so far. According to the first objection, in claiming that the virtuous person is free from inner conflict or psychological struggle, Hegel (or I on Hegel's behalf) must be mischaracterizing virtuous behavior. For that characterization suggests that heeding ethical requirements is easy and hence takes little to no effort. But experience should tell us that acting as morality demands is often quite hard and does at times require considerable effort. So it should be no surprise that becoming ethical is experienced first personally as a struggle.

In reply to this first objection, we should begin by noting that Hegel does not (or at least need not) deny that becoming ethical might require considerable effort. This commonsensical observation notwithstanding, Hegel can insist that someone's psychology is conflicted in a way that reveals a moral failure only if she is still less than fully virtuous (or only if acting as she ought to has not yet become second nature to her). Of course, a fully virtuous agent might be confronted with a pressing, even tragic situation, to which the appropriate psychological reaction is some degree of displeasure or inner struggle in acting as she nevertheless deems she ought to. Think, for example, of a tragic scenario in which a parent can only save one of two children in danger. The psychological duress experienced by the agent in such a case, however, is a function of the rare, tragic circumstances on which she finds herself and is not symptomatic of a defect of character on her part. Moreover, although the process of becoming virtuous will presumably involve struggles and conflicts, these should not be overestimated. In particular, the struggles

will be relatively minimal, Hegel appears to believe, when the agent is brought up in a well-structured community, where teachers, parents and others around her serve as moral exemplars.<sup>71</sup>

According to the second objection, my claim that (in the optimal or virtuous case) the behavior of the rational will qualifies as natural in that it is harmonious or lacking in conflict cannot be textually accurate. For, on Hegel's view, freedom is fueled precisely by conflict. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* tells a story of how various conceptions of freedom turn out to be deficient and give way to higher, more adequate forms of freedom; more specifically, that story moves forward by exposing the inconsistencies or conflicts implicit in the lower conceptions of freedom. Similarly, on the more obviously historical account we find in the "Spirit" section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, our (or Hegel's) allegedly superior, post-Enlightenment idea of freedom is construed as the product of a series of crises undergone by previous (Greek, Roman, Christian and Enlightenment) forms of life and conceptions of freedom. Surely, then, it is simply wrongheaded to attempt to find in Hegel a connection between freedom and absence of conflict, as I have done above.

I do not dispute that the reading of Hegel's projects in the *Philosophy of Right* and part of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that I have just rehearsed is roughly accurate (however crude my own sketch of that reading in the preceding paragraph may be). But that is neither here nor there. For the focus in my remarks so far in this section has been neither on the more abstract conceptual level nor on the socio-historical level, but rather on the individual level, more specifically, on the individual as a member of the modern social world. To be sure, in becoming responsive to ethical requirements, such a modern individual typically undergoes some form of conflict or struggle. But, again, this observation does not undo my claims about freedom and lack

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<sup>71</sup> See *PR*, §§150A, 153A. I here discount cases where a person has been well brought up but her psychology remains conflicted due, for example, to pathological fears. It seems to me that the right thing to say about such cases is that although the person in question is not morally blameworthy for her behavior, she is not virtuous either.

of conflict. Any worries that allegedly arise at this point about resoluteness or inner harmony can be addressed by rehearsing my reply to the first objection above: The observation about the struggles typically undergone by an individual during her ethical upbringing serves at most as evidence that the individual in question is as yet less than fully virtuous.

(ii) I now turn to the second of the two points I mentioned above, namely, that virtuous behavior qualifies as natural in that it exhibits a regularity similar to that of law-governed natural processes (for example, the rotation of the earth around the sun). Although Hegel does not dwell on this point about the regularity of virtuous action, it is at the very least implicit in the connection he draws in the “Anthropology” between habit in general, including therefore ethical habit, and mechanism.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the point *is* explicit in Aristotle, from whom Hegel takes the idea of ethical habit as a second nature.<sup>73</sup>

In what sense is behavior virtuous only if regular? In order to get a better grip on the idea that virtuous action must be performed regularly if it is to count as virtuous at all, it helps to contrast a virtuous (for example, courageous) action with a morally neutral one like brushing one’s teeth. An instance of tooth brushing counts as a case of brushing one’s teeth whether or not it is done regularly (in particular, habitually). Due to my parents’ insistence as a child and my dentists’ threats throughout my life, I am in the habit of brushing my teeth every night before bed. Now imagine someone who in an act of defiance against her dentist (or for any other reason), brushes her teeth only very rarely and randomly, approximately once every couple of weeks, say. This person can hardly be said to be in the habit of brushing her teeth. Both this person’s next (non-habitual) brushing of her teeth and my (habitual) brushing of my teeth later tonight, however, count as instances of tooth brushing. This does not appear to be so if we switch

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<sup>72</sup> Hegel tells us that, through habit, the soul “giv[es its expressions] the shape of something *mechanical*” (Enz, §410Z). And earlier in his treatment of habit in the “Anthropology,” he writes: “[H]abit is the determinacy of self-feeling . . . made into something that is natural, mechanical” (§410).

<sup>73</sup> See especially Aristotle, *NE*, Book II, Chapters 1-4.

from morally neutral to virtuous action. Indeed, an allegedly one-off instance of courage, temperance or justice, Aristotle tells us, does not exemplify the corresponding virtue (and so does not represent an instance of temperance or justice at all). A seemingly just or temperate action is only really such, and so a case of virtue, if it is done “as the just and temperate person would” (*NE*, 1105b), where part of what this phrase involves is that the action in question fits into a habitual or regular pattern of behavior.

But why hold fast to this connection between virtue and regularity, anyway? The answer, I take it, is that we expect the actions of a virtuous person to be reliable. A person does not count as virtuous, and her actions do not manifest virtue, unless she can be counted or relied upon to perform those same actions whenever the situation calls for it. And the best guarantee that a person *can* be so relied upon, so the thought goes, is that she performs such actions habitually or regularly.

The answer to the foregoing question just prompts the further issue: How are the two points discussed so far in this section, (i) and (ii), virtue as inner harmony, on the one hand, and virtue as regularity, on the other, connected? Let us again take courage to stand in for virtuous action generally. To emphasize a point I made above: In most (or even all normal) cases,<sup>74</sup> the resoluteness or inner harmony required for truly courageous action, (i), can be attained only by regularly and hence reliably performing actions like those that the virtuous person performs, (ii). In other words, only by regularly or habitually performing actions like those of the courageous person are our desires so molded as to suppress any source of inner interference.

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<sup>74</sup> That is, I leave aside cases of naturally fearless persons or members of some utopian community where external threats and other sources of fear are totally absent.

## II.2 THE RATIONAL WILL AS EMERGING FROM NATURE

Our discussion in this section has aimed to show how our responsiveness to ethical requirements is natural for Hegel in that (in the good or virtuous cases) its exercises manifest features *like*, or *similar* to, features exhibited by the behavior of subhuman members of the animal world and other natural processes. This claim sets virtuous action apart from other human behavior, most obviously, from continent and incontinent action, that is, action that is the result of psychological conflict and so unreliable. For an agent might have managed to overcome her reluctance on some occasion. But in the light of that inner struggle or reluctance, it seems we have no reason to believe that she will continue to act similarly in the future

The analogy or comparison I have exploited in the previous subsection, however, cannot be all that there is to the characterization of practical freedom as a natural capacity. Despite the analogy between virtuous action and natural phenomena, for all we have said, our will might be cut off from nature in that its origin owes nothing to the capacities we share with other animals. In the light of the broad similarities between the Kantian and Hegelian views of practical freedom I noted at the start of II.1, on the one hand, and Hegel's rejection of the Kantian dualism of pure reason and sensibility (Chapter One), on the other, we are left with the task of piecing together Hegel's alternative, naturalist story about our capacity for practical freedom. In addressing this issue in the remainder of the paper, I exploit part of Hegel's discussion of habit towards the end of the "Anthropology."

My main hypothesis is that our capacity for practical freedom is the result for Hegel of a process of habitual liberation from our natural determinations, for example, our urges, desires or impulses. Because Hegel, as I understand him, thus grounds our capacity for practical freedom in habit, his story is one whereby the will emerges from, or arises out of, nature. To render my hypothesis somewhat more concrete, and to begin to appreciate in what sense freedom qua

habitual liberation qualifies as a natural process, it might be useful to recall an example I mentioned in my previous discussion of Hegel's "Anthropology," namely, the "habit of hardening" against the sensation of cold. As I noted there, in becoming habituated to cold temperatures, a living or ensouled creature is liberated in that it is no longer completely "absorbed" by the sensation of cold and, consequently, is "free" to direct its attention elsewhere (*Enz*, §410). Such a process counts as natural in that it requires only the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals, in particular, the capacity to sense or register our environment and react in purposive ways to that environmental input.<sup>75</sup>

Admittedly, the kind of "liberation" achieved by habits of hardening is very different, much more rudimentary, than the distinctively human capacity for practical freedom. Nevertheless, Hegel provides several hints that his account of practical freedom similarly relies on a story about habitual liberation. First, Hegel employs very similar language in discussing the result of habituation and our capacity for practical freedom, specifically, the first moment of the concept of the will, the moment of universality or abstraction. He describes habituation, for

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<sup>75</sup>One might object at this point that the thesis that the capacity for practical freedom arises out of nature does not obviously set Hegel apart from Kant in the way that I am claiming. In particular, in some of his history essays and other lectures, Kant might seem to be offering an account analogous to the naturalistic one I am claiming to find in Hegel. Kant's account would have to be different from Hegel's, since Hegel's account relies crucially on habituation whereas Kant takes habitual action and freedom to be incompatible, as we have seen. But Kant might have some naturalistic story nonetheless. Indeed, in his essay "Conjectural Beginning of Human History," for example, Kant purports to trace "the first development of freedom from its original predisposition in the nature of the human being" (*MA*, 8:109). Having provided an account of this "first development," Kant recapitulates: "[T]he departure of the human being from the paradise which reason represents to him as the first abode of his species was nothing other than the transition from the crudity of a merely animal nature into humanity, from the go-cart [*Gängelwagen*] of instinct to the guidance of reason, in a word, from the guardianship of nature to the condition of freedom" (*Ibid.*, 8:115). Despite these programmatic remarks, I do not think that Kant's essay is best read as providing an account of the naturalistic sort found – I maintain – in Hegel. Kant does lay out a series of enabling conditions for the exercise of our capacity for freedom, as well as a set of consequences of that exercise (for example, that human beings come to regard themselves as the "end of nature" [*Ibid.*, 8:114]). However, it is hard to see how Kant's account could by his own lights amount to an account of our capacity for freedom (where it comes from and how it works) on the basis of a series of natural or physical occurrences. Kant himself announces towards the beginning of the essay that he will consider the human being "only after it has already taken a mighty step in the skill of making use of its powers" (*Ibid.*, 8:110). Among the powers whose mastery Kant takes for granted in his account are the capacity to stand and walk upright, to speak and, most importantly, reason or the capacity to think, that is, precisely the capacity that by guiding our behavior in place of instinct makes us free. Thus, in this essay, Kant seems to presuppose, rather than explain, human freedom. More generally, and aside from this textual point, it is unclear how Kant *could* provide some sort of naturalistic account of freedom anyway, given his characterization of freedom as a capacity to initiate series of occurrences from outside space and time.

instance, as a process whereby “the soul makes itself into abstract universal being” (*Enz*, §410), and adds that “through habit” one achieves a “liberation from sensations” (§410A). Second, Hegel declares in the context of his discussion of habit in the “Anthropology” that habit “embraces all kinds and stages of spirit’s activity” (§410A), including therefore practical spirit or the will. Finally, and perhaps more to the point, Hegel characterizes the subject matter of his practical philosophy, namely, the “system of right,” as the realm of “actualized freedom,” which he in turn glosses as “the world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature” (*PR*, §4).

Before making good on these hints, I should explicitly address a textual worry about the connection between habit and practical freedom that I am attempting to draw. It might be objected that the universality and freedom attained through habitual liberation is deficient in that it is “merely anthropological” (*Enz*, §410Z) and so, the worry goes, cannot provide the model by which to understand the freedom that belongs to higher stage of objective spirit. The universality and freedom of habit remain “merely anthropological,” Hegel explains, in that “although, on the one hand, by habit a man becomes free, . . . on the other hand, habit makes him its slave” (§410Z).

What should we make of Hegel’s remark to the effect that the freedom gained through habit is “merely anthropological” and so enslaving? Does this remark ruin the connection between habit and practical freedom that I have begun to draw in the preceding paragraphs? To be sure, as I have already noted, the sort of freedom or *Beisichselbstsein* attained by affirming as one’s own our moral requirements and duties is considerably more complex than the *Beisichselbstsein* that ensouled creatures in general attain in ceasing to be “absorbed” by their sensations, desires or impulses. Unlike the liberation gained in becoming accustomed to cold temperatures, say, the freedom that belongs to objective spirit requires various social institutions

and involves processes of habituation that are more sophisticated (typically voluntary) than the mere passive exposure to environmental conditions.

However, it would be an overreaction to infer from Hegel's claim that habitual liberation remains "merely anthropological" that the kind of freedom that belongs to objective spirit does not consist in a form of habitual liberation at all. For first, as we have just seen, Hegel explicitly tells us that habit "embraces all kinds and stages of spirit's activity" (§410A), hence not only the soul but also objective spirit. Second, and perhaps more importantly, although habit may lead to enslavement or unfreedom, it need not do so. As we will see more clearly below, habitual behavior becomes enslaving only if performed in a manner that is entirely mechanical and unreflective. Such automatic conduct is enslaving precisely in that, although it is not simply inborn or instinctive, I no longer regard it as my own freely undertaken behavior. This risk of enslavement notwithstanding, a bit of behavior can be habitual, and so come to me spontaneously or instinctively, while still being such that I can back up that behavior rationally if prompted. To express the contrast somewhat more concretely: Someone might fulfill her social role as a teacher or parent, for example, routinely or mechanically, in a way that renders her a slave to her station. This person would be dominated by some "other" both in that she is passively subjected to the norms of her social role as to an external imposition, and in that her behavior appears to go on of its own accord, determined completely by her (second) natural impulses or desires. But someone might alternatively fulfill her social role spontaneously and decisively while reflectively endorsing that role (and fulfill the role spontaneously or decisively *precisely because* she reflectively endorses or affirms it). This second person is free or *bei sich* in that she acts in the light of norms that she affirms as her own, as opposed to being dragged into action by her (habitually acquired) desires or impulses. Thus, although enslavement or unfreedom is a risk inherent in habitual behavior, both in its higher objective forms and in its

lower anthropological forms, enslavement is by no means an unavoidable outcome of habituation as such.<sup>76</sup>

Now that I have deflected the objection that habitual liberation as such is deficient in that it unavoidably leads to enslavement, I go on to spell out the connection between habit and practical freedom. I do so in two steps: First, I pull out an abstract, threefold structure of habituation from cases more complex than the example of hardening against external sensations mentioned above, namely, what Hegel classifies under the heading of “habits of dexterity” or skill like writing.<sup>77</sup> Second, I apply that threefold structure of habituation to the case of practical freedom as a capacity to respond to ethical requirements.

I begin by providing Hegel’s own description of the habit of writing at the end of the “Anthropology” and then identify the general structure of habituation that underlies that description:

[S]ince the individual activities of man acquire by repeated practice the character of *habit*, the form of something received into . . . the *universality* of the spiritual interior, the soul brings into its expressions a *universal* mode of acting . . . This universal is internally so concentrated to *simplicity* that in it I am no longer conscious of the *particular* differences between my individual activities. That this is so we see, for example, in writing. When we are learning how to write we must direct our attention on every individual detail, on a vast number of mediations. By contrast, once the activity of writing has become a habit with us, then our self has so completely mastered all the relevant individual details, has so infected them with its universality, that they are no

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<sup>76</sup> The fact that Hegel summarizes the warning that habits can become enslaving with the claim that habitual liberation is “merely anthropological” suggests that he regards some of the habits he considers in the “Anthropology” (for example, habits of hardening against external sensations) as particularly prone to yield entirely mechanical, unfree behavior. But, as my foregoing discussion is meant to indicate, the risk of enslavement or unfreedom affects all forms of habit, not just the lower, anthropological forms. Indeed, Hegel reminds us of the dangers of habituation not only in the “Anthropology” but also in the context of his remarks about ethical habit in the *Philosophy of Right*. He there writes: “Human beings even die as a result of habit – that is, if they have become totally habituated to life and spiritually and physically blunted . . .” (§151A) The sort of “death” that Hegel has in mind here, I take it, is not (or not only) a physical or biological death but our “death” as subjects of ethical requirements, that is, our loss of freedom or enslavement.

<sup>77</sup> My understanding of Hegel’s example of writing, and of the liberating aspect of habits of skill generally, is indebted to Peters (2016), especially 123-25. I build on her account by identifying the same liberating aspect in Hegel’s habits of the ethical.

longer present to us as *individual* details and we keep in view only their *universal* aspect (§410Z)

Let us briefly gloss Hegel's account of writing in the preceding passage. In his own words: "When we are learning how to write we must direct our attention on every individual detail," every line, trace, movement of the hand and fingers. Once writing has become habitual in us, however, we cease to focus on these "particular differences" or "individual details" and consequently, Hegel tells us, our production of strings of symbols takes "the shape of something mechanical, of a mere natural effect." In acquiring the skill of writing, that is, we progressively move from a focus on the "individual details" of our behavior to a consideration of that behavior in its "universal aspect" or as a mere instance of a general type. By thus abstracting from the "individual details," lines or traces of a string of symbols, we open ourselves qua skilled writers to "other activity and occupations" (§410), including (most obviously) to an occupation with the content or meaning of those written symbols.

Taking this account of writing as an exemplar, we might characterize habituation generally in terms of the following three aspects or moments: (a) In undergoing a process of habituation, the subject ceases to be "absorbed" by (and thereby liberates herself from) the particular. (b) As a consequence of this process, a mechanical or automatic (and, to that extent, seemingly unfree) pattern of behavior sets in. (c) This mechanical behavior in turn allows the subject to adopt the point of view of universality and thus direct her attention to "other activity and occupations."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Needless to say, the threefold division of habituation should not be confused with Hegel's threefold analysis of the concept of the will discussed in section I. More importantly, however, this threefold division is not intended to carry connotations of temporal succession. The three "moments" are three sides or aspects of the process of habituation. Habituation no doubt takes time. But (a) the insensitivity towards the particular, (b) the onset of mechanical behavior and (c) the adoption of the point of view of universality do not (or at least need not) occur as separate, successive temporal stages.

I now attempt to apply this abstract structure to practical freedom as a capacity to respond to, and affirm, ethical requirements. (a) As in the example of a habit of skill, so in the case of ethical habituation, various “particularities,” that is, natural determinations such as sensible desires or urges, are molded or numbed. Indeed, as I have noted previously, in acquiring an ethical virtue, conflicting desires are often overridden. (b) However, if the result of this process of ethical habituation were in turn merely a bit of automatic or mechanical behavior, as the second moment mentioned above would have it, then that outcome by itself could hardly count as a case of virtue. As we have seen in II.1, Hegel’s description of ethical habit as a second nature is meant to capture features (such as resoluteness and regularity) that mechanical or automatic behaviors appear to paradigmatically instantiate. Nevertheless, virtuous action does not consist for Hegel merely in automatically acting according to duty, or in mechanically performing the same types of actions as the virtuous person, but in doing so for the right reasons or with the right state of mind. And part of that state of mind involves being capable of reflecting upon and backing up one’s action with reasons. (c) Luckily, the abstract structure of habituation extracted from Hegel’s example of writing allows us to respect this latter thought in the following way: As in the case of skill, the insensitivity to immediate urges or desires makes room for the subject to step back from the particular and adopt the point of view of universality. In this case, it allows her to direct her view to the idea of freedom itself, and so come to appreciate the authoritativeness of ethical requirements, understood as requirements of freedom. Habitual or mechanical behavior is thus not only compatible with, but necessary for, a conception of ourselves as responsive to ethical requirements.

## 4

### **THE ESSENTIALIST THESIS I:**

#### **THE NORMATIVITY OF ANIMAL LIFE**

So far in this dissertation, I have motivated the interpretive thesis that Hegel must be an ethical naturalist of some sort or other by reviewing, and extracting some general lessons from, his criticisms of Kant's moral philosophy (Chapter One). I have then attempted to make good on the hints provided by Hegel's criticisms of Kant by showing how, for Hegel, distinctively human capacities, like objective consciousness and most importantly for our purposes practical freedom or the will, are the upshot of processes of habituation and so of the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals (Chapters Two and Three). Having thus made the case in the previous two chapters for one of the two theses that make up Hegel's version of ethical naturalism (what I referred to at the outset of the dissertation as the "emergence thesis"), I now turn to the other, essentialist thesis, namely, the claim that moral requirements are grounded or have their source in our nature, essence or, as Hegel also says, our "concept."

I defend the claim that Hegel endorses the thesis that moral requirements are grounded in our nature or essence in two steps. In this chapter, I piece together Hegel's account of the normative evaluation of animal organisms generally, setting aside for now features characteristic of human animals in particular. In Chapter Five, I undertake the task of expanding Hegel's account of evaluative judgments to the normative (including moral) evaluation of specifically human features and behavior. In making my case for the essentialist thesis in this two-step way, I take myself to be filling in the details of a program for an interpretation of Hegel recently put

forward by Robert Stern.<sup>79</sup> Recall that, as I noted at the outset of the dissertation, Stern attributes to Hegel (but does not work out in any detail) a sort of essentialism like the one I intend to articulate on Hegel's behalf in these final two chapters. In the course of discussing Hegel's account of the normativity of animal life in this chapter, I contrast my view with that of Hegel commentator Sebastian Rand. For Hegel, according to Rand's reading, animal specimens are *not* normatively evaluable in the light of their nature or essence.

My discussion in this chapter is organized around the following two questions, which I seek to answer in sections I and II respectively: First, what is Hegel's understanding of the meaning or content of evaluative judgments or what he calls "judgments of the concept," that is, judgments of the form 'x is good', 'x is as it ought to be' or, on the other hand, 'x is defective', 'There is something wrong with x', 'x is not as it ought to be'? (Section I) After answering this first question, I then ask, second, what makes animal organisms, unlike inorganic nature, an appropriate subject of normative evaluation for Hegel? In other words, what makes it the case that *pace* Rand 'this cat', 'that wolf', 'this human' (but not 'this pebble' or 'that rock', say) can figure in the 'x' position of judgments of the sort 'x is as it ought to be', 'x is defective'? And what is meant by the judgments 'There is something wrong with this tiger', 'This gazelle is as it ought to be', 'This cat is defective' and others, anyway? (Section II)

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<sup>79</sup> In addition to Stern (2016a) and (2016b), Alznauer (2016) has been tremendously helpful in thinking through the material of this and the next chapter. However, by taking the two-step approach that I have just announced, beginning with Hegel's account of the normative evaluation of animal organisms (in this chapter) and then expanding that account to include the normative (including moral) evaluation of features and operations that are peculiar to human animals (in the next chapter), my interpretive procedure differs from Alznauer's. For he does not build upon or extend Hegel's account of the normativity of animal organisms to include the normativity that belongs to specifically human features, behaviors, products and practices; rather, he seems to treat each of these two kinds of normative assessment (natural normativity and spiritual normativity) as separate species of a single genus, namely, what he labels "intrinsic normativity." But this mode of presentation leaves it unexplained what is the connection, if any, between those two species of normativity, and thus raises the possibility that the features in virtue of which we are evaluable as animals are completely cut off from those other features in virtue of which we are subject to spiritual normative assessment (for example, as morally virtuous or vicious).

## SECTION I: JUDGMENTS OF THE CONCEPT

### I.1 PRELIMINARY QUALIFICATION: ANTI-SUBJECTIVISM

In this section, I attempt to explicate Hegel's conception of evaluative judgments or "judgments of the concept." Before doing so, however, I should make a clarificatory point to forestall possible misunderstandings. In offering an account of a certain type of judgments, namely, judgments of the concept, Hegel does *not* take himself to be giving an account merely of our evaluative attitudes towards or subjective take on the world, which might for all we know possess or lack the normative features we project on to it. Rather, Hegel's account of judgments of the concept is meant to describe features (in particular, normative properties like goodness and badness) that the subjects of those judgments can have independently of our subjective states or representations. For Hegel, value in general is not a merely subjective projection on our (or any other valuing creatures') part. In other words, certain things would be good or bad, normatively sound or defective, even if creatures capable of using evaluative language had never evolved.

By way of support for this anti-subjectivist point, as we might label it, consider the following pieces of textual evidence. Hegel prefaces his discussion of judgments (evaluative or otherwise) in the *Encyclopedia* by telling us that "[t]he judgment is not our subjective doing, by which this or that predicate is ascribed to the object" (§166Z). He begins the next paragraph by elaborating:

The judgment is usually taken in a subjective sense, as an operation and a form, which occurs *only* in thinking that is conscious of itself. But . . . [here] the judgment is to be taken as entirely universal: every thing is a judgment.—That is, every thing is a singular which is inwardly a universality or inner nature, in other words, a universal that is made singular . . . (§167, emphases modified)

What are we to make of these passages? Hegel here pits his account of judgments against the orthodox or “usual” view, according to which judgments are a “subjective doing” or a mental “operation” whereby some predicate or universal representation “is ascribed to the object.” Accordingly, when he goes on to say that “every thing is a singular which is inwardly a universality,” he cannot be using “universality” to describe a feature of certain subjective representations (namely, concepts as they are “usually taken”) that are predicated, in some mental “operation,” of an object. Rather, when Hegel writes, as a gloss on the claim that “every thing is a judgment,” that “every thing is a singular which is inwardly a universality or inner nature,” he is telling us that every object or thing (that is, every “singular”) bears certain properties or universals which jointly articulate that thing’s “inner nature.” That a “singular” bears some property or universal might (but need not) be registered by a “subjective doing” (that is, by a judgment as these are “usually taken”). These general considerations about judgments go for evaluative judgments in particular, too. When we make some evaluative judgment, understood as a mental “operation,” we are not (primarily or only) attributing to an object some subjective representation, namely, a predicate like ‘good’ or ‘bad’. We are rather registering that some object, thing or “singular” bears some property or universal, in this case, a normative property. And again, that some object bears a normative property, for example, goodness, might be (but does not depend on its being) registered by a “subjective doing” or mental “operation” on our part.

## **I.2 TRUTH AS THE CORRESPONDENCE OF OBJECT AND CONCEPT**

With this anti-subjectivist qualification in place, let us now focus on Hegel’s account of evaluative judgments or “judgments of the concept” itself. Some of the examples of judgments of the concept that Hegel provides are “This house is bad,” “This action is good,” “This body is

diseased,” “A certain work of art is beautiful.” What characterizes judgments like these? The most general feature of these sorts of evaluative statements, Hegel tells us, is that they “can contain truth” (§172A) or have a content that is true (or untrue, as the case may be). In order to understand the precise sense in which evaluative judgments can contain truth for Hegel, we need to consider the contrast he draws between truth and what he calls “correctness [*Richtigkeit*].”

Correctness, we read, consists in “the formal agreement of our representation with its content” (§172Z). Thus, to use Hegel’s own example, the judgment “The rose is red” will be correct just in case our representation, expressed in that judgment, agrees with its content, that is, just in case the rose that judgment is about is indeed red. Truth, for its part, “consists in the agreement of the object with itself, i.e. with its concept” (§172Z). In other words, an object (a house, living body, an action or a work of art) counts as “true” just in case it satisfies certain criteria that define the concept, kind or type to which the object belongs.<sup>80</sup> Houses, for example, are the type of things whose function or end is to provide shelter to its inhabitants. A bad house will be bad or untrue in that it fails to meet criteria that characterize houses as members of the function kind that they are, for example, by having thin walls, leaks in the ceilings or being otherwise badly insulated.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> My discussion of truth and correctness is taken from Hegel’s treatment of judgments of the concept in Part I of the *Encyclopedia*. Later, in the section titled “The Idea,” he again writes: “[T]ruth means that objectivity corresponds with the concept –not that external things correspond with my representations (representations of this kind are just *correct* representations held by me as *this* [individual]” (§213A). Elsewhere, Hegel refers to “correctness” as “subjective truth” and contrasts it to “objective truth.” For example, in the Introduction to his “Philosophy of Nature,” we read: “If subjective truth is the correspondence between representation and object, objective truth is the correspondence of the object, of the fact, with itself, so that its reality is in conformity with its concept” (§246Z). This usage of “truth” or “objective truth,” though technical, is echoed in ordinary English (and German) when say that someone is a good or true friend or that some piece is a true work of art. Hegel himself notes the similarity with the ordinary usage: “It is [the] deeper [objective] sense of truth which is at issue when we speak, for instance, of a “true” state or a “true” work of art. These objects are “true” . . . when their reality corresponds to their concept. Interpreted in this way, the “untrue” is the same as what is sometimes also called the “bad.” A bad man is one who is untrue, one who does not behave in accord with his concept or his destination [*Bestimmung*]” (*Enz*, §213Z)

<sup>81</sup> Artifacts like houses are internally evaluable as good or “true” in the light of their satisfaction of features that characterize the functional kind to which they belong. The function that defines the kind or concept in question guides the activity of producer, who if successful bestows a shape and arrangement on the artifact parts that renders the whole “true.” Apart from the producer’s activity, however, the components of a house (e.g. stones, planks of wood, etc.) can serve any number of purposes other than that of providing shelter. This is not so in the case of

Truth, then, understood as the correspondence of an object with its concept, or of a thing with its kind or nature, is the most general concept of normative appraisal, which encompasses the more specific terms mentioned in the examples of judgments of the concept above: good, healthy, just or beautiful. Judgments of the concept characterize a thing or object as good (or healthy, just, beautiful or, in general, true) in the light of its satisfaction of criteria that define the kind or concept to which the thing belongs. As Hegel puts it: “The predicates good, bad, true, beautiful, correct, etc. express that the thing is measured against its general concept . . . and is, or is not, in agreement with it” (*WL*, 344/657-58).

Two implications of Hegel’s account of truth and judgments of the concept, as I have here sketched it, bear underscoring. First, the concept or kind to which a thing belongs serves as an ‘ought’, a normative standard or rule against which that thing is compared and accordingly judged to be good or bad. “In [the] judgment [of the concept] the concept is laid down as the basis [*ist zugrunde gelegt*] . . . it is an *ought* to which the reality may or may not be adequate” (*WL*, 344/657), Hegel writes. Thus, normative evaluation for Hegel is internal or immanent in that it proceeds in accordance with criteria that are the object’s own (qua member of its kind) and not in accordance with some external standard, including our or any other valuing creatures’ interests or attitudes.

The second implication of our foregoing discussion that is worth emphasizing is this: According to Hegel’s account, a thing (be it a house, action, living body or artwork) can be bad or untrue, and so fail to correspond to the concept to which it nevertheless belongs, without

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animal organisms, as will become clear in the next section. The causal structure of an animal organism is not the result of some external purpose, and the shape and arrangement of its components does not depend on the conscious activity of a creator. Of the difference between artifacts and living organisms, Hegel writes: “The particular parts of a house, for example, the individual stones, windows, etc., remain the same, whether they together form a house or not; their association is indifferent to them and the concept remains for them a purely external form which does not live in the real parts . . . The members of an organism, on the other hand, do likewise possess external reality, yet so strongly is the concept their own indwelling essence that it is not impressed on them as a form merely uniting them externally; on the contrary, it is their sole sustainer” (*VA*, 163/121).

ceasing to exist altogether. Inasmuch as it does not agree with, or correspond to, its own concept, a thing fails to “agree with itself” (§172Z) or exists in “contradiction” (§382Z) as Hegel puts it.

In the next section, I examine Hegel’s account of normative evaluation as it applies to animal organisms. My treatment of his (somewhat scattered) discussion of the normativity of animal life will be guided by the following pair of questions, corresponding to the two implications of Hegel’s theory of truth and normativity that I have just highlighted: In what sense is the normative evaluation of animal organisms internal or immanent, exactly? And how can an animal organism continue to exist as a member of its kind while failing to correspond to the concept or kind to which it belongs? In what sense, that is, can animals endure “contradiction”?

## **SECTION II: ANIMAL ORGANISMS**

### **II.1 FORMATION, ASSIMILATION, REPRODUCTION**

In this section, I aim to understand what makes animal organisms an appropriate subject of normative evaluation, according to Hegel. I begin, however, by offering a summary of Hegel’s general account of animal life in the final chapter of his “Philosophy of Nature.” This summary will provide the necessary background for our more detailed discussion of the normativity of animal life in the remainder of the chapter. More specifically, as we will see later in the chapter, two of the features by which Hegel characterizes animals, namely, teleological structure and membership in a species via reproduction (what Hegel refers to as the “genus process”), explain what it is that makes animal organisms appropriate subjects of normative evaluation.

As we saw in our discussion of the animal soul in Chapter Two, animals for Hegel are complex causal systems whose parts and whole are reciprocally determined, in particular, each, parts and whole, is simultaneously cause and effect. As Hegel writes: “As animal life is its own product and purpose, it is simultaneously both end and means” (*Enz*, §352Z). The individual

parts of an animal organism (for example, its liver or heart) are causally dependent on other individual parts, and ultimately on the organism as a whole, for their proper functioning. Animal life is thus a means to the proper functioning of its parts. But animal life is also an end, as we have just seen in Hegel's quote. The individual parts are also causally responsible for the subsistence of the whole. By cleansing our blood, for example, our liver causally contributes to the survival of the human organism to which it belongs.

To be sure, not only animal but also vegetable organisms seem to exhibit this two-way causal structure. Plants and their parts appear to be simultaneously cause and effect, or means and end. It is thus worth considering what status Hegel awards plants vis-à-vis animals. As I understand it, the main difference between plants and animals, on Hegel's account, is that (a) plant parts can often subsist apart from the whole to which they originally belong and (b) the causal role of some part within the whole can frequently be carried out by other parts, thereby guaranteeing the continued existence of the whole. I take Hegel to be making each of these two points respectively, for example, when he writes:

[a] [T]he process whereby vegetable subjectivity articulates and sustains itself is one in which it . . . falls apart into several individuals. The singleness of the whole individual is simply the basis of these [several individuals], rather than a subjective unity of members; the part –bud, branch, and so on, is also the whole plant . . . [b] [T]he differentiation of the organic parts is merely a superficial metamorphosis, and the one part can easily assume the function of the other (*Enz*, §343)

Hegel makes the first point, (a), perhaps more clearly in the Introduction to the “Organics” section of the “Philosophy of Nature”: “[E]ach plant is merely an infinite number of subjects, and the connection whereby these subjects appear as a single subject is merely superficial. The plant is unable to maintain its power over its members, for they detach themselves from it and become independent” (§337Z). From (a) and (b) it follows that at least some vegetable

organisms are in fact not teleological systems in the sense defined, that is, they are not such that their parts are causally dependent on the whole and vice versa. From (a) it follows that some plant parts do not causally depend on the whole for their continued existence. From (b) it follows that some plant wholes do not causally depend on any of their specific parts, since “one part can easily assume the function of the other.” Inasmuch as Hegel’s account of the normative evaluability of animal organisms relies on their teleological organization, as we will see below, it seems to follow from (a) and (b) that not all plant specimens are susceptible to evaluation as normatively sound or defective.<sup>82</sup>

Having offered these remarks about the status of plants for Hegel, I return to his discussion of animal organisms. In addition to characterizing them in general as teleological systems, Hegel further describes animal organisms in terms of three specific end-directed processes or operations: (i) the “shape process” or “formation process [*Gestaltungsprozess*],” (ii) the “assimilation process” and (iii) the “generic process” or “genus process [*Gattungsprozess*].” All animals are subject to these three kinds of processes, according to Hegel. In his treatment of vegetable organisms, Hegel describes this “triad of processes” as follows:

[T]he *first* of these [processes] is the universal process, the process of the vegetable organism within itself, the relation of the individual to itself . . . In the *second process*, [the] living being does not contain its other, but faces it as an external independence . . . This is the process which is specified in the face of an external nature. The *third process* is that of the genus, and unites the first two. This is the process of the individuals with themselves as genus, or the production and preservation of the genus. In it, the genus is

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<sup>82</sup> If my remarks about Hegel on plants are interpretively accurate, then it is a mistake to group together plants and animals, as commentators writing on Hegel on natural normativity tend to do. On the two points I have made about plants, (a) and (b), see Haase (unpublished). I have said that (a) and (b) are “often” or “typically” the case, for there are certainly exceptions to both these Hegelian points. Consider (a): There are plants whose parts cannot subsist independently of the whole to which they originally belonged, and, conversely, there are animal organisms whose parts are “independent” in that sense.

preserved by the destruction of individuals, as the production of another individual” (*Enz*, §346)<sup>83</sup>

The first, “shape process” consists of the set of operations of the blood, nervous and other physiological systems of the animal organism. More generally, the “shape process” is that process (or set of processes) whereby the animal relates to its own body parts and operations, without consideration of these parts’ interaction with the animal’s external surroundings. “The first process – Hegel writes – is that of the *self-relating* organism” (§352, emphasis added). By contrast, the second, “assimilation process” is comprised of both the “theoretical” operations (sensations) and the “practical” operations (for example, respiration or nourishment) whereby the animal relates to its external surroundings. In this second process, “[t]he organism is . . . considered . . . as idea which relates itself *to its other*, its inorganic nature” (§352, emphasis added). Finally, the *Gattungsprozess* consists at least in part in the production, by some exemplars of an animal species, of other specimens of the same sort or with the same structure. This third process represents the “unity” of the previous two – as Hegel notes in §346 above – in that the animal “relat[es] to an other which is itself a living individual, and thereby *relat[es] itself to itself in the other*” (§352, emphasis added). To bring together the different pieces of Hegel’s description of animal organisms in a brief statement: For Hegel, animals are causal systems that are teleological structured, both (i) internally or physiologically and (ii) externally or in their relations to the environment, so as to guarantee their own survival or individual preservation as well as (iii) their reproduction or the preservation of the species.

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<sup>83</sup> I cite this passage from Hegel’s discussion of plants only because it strikes me as comparatively clearer than others. Similar statements of this “triad of processes” can be found in the chapter on animal organisms (specifically, §§352 and 352Z). For discussions of the same material in Hegel’s logic, see *Enz*, §§217-222.

## II.2 NORMATIVITY, TELEOLOGY, AND THE *GATTUNGSPROZESS*

Against the background of Hegel's account of animal life, I now summarize Rand's views, to which I oppose my own interpretation of Hegel on the normativity of animal life below. As I noted at the outset of the chapter, Rand maintains that animal organisms are not appropriate subjects of evaluative judgments or "judgments of the concept," according to Hegel. By way of an initial defense of his view, Rand notes that "[w]hen considering *non*-evaluative judgments, [Hegel] routinely uses examples from organic (and also inorganic) nature," whereas "when he turns to consider evaluative judgment . . . he stops using natural examples altogether" (Rand 2015, 74). Rand believes that the pattern he claims to find in Hegel's examples is not fortuitous. He argues that lack or defect (*Mangel*) is a feature of animal organisms generally. All animal organisms undergo some *Mängel* (for example, feelings of thirst and hunger), in response to which they assimilate or take in part of their environment. This process of assimilation, as we have seen above, is one out of the "triad of processes" that makes up animal life as such. Since *Mangel*, as just described, characterizes healthy, well-functioning organisms, it cannot be a sign of badness or normative failure, Rand says. He admits: "It would be obtuse to deny that there is a difference between getting thirsty and losing a limb" (78). Nevertheless, he adds that "whatever that difference may be, it is not relevant here" (Ibid.).<sup>84</sup> As I show below, reflection on the role of the *Gattungsprozess* in animal life reveals that there is a principled difference between, say, a thirsty and a three-legged gazelle, for Hegel, which Rand does not consider but is very relevant here.

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<sup>84</sup> Rand (2015) considers and dismisses two attempts to distinguish between thirst and the loss of a limb: "[Need and damage] may seem to differ causally; it may seem that a dog gets thirsty through its own activity and loses a leg through the imposition of an external force. But a dog can get thirsty by being locked in a hot car, and what happens when it is hit by a truck (or cut by a vet's bone saw) is determined by its body's constitution and its response to trauma. Alternately, need and damage may seem to differ in frequency or statistical likelihood; all dogs get thirsty, but not all get hit by trucks. Yet for the analysis of their form, frequency is wholly irrelevant. What matters is the way in which both damage and need figure in the animal's activity of bringing about its continued individual life, and in this respect they are the same" (78).

As a way of framing my own interpretation of Hegel on the evaluability of animal organisms, let me recall two general points I drew from Hegel's discussion of evaluative judgments at the end of section I, namely: First, that the criterion or standard according to which a thing or object is normatively evaluated is internal to the thing evaluated, in particular, the criterion is to be found in that thing's own kind or concept and, second, that a thing or subject of evaluation can continue to exist as an exemplar of its kind while nevertheless failing to correspond to the concept to which it belongs.

That Hegel thinks that animal organisms are appropriate subjects of normative evaluation is *pace* Rand evident from some of Hegel's examples of judgments of the concept ("an ill body is not in agreement with the concept of life" [*Enz*, §172Z]) as well as from his remarks about normative failure and success in the chapter on animal organisms in the "Philosophy of Nature," where we read for instance:

If one is prepared to admit that the works of man are sometimes defective, it must follow that those of nature are more frequently so . . . In man, the basis of these defects lies in his whims, his caprice and his negligence, e.g. when he introduces painting into music, paints with stones in mosaics, or introduces epic genre into drama. In nature, it is external conditions which stunt the forms of living being . . . (§370Z)<sup>85</sup>

In order to understand the precise sense in which animals are appropriate subjects of evaluative judgments for Hegel, however, I believe that we need to answer two questions (or sets of questions) about animal organisms, corresponding to each of the two points I have just reviewed: First, in judging an organism to be good or bad, sound or defective, in what sense are we judging it on the basis of some internal standard and not an external criterion imposed upon it from without? Second, how is it that an animal organism, as Hegel puts it, can endure "contradiction"

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<sup>85</sup> If Rand was right about defect and animal life, then one would expect this passage to say that nature is not just more frequently but always defective, and that external conditions do not stunt but enable or facilitate "forms of living being" (by offering animal organisms the opportunity to overcome the defect or lack that defines animal life as such).

or “self-negation” in that it can fail to agree “with itself, i.e. with its concept” (*Enz*, §172Z)? That is, what makes it the case that organic nature (unlike its inorganic counterpart) can exist as a member of a kind or fall under a concept with which it fails to correspond? It will likely (and rightly) seem to the reader that the answer to these questions will have to draw on the fact that animals are teleological systems. Both answers, however, are more intricate than what this bare appeal to teleology might suggest, as we will straightaway see.

I tackle the question about internal evaluation first. That the status of animal organisms as subjects of normative evaluation is very closely connected to their teleological structure is suggested by the following consideration: An organism is as it ought to be when its parts function properly, that is, when they benefit or advantage, or serve the ends of, the whole (at a minimum, self-preservation or survival). Indeed, it seems that inorganic nature (a pebble, for example) is not an appropriate subject of normative evaluation precisely because its parts are not teleologically structured, they have no ends or purposes that they can attain or fail to attain. Hegel seems to be expressing something like this thought about teleology and normativity when he writes:

The organism is in a *diseased* state when one of its systems or organs is *stimulated* into conflict with the inorganic potency of the organism. Through this conflict, the system or organ establishes itself in isolation, and by persisting in its particular activity in opposition to the activity of the whole, obstructs the fluidity of this activity, as well as the process by which it pervades all the moments of the whole (*Enz*, §371)

An organism is thus defective (or, more precisely, diseased) when one or more of its parts “obstructs the fluidity of [the] activity [of the whole],” that is, as we might put it, when the functioning of those parts is not conducive but obstructive to the end or ends of the organic whole to which they belong.

Although teleology does certainly play a role in the normative evaluation of animals, the story I have told so far about benefit or conduciveness to the end of biological survival or self-preservation is not by itself sufficient to account for the ways in which we judge animal parts, and accordingly the organic wholes to which they belong, to be well or malfunctioning, normatively successful or defective. In particular, the fact of benefit by itself cannot account for the sense in which the evaluation of animals is internal or proceeds in accordance with those animals' own concept. To realize that the account of the normativity of animal life provided up to this point, based solely on the idea of benefit or advantage, must be incomplete, consider the question: Why is a three-legged gazelle (but not a four-legged gazelle that lacks wings) defective? The answer cannot rely on benefit or conduciveness to the biological survival or self-preservation, for the possession of wings might well, let us imagine, be more beneficial or help gazelles more efficiently attain the end of self-preservation than any number of legs, three or four, in the absence of wings. For example, we might imagine that a winged gazelle would more quickly and safely escape predators than any of its (three- or four-)legged but wingless counterparts.

One noteworthy feature of Hegel's remarks about the normativity of animal life in "The Animal Organism" chapter is that they occur more specifically in the context of his discussion of the *Gattungsprozess*. By reflecting now more closely on the relation between teleology, on the one hand, and membership in a kind via reproduction, on the other, we can understand how exactly the evaluation of organisms is internal or proceeds by comparing an object with its own concept (and is not a matter of judging it in accordance with some external, general standard). As we have seen, an animal is characterized by having parts that are structured in a purposive or end-directed way. To return to a previous example: The function or causal role of a human liver is to cleanse blood in order to help guarantee the survival of the organic whole of which it is part.

A part of some specific organism, this particular human liver for example, owes its function or causal role to the role that parts of that sort play within the kind or species as a whole. If human livers in general did not serve the role of cleansing blood, and in this way contributed to the biological survival of the species or kind, specimens or exemplars of that kind would not have managed to survive and reproduce to give rise to other exemplars with similarly functioning parts (human livers). In short, the existence of specific organisms endowed with parts with a certain function or purpose depends on the existence of prior organisms with similarly functioning parts and, more generally, of a species, kind or “concept” of which the particular organisms are exemplars.<sup>86</sup>

Against the background of the connection between the teleological structure of particular organisms and their membership in a kind via reproduction, we can now return to the gazelle example above. What is it, if not benefit or advantage alone, that makes a three-legged yet not a four-legged but wingless gazelle defective? And how is the verdict about these two gazelles the upshot of an internal evaluation of them, of a comparison of each of them with some internal standard? The answer is that the four legs (unlike the hypothesized wings) of any particular gazelle owe their existence and causal role to the existence of parts with that same role in other, prior gazelles, and ultimately and more generally, in the species or kind to which that particular gazelle specimen belongs. So a three-legged gazelle (but not a four-legged gazelle that lacks wings) is defective in that it lacks a feature without which its species or kind would not have been able to survive and reproduce to give rise to that specific three-legged gazelle. In other words, our three-legged gazelle specimen is defective, or not as it ought to be, in that it fails to exhibit a feature without which its kind or species (and so also our limp gazelle) would not have survived at all. The evaluation of animal organisms is internal in that it is thus the features or

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<sup>86</sup> On the connection between teleology and the *Gattungsprozess*, see Kreines (2013), 138 and (2015), 96.

characteristics of each animal kind or species that set the standard or criterion by which we judge specimens of that very kind to be successful or defective. The features or, as Hegel puts it, the “determinations” of the kind or “concept” constitute a rule or “ought” against which animal specimens are measured.<sup>87</sup>

Let us now turn, more briefly to the issue of contradictory existence. How is an existence in disagreement with itself so much as possible? More precisely, how can organisms exist as exemplars of a kind with which they do not correspond? Inorganic nature is incapable of this feat. A stone, for example, cannot fail to correspond to its concept or kind (without ceasing to exist as a specimen of its kind altogether), it “is unable to survive chemical decomposition” (§371Z).

In addressing this second question, the connection between the teleological structure of a particular organism and the *Gattungsprozess* (that is, membership in a species via reproduction) proves again to be helpful. Consider an instance of gold. Its concept or kind consists in a certain chemical structure. If an alleged piece of gold does not correspond to its concept, or if it has a chemical structure other than that of gold, then the piece of metal in question is not gold at all. In §382Z of the “Philosophy of Spirit,” we find: “What belongs to external nature is destroyed by contradiction; if, for example, gold were given a different specific gravity from what it has, it would have to perish as gold.” There is thus no defective gold. By contrast, an animal organism can be defective (in that it has a malfunctioning liver, say), and so fail to correspond to its concept, while nevertheless continuing to be a specimen of that concept or kind. What explains this difference between inorganic and organic nature? The answer, I think, is this: An animal

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<sup>87</sup> In §370Z of the “Philosophy of Nature,” we read: “The general determinations must be made to rule . . . and the natural forms compared with them. If the natural forms do not tally with this rule, but exhibit certain correspondences, agreeing with it in one respect but not in another, then it is not the rule, the determinateness of the genus or class etc. which has to be altered. The rule does not have to conform to these existences, they ought to conform to the determinateness, and this actuality exhibits deficiency in so far as it fails to conform.”

organism with a malfunctioning liver is still an organism of its kind in that it exists, and its parts exist and have (or lack) certain specific functions, on account of its being the product of organisms of the same kind or species, a species that could not have survived and reproduced without its parts fulfilling certain causal roles (for example, without livers cleansing the organisms' blood).<sup>88</sup>

With the answer to the two questions I posed above, about internal evaluation and contradictory existence, on the table, I now situate my reading with respect to Rand's interpretive position. Rand claims that there is no way, within the context of Hegel's "Philosophy of Nature," to distinguish between defects like the feeling of thirst and the absence of a limb (in a limbed species). But in the light of our foregoing discussion in this subsection, we should be able to see that there is such a way. The species-specific ways in which organisms assimilate the environment to overcome *Mängel* like thirst are part of what characterizes the kind or species in question and help guarantee the species' survival and reproduction. Not so in the case of a missing limb. The absence of a limb will not figure in the description of that creature's concept or kind and is not conducive but obstructive to the survival and reproduction of the species. More specifically, as I have said, a three-legged gazelle is defective in that it lacks a feature without which its kind would not have been able to survive, reproduce, and so give rise to that three-legged specimen. A healthy, four-legged gazelle, whether thirsty or not, is normatively sound in that it lacks no such features.

Having used my discussion of the *Gattungsprozess* and normativity to respond to Rand's interpretation, I close my treatment of the evaluability of animal life. In Chapter Five, I turn my

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<sup>88</sup> A question that arises in this vicinity is: How far can a thing's failure to correspond to its concept extend before it stops belonging to that concept altogether? That is, how defective can an organism be before it stops counting as an instance of its kind? I do not know of a passage in which Hegel answers this question in a clear and succinct way. Given our own discussion in this section, however, I suggest that his answer would proceed roughly along the following lines: An organism (no matter how defective or malfunctioning) counts as a member of its kind so long as it is brought about as the result of the reproduction of other members of the species.

attention to the moral evaluation of human beings. In doing so, I *expand* or *extend* my treatment of Hegel's account of the normativity of animal life to the case of distinctively human features and behavior. In other words, I do not take the shift to human life, for Hegel, to mark the beginning of an altogether different or separate topic with respect to the one that has occupied us in this chapter. Accordingly, and notwithstanding the differences between us and lower animals, one of the challenges of my next chapter will be to explain the moral evaluation of human beings on Hegel's behalf with the help of the ideas of teleology and the *Gattungsprozess*, as I have done with the normativity of animal life in this chapter.

## 5

### THE ESSENTIALIST THESIS II:

#### MORAL NORMATIVITY AND FREEDOM

In this final chapter, I expand or extend Hegel's theory of normativity from the normative evaluation of animal organisms generally to the moral evaluation of human features and behavior in particular. This expansion or extension represents the second of my two-step defense of the normative thesis, the thesis that moral requirements are grounded in our essence or nature, that is, in our freedom. Together with my discussion of the descriptive thesis (in Chapters Two and Three), my discussion of Hegel on moral evaluation in this chapter completes my articulation and defense of the interpretive claim that Hegel is an ethical naturalist.

That Hegel's theory of normativity can be applied to the human, moral case is clear from one of the examples he offers in his discussion of the "judgments of the concept" in the *Science of Logic*, namely, "This action is good." In the *Encyclopedia*, he is more explicit still: "A bad man," we read, "is one who is untrue, one who does not behave in accord with his concept" (§213Z). As these examples indicate, in Hegel's view, human behavior is an appropriate subject of normative (specifically, moral) evaluation according to some internal standard. Less clear, however, is *how* Hegel's theory can be applied to the human case. How exactly can Hegel's theory of normativity be extended from the subhuman, non-moral case to the human, moral case? How, more specifically, can Hegel maintain that moral requirements are grounded in our essence or nature, given that we humans are seemingly free to step back from or call into question any features that purportedly belong to our nature? Are we not free, in other words, to disown any

features that allegedly make up our nature and to therefore escape the moral requirements *ex hypothesi* grounded in them? In section I of this chapter, I pose and answer these questions on Hegel's behalf, thus removing one major obstacle to the defense of the essentialist thesis. I argue that, by Hegel's lights, attempts to skeptically call into question or otherwise escape the dictates of morality by exercising our freedom are self-undermining. Inasmuch as such attempts are an exercise of our freedom, they fall within its jurisdiction. Attempts to freely unbind oneself from norms grounded in our essence or nature, that is, in our freedom, are thus themselves subject to those very norms. I substantiate the attribution of this answer to Hegel by considering his discussion of two attempts to escape the requirements of freedom: the cases of suicide and consenting to be a slave.

Having removed one worry blocking the way to the espousal of the essentialist thesis in section I, I go on, in section II, to fill in some of the details of Hegel's account of moral normativity. As I have noted, I read that account as an extension or continuation of Hegel's account of the normativity of animal life. I thus spell out the role that the key elements in Hegel's explanation of the normativity of animal life, namely, teleology and reproduction, play for him in the moral evaluation of human behavior. I end by addressing a further objection to which the parallel between the subhuman and the human cases gives rise, namely, the objection that the parallel condemns Hegel to a kind of moral conservatism. I argue that the objection results from focusing on one of the processes that characterize animal life, the *Gattungsprozess*, to the detriment of the process of assimilation and the way in which the assimilation of the environment, in the case of us humans, is mediated by habitual liberation and so reflection.

Before beginning, I should be explicit about the scope of my aims in this chapter. Attempts, Hegelian or otherwise, to ground morality in features that are essential to, or constitutive of, human nature, agency or pure practical reason, as the case may be, are in general

faced with two major tasks: (1) To identify the essential or constitutive features (of action, human nature, etc.), and (2) to derive specific moral requirements from such features. I do not in this chapter undertake task (2), the task of deriving specific moral requirements from our essence as Hegel understands it, that is, from our freedom. I take Hegel himself to be carrying out this task in the *Philosophy of Right* when he inquires into the conditions under which the concept of freedom can be fully realized or actualized.<sup>89</sup> The laws and institutions that jointly embody these freedom-enabling conditions make up Hegel's vision of a rational, well-ordered society. These conditions also furnish the content of our moral obligations, inasmuch as each of us is morally required to act only in ways that respect and promote our and others' freedom. That the formulation I have just provided of Hegel's main question in the *Philosophy of Right* is accurate can be appreciated by recalling Hegel's own gloss on his project in the Introduction to that text. Hegel there tells us that he aims to "develop the idea [of right] . . . out of its concept" (§2).<sup>90</sup> By "right" Hegel just means whatever institutions, practices, laws, and behavior are in conformity with freedom.<sup>91</sup> By the "idea" of freedom, or right, Hegel means the concept of freedom together with its existence, actualization or, somewhat more plainly put, the conditions for its realization.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> This formulation needs to be qualified, since Hegel investigates the conditions for the realization of not one but three interrelated concepts of practical freedom, corresponding to each of the three main parts of the *Philosophy of Right*: the freedom of personhood or personality, the freedom of moral subjectivity, and what he sometimes calls "substantial" freedom or the freedom enjoyed by the members of (modern) ethical life. For a discussion of these three varieties of Hegelian practical freedom, see Neuhouser (2000) and (2018).

<sup>90</sup> See also *PR*, §31, where Hegel tells us that he is following the method "whereby the concept . . . develops out of itself." In the following paragraph he adds: "The *determinations* in the development of the concept are on the one hand themselves concepts, but on the other hand, since the concept is essentially idea, they have the form of existence [*Dasein*]" (*PR*, §32)

<sup>91</sup> "The idea of right is freedom . . ." (*PR*, §1Z), we read. Later, Hegel writes: "Right is therefore in general freedom, as idea" (§29).

<sup>92</sup> Hegel opens the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* by writing: "The subject-matter of the *philosophical science of right* is the *idea* of right – the concept of right and its actualization" (§1). Towards the end of the introduction, Hegel reminds us: "*Right* is any existence in general which is the *existence* of the *free will*" (§29). Accordingly, he describes "the system of right" as "the realm of actualized freedom" (§4).

Although I will discuss specific parts of it as I proceed, my objective in this chapter is not to work through the details of the story to which I have just alluded, as Hegel tells it in the *Philosophy of Right*. I do not, that is, aim to spell out what specific requirements might be derived by asking about the “existence” or conditions (social institutions and laws) under which freedom can be fully realized. Having already identified our nature or essence, on Hegel’s construal, as freedom, my aims in this chapter are, more modestly, to defend the normative thesis from various objections, and to spell out how moral evaluation is, for Hegel, of a piece with the non-moral, normative evaluation of animal life generally. I hope this chapter can thereby provide a sufficient textual defense of the normative thesis, even if it admittedly falls short of providing an exhaustive articulation of such a thesis.

## **SECTION I: A MORAL “OUGHT” FROM AN “IS”?**

### **I.1 THE UNBINDING OBJECTION**

According to Hegel’s general account of evaluative (including therefore moral) judgments, a thing or object is good or bad, sound or defective, inasmuch as it exhibits all or lacks some of the features that comprise the concept under which the object falls. In this section, I raise and respond on Hegel’s behalf to one objection against the attempt to extend his theory of normativity, as presented in the previous chapter, from the subhuman, non-moral to the human, moral case. The objection I have in mind can be put succinctly in the form of the following question: How can a moral “ought” be grounded in an “is,” that is, in features that characterize our human essence or nature?<sup>93</sup> In order to bring out the objection contained in this question, I specify in this subsection the way in which Hegel’s theory of normativity, as it applies to animal life, amounts to a case of grounding an “ought” in an “is.” I then characterize the shift from the

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<sup>93</sup> This objection is obviously unrelated to the realizability objection in Chapter One, which I sometimes formulated as the Hegelian charge that the Kantian moral “ought” can never become an “is.”

subhuman to the human case in a way that is supposed to make trouble for attempts to ground distinctively moral “oughts” in an “is,” that is to say, in some features of our nature or essence. In the next subsection, I offer a response to this objection and provide textual support for the interpretive claim that that is the response Hegel would have offered, had he been confronted with the objection as I pose it here. Indeed, the unbinding objection – it bears underscoring – is not one that Hegel himself raises. But it is an objection that has been posed to other, non-Hegelian versions of the essentialist thesis. Addressing the unbinding objection with the help of resources that Hegel’s text does provide thus serves to render his version of the essentialist thesis philosophically more palatable than it might otherwise initially appear to be.

First, then, how does Hegel’s account of the normativity of animal life represent a way of grounding an “ought” in an “is”? Such an account grounds an “ought” in an “is” insofar as it is the features of an animal specimen’s kind, nature or essence that serve as a standard or criterion in judging a specimen with that nature to be or not to be as it ought to. As we saw Hegel write in our discussion of the “judgments of the concept” in the previous chapter: “In [the] judgment [of the concept,] the concept is laid down as the basis [*ist zugrunde gelegt*] . . . [I]t is an *ought* to which the reality may or may not be adequate” (WL, 344/657). Thus, for instance, because it is a feature of gazelle nature to have four legs, we can formulate the general judgment “Gazelles ought to have four legs” and, using this judgment as a rule or normative standard, we can correspondingly deem a three-legged gazelle specimen defective.

Even if an interlocutor accepts that a non-moral “ought” can be grounded in an “is” in the manner just described, that same interlocutor might doubt that that model of normative evaluation can be extended to a specifically moral “ought.” What occurs in the shift from the non-moral, subhuman to the moral, human case to awaken such doubts? The worry seems to go

roughly as follows.<sup>94</sup> As free beings, we humans are allegedly capable of stepping back from or disowning any features that make up our nature or essence. For example, assume for the sake of argument that humans essentially or by nature seek their own happiness. Because we have free wills, we can step back or escape that feature of our nature or essence. Similarly, the complaint continues, any moral requirements or “oughts,” *ex hypothesi* grounded in human nature and so in an “is,” are requirements from which we can free ourselves or cease to be bound. An explanation of the binding force or obligatoriness of moral requirements thus cannot go by way of an appeal to human nature, to our essence or concept. Moral requirements cannot be grounded in our nature, as the normative thesis holds, for our freedom appears to make it possible for us to step back from or disown any candidate features of our nature or essence. Because it turns on the alleged possibility of our disowning any features that make up our essence, and so on our ceasing to be bound by the requirements grounded in that essence, I refer to the objection as the “unbinding objection.”

Before responding to this objection on Hegel’s behalf, it is worth distinguishing explicitly between two general ways of ceasing to be bound by moral requirements, (1) unfreely and (2) freely. (1) One ceases to be bound by the requirements of morality *unfreely* if one’s behavior is determined by something “other” or outside one’s will. One is unfree and so no longer subject to the requirements of morality, for example, if external causes, like the strike of a lightning bolt, result in the momentary or permanent loss of our rational capacities. Under this first category, we can also include behaviors that amount to cases of deed but not action, in Hegel’s technical sense, because they are done from ignorance not resulting from negligence or otherwise

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<sup>94</sup> See e.g. McDowell (1998), Chapter 9, especially 167-173, for a formulation of a complaint along these lines. I should note, however, that the unbinding objection seems to me to be independent of how we conceive of human nature or essence, biologically (as McDowell’s formulation appears to assume) or otherwise. For another formulation of this kind of worry, see also Enoch (2006).

imputable to the agent.<sup>95</sup> Because such behaviors are done from ignorance, they are outside of the agent's control and are, therefore, not behaviors for which she can be held morally responsible. (2) A *prima facie* case of *freely* ceasing to be bound by the requirements of morality is vicious action based on skeptical doubts about morality. The skeptic steps back, calls into question such requirements and voluntarily acts in ways that flout them. Another plausible case of freely ceasing to be subject to moral requirements is suicide. Indeed, by freely or voluntarily taking one's own life, one arguably ceases to be bound by the rules of the moral game or any other game. One final example within this category might be the free decision to consent to be a slave. By consenting to be a slave, one allows one's behavior to be determined or dictated by one's master, in which case one can presumably no longer be (fully) blamed or praised for that behavior.<sup>96</sup>

The point I wish to extract from the distinction I have just drawn, between freely and unfreely ceasing to be bound by moral requirements, is the following: Neither defenders nor critics of the normative thesis dispute that it is possible to cease to be bound by moral requirements. One can be struck by lightning, lose consciousness and thus exit the moral game. In other words, it is no part of the view that morality is grounded in our essence or nature that it is thereby impossible to cease to be subject to moral requirements. The bone of contention between defenders of the normative thesis (including Hegel on my reading) and proponents of the unbinding objection is whether it is possible to step back from and *freely* cease to be subject to moral requirements. I will now argue on Hegel's behalf that such a maneuver is self-

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<sup>95</sup> Hegel defines a deed (*Tat*) as a physical event or occurrence that an agent brings about or for which she is causally (but not morally) responsible. An action (*Handlung*) is that part of the deed that the agent does on purpose and for which she is morally responsible. The agent's purpose are those consequences which the agent knew (or should have known) were included in her deed. See *PR*, §115-117.

<sup>96</sup> I say "prima facie," "plausible" and "arguably" because I am going to suggest on Hegel's behalf that one cannot in fact freely escape or cease to be bound by moral requirements.

undermining. By Hegel's lights, it is not in fact possible to freely cease to be subject to the requirements of morality.

## I.2 HEGEL'S RESPONSE: SUICIDE AND SLAVERY

According to the unbinding objection, moral "oughts" cannot be grounded in an "is," in a feature of our nature or essence. Any such candidate feature is a feature that, as free beings, we can call into question, from which we can step back or that we can disown. What might we say on Hegel's behalf in response to this sort of objection? We can begin to alleviate the force of the objection by recalling how, for Hegel, our essence or concept is freedom. This essential freedom is not a feature from which we can step back or escape. In a passage we have already had occasion to discuss, Hegel tells us that the "essence" of spirit is "freedom from and within the natural" (*VPGI827/28*, 19/71). And again, at the outset of the *Encyclopedia* version of his "Philosophy of Spirit," Hegel claims that "formally the essence of spirit is freedom" (§382). Turning to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes that what he sometimes calls "practical spirit" or the will (and not "the *realm of spirit* in general") is in this context the "precise location and point of departure of right" (§4). Of the connection between freedom and practical spirit or the will, he then goes on to say:

The freedom of the will can best be explained by reference to physical nature. For freedom is just as much a basic determination of the will as weight is a basic determination of bodies. If matter is described as heavy, one might think that this predicate is merely contingent; but this is not so, for nothing in matter is weightless: on the contrary, matter is weight itself. Heaviness constitutes the body and is the body. It is just the same with freedom and the will, for that which is free is the will. Will without freedom is an empty word (§4Z)

On Hegel's understanding, the claim that moral requirements are grounded in our essence or nature is therefore tantamount to the claim that moral requirements are grounded in our freedom.

More precisely, as I noted above in describing Hegel's project in the *Philosophy of Right*, moral requirements are derived for him by considering the conditions under which freedom can be fully realized or actualized.

How, exactly, does identifying our essence with freedom help Hegel with the unbinding objection? The objection begins by characterizing attempts to step back and call into question features of our nature or essence as exercises of freedom. But if our nature or essence lies in our freedom, as Hegel has it, then the stepping back just is an exercise of the nature or essence from which one is allegedly stepping back. On Hegel's account, in other words, in stepping back from our essence or nature, we are exercising our freedom in order to allegedly step back or escape from our freedom; in so stepping back, therefore, we remain under the jurisdiction of (and so subject to the norms derivable from) our freedom. Thus, *pace* the proponents of the unbinding objection, it is not in fact possible to freely escape the requirements of morality by somehow stepping back from our nature or essence – not, at any rate, if we conceive of our nature or essence in terms of freedom.

Attempts to freely unbind oneself from the requirements of freedom are thus self-undermining or “contradictory,” as Hegel sometimes writes. Of course, this contradictoriness does not mean that there can be no exercises of practical freedom that flout the requirements of morality. The amoralist can continue living a life of moral depravation. And some people's lives may be so unbearable that they commit suicide. But neither the amoralist nor the person who commits suicide escape morality or moral blame. Inasmuch as they act freely, they remain subject to the requirements of morality, understood as requirements of freedom.<sup>97</sup> In the remainder of this section, I argue that the response to the unbinding objection I have just sketched is (or would be) Hegel's own. I do so by considering some of Hegel's remarks about

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<sup>97</sup> See Ferrero (2009) for a similar response to the version of the unbinding objection raised by Enoch (2006).

suicide and slavery. Since Hegel's remarks about suicide are somewhat clearer than those about slavery, it is with the former case that I begin.

I earlier suggested that suicide is a *prima facie* example of freely ceasing to be subject to the requirements of morality. Indeed, if someone freely chooses to end their life, then that someone is henceforth no longer subject to the rules of the moral (or any other) game. A corpse is not a moral subject. And that Hegel considers the act of suicide to be an exercise of freedom is evident from his mention of it in order to illustrate the extent of human freedom. In the opening paragraphs of the *Philosophy of Right*, we read: "It is inherent in [the] element of the will that I am able to free myself from everything, to renounce all ends, and to abstract from everything. The human being alone is able to abandon all things, even his own life: he can commit suicide" (§5Z). Nonetheless, for Hegel, suicide is not a way of freely ceasing to be subject to the requirements of morality. Suicide, on Hegel's view, is morally impermissible and thus subject to those requirements. Moreover, Hegel's justification of the wrongfulness of suicide takes exactly the shape we would expect, given the response to the unbinding objection that I have proposed on his behalf. Hegel writes:

[H]ave I a right to commit suicide? The answer will be that, as *this* individual, I am not master of my life, for the comprehensive totality of activity, i.e. life, is not something external to personality, which is itself immediately *this*. Thus, it is a contradiction to speak of a person's right over his life, for this would mean that a person had a right over himself. But he has no such right . . . (§70Z)<sup>98</sup>

As I read this passage, "it is a contradiction to speak of a person's right over his life" because life is a condition of being free and so bearing rights at all, for Hegel. Suicide, accordingly, consists in an exercise of freedom whereby an agent gives up, or wills away, a condition of her exercising

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<sup>98</sup> In the main paragraph to which this *Zusatz* belongs, Hegel similarly writes: "The disposal or sacrifice of life is . . . the opposite of the existence [*Dasein*] of this personality. I have therefore no right whatsoever to dispose of my life" (*PR*, §70).

her freedom or willing (and so committing suicide) in the first place. More precisely, life is a condition, part of or “not something external to” personhood or personal freedom, that is, a capacity to choose as one pleases (so long as one does not thereby undermine one’s capacity to choose).<sup>99</sup>

Hegel’s scattered comments on slavery are more extensive and arguably more controversial than his brief remarks about suicide. I do not intend in what follows to provide a defense of Hegel’s views on slavery generally. I intend only to put to use Hegel’s comments on slavery to further support the interpretive claim that my foregoing response to the unbinding objection is (or would be) Hegel’s own. According to that response, attempts to freely cease to be subject to the requirements of freedom (for example, by consenting to be a slave) fail inasmuch as they presuppose the feature of our nature or essence that they purportedly disown.

The first thing to note in connection with Hegel’s remarks is that he is adamant in his condemnation of the institution of slavery, since it violates the conditions under which each of us can be fully free. Thus, Hegel tells us, for example, that “the slave has an absolute right to free himself” (§66Z), that is, to secure the conditions under which he can be fully free. Earlier we similarly read: “If we hold firmly to the view that the human being in and for himself is free, we thereby condemn slavery” (§57Z). Hegel goes on to add, however, that to the extent that slaves either consent to or continue to accept their condition as slaves, avowedly or tacitly, they are morally responsible for that condition.

[I]f someone is a slave, his own will is responsible, just as the responsibility lies with the will of a people if that people is subjugated. Thus the wrong of slavery is the fault not only of those who enslave or subjugate people, but of the slaves and the subjugated themselves (§57Z)

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<sup>99</sup> That that is roughly Hegel’s conception of personal freedom is supported, for example, by his description of the wills of persons entering into relations of contract in “Abstract Right” as “arbitrary wills.” See especially *PR*, §§75 and 75Z.

Once again, Hegel appears to locate the wrongfulness of consenting to enter into a condition of slavery in its contradictoriness. In granting that consent, the slave disowns a feature of his essence or concept as human, namely, his freedom – a feature that the consent, to the extent that it is an exercise of freedom, nevertheless presupposes. There is, as Hegel himself puts it, a “contradiction inherent in handing over to others my capacity for right” (§68A), for example, by consenting to slavery.

By committing suicide, one ceases to play, and be subject to the rules of, the moral game. Similarly, in consenting to be a slave, one no longer has any rights or duties, for one is henceforth no longer free.<sup>100</sup> But this claim about the absence of slavish rights and duties does not dispel the general point I have here been pressing, namely, that voluntarily exiting our condition as free beings is itself an exercise of freedom and thus remains under its jurisdiction.

## SECTION II: FREEDOM AND SOCIAL ORGANISMS

### II.1 FREEDOM AND TELEOLOGY

Our discussion in the previous section helps lend some philosophical plausibility to the Hegelian thesis that moral requirements are grounded or, as I have also put it, have their source in our nature or essence. That discussion also helps precisify the grounding relation to which the formulation of the thesis alludes. Moral norms are grounded in our essence or nature in the following sense: Simply by exercising the freedom they enjoy by nature or essentially, human

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<sup>100</sup> In §261Z of the *Philosophy of Right*, we read: “[T]here is a single principle for both duty and right, namely the personal freedom of human beings. Consequently, slaves have no duties because they have no rights, and vice versa.” On the absence of slavish rights and duties, see also *PR*, §§155 and 155Z. In the remark to §21 of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes: “The slave does not know his essence, his infinity and freedom; he does not know himself as an essence – he does not know himself as such, for he does not *think* himself.” I take this passage to provide an explanation as to why the slave consents to his slavish condition. It is because somehow he “does not know his . . . freedom” (perhaps due to his upbringing or other social circumstances) that the slave could ever consent to enter into his slavish condition.

beings are thereby committed to the moral norms derivable from the concept of freedom of which they are bearers. One implication of the essentialist thesis, as I have just glossed it, is that the question whether we ought to do what we are morally required to do, or whether our moral requirements are really justified, is moot. For in order to meaningfully pose the question, we would need to call into question or be able to escape those requirements. But if the requirements really are grounded in or derived from our freedom, then we are subject to them just by being the essentially free creatures that we are, and so no possibility of escape is available. Moral requirements, inasmuch as they are grounded in our essence or nature, are inescapable or unavoidable.<sup>101</sup>

As I indicated toward the start of this chapter, moral requirements are derived for Hegel by considering the conditions (social institutions and laws) under which our essence can be fully realized. In this section, I articulate and defend the claim that Hegel's view of moral normativity is of a piece with (more precisely, an expansion or extension of) his account of the normative evaluation of animal organisms, which as we saw in the previous chapter turns on the ideas of teleological organization and membership in a species via reproduction. The questions to which I now direct my attention are thus: What role do teleology and reproduction play in Hegel's account of social institutions and the moral evaluation of human features and behavior? Is the role that those ideas play in the evaluation of social members and institutions similar to the role they play in the case of animal life? If so, how far do the similarities go?

Before turning to the evaluation of social members and institutions, I summarily recapitulate the animal case. Animal organisms, for Hegel, are systems whose parts and whole causally determine one another. Again, "[animal life] is both end and means" (*Enz*, §352Z). The animal organism as a whole is a means to the proper functioning of its parts, which are in turn a

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<sup>101</sup> For discussion of these issues (not in the context of Hegel scholarship) see again Ferrero (2009) and also Rosati (2003).

means to or causally responsible for the maintenance of the whole. Unlike the parts of inorganic nature, then, the parts of animal organisms are endowed with ends or purposes, on account of which they (and by extension the whole to which they belong) can be judged normatively sound or defective. Animal parts, as well as the corresponding whole, are sound or defective, in particular, depending on whether they do or do not contribute to the maintenance of the whole. But as I attempted to illustrate in the previous chapter with my discussion of the three-legged versus the four-legged but wingless gazelles, this contribution or benefit does not suffice to explain the evaluability of animal organisms according to an internal standard. As I read Hegel, an animal organism is sound or defective just in case it exhibits all or lacks some features out of a very specific set of features, namely, those without which its species or kind would not have been able to reproduce and so give rise to the animal organism under evaluation.

The first thing to note, if we now move from the non-moral, animal case to the moral, human case, is that we will be considering wholes that are supra-individual social entities and parts that are individual human beings (and not sub-individual bodily parts and organs). That these wholes and parts are reciprocally determined, and so mirror the teleological organization of other living things, is flagged at the very beginning of Hegel's treatment of the three basic social institutions that make up "Ethical Life," when he writes: "Ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*] is the idea of freedom as the *living good*" (*PR*, §142, emphasis modified). I begin by outlining the teleological structure that Hegel discovers in each of the three institutions he considers: the family, civil society, and the state.<sup>102</sup> I then spell out the role that teleology and reproduction play in his account of the normative (moral) evaluation of human behavior.

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<sup>102</sup> Hegel argues in addition that the state, on the one hand, and the family and civil society, on the other, are also reciprocally determined. (See *PR*, §260Z.) I set aside the relation of the three social institutions here and review only the teleological structure internal to each institution considered separately.

How are the parts and whole of each of these institutions teleologically structured, that is, reciprocally determined, “interpenetrating,” or “interdependent,” as Hegel writes? The nuclear family can survive thanks to the various functions carried out by its component parts: spouses, parents, children, siblings. The social whole is thus dependent on its parts. In turn, each of the parts can only carry out its function (as a son and brother, for example) within the context of the whole or, more specifically, in self-conscious relation to the rest of the parts (parents and sister). Hegel remarks on the character of this dependence of the parts on the whole when he writes that the “disposition [appropriate to the family] is to have self-consciousness of one’s individuality *within this unity* . . . [O]ne is present in [this unity] not as an independent person [*eine Person für sich*] but as a member” (*PR*, §158).

Like the family, civil society (or, to be precise, the system of production and exchange that makes up one part of civil society) is similarly a “system of all-round interdependence” (*PR*, §183), within which “[particularity and universality] are bound up and conditioned by each other” (§184Z). Unlike family members, however, particular economic agents do not (or need not) regard their dependence on the whole or universal as anything more than instrumentally useful for the pursuit of their own self-interested ends. Or as Hegel describes economic agents: “In civil society, each individual is his own end, and all else means nothing to him. But he cannot accomplish the full extent of his ends without reference to others; these others are therefore a means to the end of the particular” (*PR*, §182Z). Particularity in the context of civil society, then, is “conditioned by” the universal in the sense that particular economic agents cannot satisfy their needs without relying on others, with whom they engage in a process of exchange, and ultimately on the operation of the economic system as a whole. Because that system is only kept in operation by the productive activity of the particular economic agents, however, the universal is also “conditioned by” the particular.

Finally, in his discussion of the state, Hegel writes that the rationality of social institutions consists in “the unity and interpenetration of universality and individuality” (*PR*, §258A). Unlike the familial bonds of love, the universal or the state depends on its individual members in the sense that the laws of the state are preserved and secured through the *rational* affirmation of its citizens, who regard those laws as just or good. “[T]he universal does not attain validity or fulfillment without the interest, knowledge, and volition of the particular,” Hegel writes (*PR*, §260). At the same time, individual citizens depend on the state or universal for (i) the unobstructed pursuit of their own ends and (ii) their identity as citizens or members of a people. Hegel puts (i) by saying that “individuals do not live as private persons . . . without at the same time directing their will to the universal end” (§260). I take Hegel to have (ii) in mind when he writes that individuals should “knowingly and willingly acknowledge this universal interest . . . as their own *substantial spirit*, and *actively pursue* it as their *ultimate end*” (§260) (and not merely as a means to some further, self-interested end).

In a way analogous to the case of mere animal life, the teleological structure of the family, civil society, and the state, which I have just outlined, accounts in part for their normative evaluability as well as that of their members. That is, a social member qualifies as normatively (morally) sound or defective inasmuch as she does or does not fulfill certain functions that are required for the preservation of the social wholes of which she is part. For example, if a father of a Hegelian family does not *inter alia* supply the resources for his children to be self-sufficient by the age they reach maturity, then he is defective qua member of that institution. If sufficient members malfunction, then the social institution as a whole is rendered diseased or defective. That in fulfilling her function within these institutions a social member is realizing her own and helping others realize their freedom, as opposed to promoting some other purpose, is perhaps easiest to appreciate in the case of the state. By helping to preserve and secure the laws of a just

state through her rational affirmation, a social member realizes her own freedom in that she is thereby able to pursue her ends unobstructed or uncoerced by others. Because she affirms these laws as her own, that is, because she “bears spiritual witness to them as to [her] own essence” (*PR*, §147) or “knowingly and willingly acknowledges [that] universal interest as her own substantial spirit” (*PR*, §260), the individual social member ceases to be subject to those laws as to a foreign power or “other,” thus further realizing her freedom as absence of external domination. In this way, as Hegel puts it, “[the state] immediately ceases to be an other for [her], and in [her] consciousness of this, [she is] free” (*PR*, §268).

## II.2 FREEDOM AND REPRODUCTION

If the institutions of “Ethical Life” are to qualify as social organisms, as Hegel suggests, then in addition to the part-whole teleological structure that they exhibit, these institutions must also reproduce themselves. Indeed, Hegel at the very least gestures at this latter feature of social institutions when, in a remark I have quoted above from §142 of the *Philosophy of Right*, he compares the living and the ethical. Elsewhere he is more explicit. Speaking specifically of the state, Hegel notes that it “*continually produce[s]* [the concept of the rational will]” or, more simply, freedom “as [its] result” (*Enz*, §539, emphasis added). I now turn to reproduction and its role in the evaluation of social institutions and their parts.

What we have said so far about the institutions of “Ethical Life” allows us to concisely describe some of the ways in which Hegel’s three main social institutions reproduce themselves. The family reproduces itself by bringing up its children, who once they become relatively self-sufficient exit the family home and form their own, new families. As for civil society, by supplying the material goods required for the survival of its participants, on whose activity it depends, the economic system as a whole ensures its own reproduction. Finally, because the laws

of a just state can be rationally affirmed by its members, the state enjoys a stability and ongoing existence that it would not if its laws were continuously opposed and needed to be constantly enforced.<sup>103</sup>

Having discussed the evaluative role of the teleological organization of social institutions, let us now ask: What role does the self-reproducing character of social institutions play in the evaluation of the individuals that are part of the institutions as well as of the institutions themselves? And how, if at all, does that role mirror the role of reproduction in the evaluation of mere animal organisms? How, more specifically, does the reproduction of the social wholes help explain the sense in which the evaluation of individual social members is internal or proceeds in accordance with criteria to which the individual under evaluation is (at least implicitly) committed? Analogously to the relation that we saw holds between kind and specimen in the case of the normative evaluation of animal life, the freedom-realizing institutions of “Ethical Life” provide the conditions without which social specimens could not be born and formed to become the free individuals (with particular institutional roles and identities) that they turn out to be. A social member has the existence and institutional roles that she has because of the prior, ongoing existence of social institutions, with specialized roles or functions, that have produced, nurtured and initiated her and other social members into some of those roles. Inasmuch as social members flout the norms that govern the freedom-procuring practices and institutions of their social world, they exhibit a form of internal failure or defect. For absent their participation in,

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<sup>103</sup> There are more ways in which these social institutions can reproduce themselves than the ones I have just mentioned. A state can reproduce itself, as I have just claimed, in the sense that it guarantees its own stability or ongoing existence by procuring the rational assent of its current citizens. But a state can further reproduce itself by securing the political conditions that are partly responsible for new citizens to come into the world. (This second way in which the state reproduces itself makes it clear that the good functioning of one institution depends on that of another institution and vice versa, as Hegel suggests in §260Z of the *Philosophy of Right*.) Finally, a state can reproduce itself by having some of its citizens found a new state, a possibility Hegel considers in his discussion of colonialism.

and affirmation of, the institutions in question, individual social members would not exist, be free or have the roles and social identities that define them in the first place.

The point I have just made about the reproduction and the evaluability of social wholes and their members mirrors the account of the *Gattungsprozess* and the normativity of animal life that I spelled out in the previous chapter. The point that I now go on to make, on the other hand, is specific to the evaluation of social institutions and their participants. Although I make the point in connection with some of Hegel's remarks about the state, the same point could be made *mutatis mutandis* about the two other institutions of "Ethical Life."

In the remarks about the state that I have in mind, Hegel describes the "political disposition," or the frame of mind that befits members of a rational, well-ordered state, as one of "trust." Hegel glosses trust, in turn, as members' "consciousness that [their] substantial and particular interest is preserved and contained in the interest and end of an other (in this case, the state)" (*PR*, §268). By claiming that both (i) the particular and (ii) also the substantial interests of members are preserved in the state, I take Hegel to be making the point I touched upon above, namely, (i) that the laws of a just state allow its participants to pursue their own particular or private ends in uncoerced ways, and (ii) that by rationally endorsing the laws of a just state participants in the state first acquire a self-conscious identity as citizens or members of a people. Because they cease to regard the state as "other" or inimical to their interests, both particular and universal, social members are free or can be said to obey only their own wills in heeding the laws of the state. Again, thanks to the disposition of trust, "[the state] ceases to be an other for me, and in my consciousness of this, I am free" (§268).

In the light of our discussion in this and previous chapters of Hegel's conception of freedom as "being with oneself in an other," and of the way in which the state helps realize that freedom, the claims about the "political disposition" that I have just reviewed should perhaps

come as no great surprise. Given our earlier discussions of habit, we are also in a position to understand Hegel's claim that the feeling of trust, and so freedom, is the result of "a volition [*Wollen*] which has become habitual" (§268). Very briefly, through habituation, individuals liberate themselves from their "natural determinations" and acquire a capacity for a kind of abstraction or universality. On the basis of that capacity, they can then acknowledge and affirm as their own certain requirements, including the laws of the state, that make possible the realization of their (and others') freedom.

In addition to Hegel's explicit claims about trust, freedom, and habituation, which I have just summarized, I now want to make the more reconstructive claim that such a "habitual volition" can be acquired only if the state and the rest of the social world around us enjoys a stable, ongoing existence or reproduces itself. As our discussion of Hegel on habit in previous chapters emphasized, a pattern of behavior can become habitual only as a result of repetition. I further suggest that repetitive behavior of the sort that allows social members to develop a "habitual volition" (and so find their freedom within their social world) is possible only in an institutional context that is stable, ongoing or "continually produces" itself. Or to put this latter point differently: If the social, institutional conditions were constantly changing, unstable or unpredictable, then behavior could not be repeated routinely or regularly enough to allow for "mechanical," habitual patterns of behavior to set in. Think, for example, of current day Syria or of Barcelona in early 1939. It is difficult to see how citizens living in such unstable conditions could develop a "habitual volition" (and so come to "trust" and find their freedom within their social world). More generally, it is difficult to see how behavior could ever come easily or automatically, as habitual behavior does, in a situation where the agent's social setting is significantly unstable or unreliable, not self-reproducing.

What does the connection I have just put forward, between the reproduction of social institutions and the “habitual volition” of its members, tell us about the evaluation of each? We can answer this question succinctly as follows: Non-self-reproducing institutions, as well as social members that fail to promote the continuous existence of those institutions, are defective for the reason that without the continuous, stable existence of those institutions, social members could not develop a “habitual volition” nor, therefore, be fully free within their social world.

### II.3 FREEDOM AND ASSIMILATION

Before concluding my discussion of the essentialist thesis, and with it this dissertation, I raise and respond to one final objection to which my interpretation so far in this chapter gives rise. In a nutshell, the objection is that the story I have told leaves Hegel vulnerable to a charge of moral conservatism. The charge that Hegel’s views have conservative or even reactionary implications is of course not new.<sup>104</sup> But the similarities I have been exploring between the evaluation of animal organisms and the evaluation of social members and institutions raises the objection in a new way.

To substantiate the version of the conservatism charge I have in mind, consider an example from one of Hegel’s followers. In our current social world in the West, the rules of private property certainly seem to be stable in the relevant sense, namely, such rules enjoy an existence that is continuous enough for individuals subject to them to develop a “habitual volition.” Nevertheless, a social order in which what Marx calls the “means of production” are privately owned is one, so Marx claims, that renders a whole class of social members unfree. I do not wish to delve here into the details of Marx’s view that workers, because they do not own the

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<sup>104</sup> The *locus classicus* of this objection in the last century is Popper (1945/2013). Although the objection that Hegel is an apologist for the Prussian *status quo* has by now been widely discredited among Hegel commentators, a natural (even if mistaken) reading of Hegel’s famous remark that “the actual is rational” forces commentators and teachers to have to continue to explain away the apparent conservatism.

means of production, are forced to sell their labor power and are thus unfree. The point I mean to illustrate by alluding to Marx's critique of capitalism is just that a set of practices and institutions can be stable or self-reproducing, as well as teleologically structured, and yet freedom-obstructive. Unless the story I have told in this section is supplemented, then, it seems that Hegel's view is compatible with freedom-endangering social arrangements and, to that extent, with conservative or reactionary positions.

The response to the charge, as I have just outlined it, is that the teleological organization and reproduction of social institutions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the realization of the freedom of its members. This response prompts the next question: What needs to be added to the story in order for Hegel to escape the charge of conservatism? And how, if at all, does Hegel's account of animal life, as I discussed it in the previous chapter, figure in this addition to the story? I hypothesize that the piece that needs to be added to the story is that social members not only help reproduce the institutions in which they participate but, like other animals, also assimilate their environment in order to attain their species-specific ends. Lower animals assimilate their environment based on instinct in order to attain the end of biological preservation. Human beings also take in or assimilate the environment, including their social surroundings, in order to attain their species-specific ends. In our case, however, the ends or purposes in question outstrip that of mere biological preservation to include the distinctively human end of realizing freedom. Moreover, now bringing together discussions from Chapters Two and Four, the assimilation of the environment by us humans is the result of the habitual separation from our "natural determinations" and thus reflective as opposed to instinctive. Social members are morally sound inasmuch as they fulfill roles that are required for the functioning of the institutions of which they are part. Moreover, as we have seen, by fulfilling these roles, social members help reproduce the institutions in which they participate. We can now add that social

members' participation in the institutions need not be a matter of unreflectively accepting the institutions, and their individual roles within them, in the precise form in which they have been passed down to them. Participants in the institutions of "Ethical Life" assimilate their surroundings reflectively and so are able to reform the institutions, including participants' roles within them, so as to make them conducive to fully realizing individuals' freedom.

## II.4 CONCLUSION

My response to the conservatism charge completes my expansion of Hegel's account of normativity from the case of the non-moral evaluation of animal organisms generally to the moral evaluation of human features and behavior. In thus working out the final two chapters of the dissertation, I hope to have begun to fill in the details of the sort of naturalist program of interpretation recently suggested by Stern and others.

The second of the two theses that make up Hegel's naturalism as I have understood it, namely, the emergence thesis, was my topic in Chapters Two and Three. I argued in those chapters that, for Hegel, distinctively human capacities, like objective consciousness and most significantly the capacity for practical freedom, emerge through processes of habituation from the exercise of capacities that we share with other animals. In so arguing, I sought to attribute to Hegel a stronger, more clearly naturalistic thesis than other interpretive theses (such as those we find in recent work by Terry Pinkard) based on the general claim that Hegelian spirit and nature are "continuous."

Finally, in articulating and defending my naturalist interpretation, I have aspired to present one plausible (perhaps even compelling) way of piecing together Hegel's positive alternative to Kant's moral theory, which as we saw in Chapter One Hegel rejects on account of its dualistic underpinnings.

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**LANGUAGES**

Spanish: Native  
Catalan: Native  
German: Fluent (Goethe-Zertifikat C1, 2012)  
Ancient Greek: Elementary

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## APPENDIX

11/14/2019

University of Illinois at Chicago Mail - Copyright permission?



Nicolas Garcia Mills &lt;ngarci31@uic.edu&gt;

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**Copyright permission?**

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**Woodward-Reed, Hannah** <hwoodwardr@wiley.com>  
To: Nicolas Garcia Mills <ngarci31@uic.edu>

Thu, Nov 14, 2019 at 3:26 AM

Dear Nicolas,

Sincere apologies for the delay in getting back to you – as it is to be included in your dissertation and not published in another journal/book volume, please just include a reference to the original publication.

Many thanks for your patience,

Hannah

**From:** Nicolas Garcia Mills <ngarci31@uic.edu>  
**Sent:** 13 November 2019 20:54  
**To:** Woodward-Reed, Hannah <hwoodwardr@wiley.com>  
**Subject:** Copyright permission?

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Thank you once again!

Nicolas

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