

June 5, 2019

Hegel on the Historicity of Normativity

Lecture 3Genealogy and Magnanimity:
The Allegory of the Valet

I. Two Meta-Attitudes

An important perspective on the concept of alienation is provided by two meta-attitudes that are in play throughout the final two-thirds of the *Spirit* chapter. Hegel's terms for these attitudes is "edelmütig" and "niederträchtig." Miller translates these as "noble" and "base" (or "ignoble"). I take it that a better way to think about the contrast is as that between "generous" and "mean-spirited," or "magnanimous" and "pusillanimous" (literally: "great-souled" and "small-souled"). Because the rich content they are to convey goes beyond that expressed by any of these labels, however, I will generally leave these terms in the German. They are *meta*-attitudes because they are attitudes toward the relations between norms (or normative statuses such as commitments, responsibilities, and authority) and attitudes of acknowledging or attributing such norms as binding or applicable. As I understand it, the *edelmütig* meta-attitude takes it that there really are norms that attitudes are directed toward and answer to. It treats norms as genuinely efficacious, as really making a difference to what individuals do. It understands attitudes as norm-governed, in the dual sense that norms provide standards for assessments of the correctness of attitudes, and that attitudes are subjunctively sensitive to the contents of the norms. Attitudes—paradigmatically the acknowledgment or attribution of a norm as binding, taking oneself or another to be committed or responsible, practically distinguishing between performances that are appropriate and those that are not—are the way the norms are actualized, the way they become efficacious, how they make things happen in the causal order. The *niederträchtig* meta-attitude sees only normative attitudes. The norms are construed as at most adverbial modifications of the attitudes: a way of talking about the contents of those attitudes by assigning them virtual objects.

Niederträchtigkeit is the purest expression of the alienated character of modern normativity (hence culture, self-consciousness, and community).

The two meta-attitudes of *Edelmütigkeit* and *Niederträchtigkeit* are initially both manifestations of alienation because they seize one-sidedly on the unity of knowing-and-acting consciousness, in the one case, and the distinction that it involves, on the other. Because the defining flaw of modernity is its failure to get the unity and the distinction that knowing-and-acting consciousness involve in focus together in one picture, the way forward to the reachievement of unalienated *Sittlichkeit* is a kind of higher *Edelmütigkeit*. On the theoretical side, that is coming to apply metaconceptual categories of *Vernunft*, rather than those of *Verstand*. Hegel's account of what that consists in is the core achievement of his philosophy. As we draw closer to the end of his exposition in the *Phenomenology*, we get a new vantage point on that structure of unalienated understanding.

II. The *Kammerdiener*

The clearest expression of the new piece of the puzzle comes in a famous passage about “playing the moral valet.” “Valet” is “Kammerdiener,” and I call this crucial stretch of text “the *Kammerdiener* passage.” It expresses a cardinal form of *Niederträchtigkeit*, holding fast to the disparity that action involves:

[I]t holds to the other aspect . . . and explains [the action] as resulting from an intention different from the action itself, and from selfish motives. Just as every action is capable of being looked at from the point of view of conformity to duty, so too can it be considered from the point of view of the particularity [of the doer]; for, qua action, it is the actuality of the individual. This judging of the action thus takes it out of its outer existence and reflects it into its inner aspect, or into the form of its own particularity. If the action is accompanied by fame, then it knows this inner aspect to be a desire for fame. If it is altogether in keeping with the station of the individual, without going beyond this station, and of such a nature that the individuality does not possess its station as a character externally attached to it, but through its own self gives filling to this universality, thereby showing itself capable of a higher station, then the inner aspect

of the action is judged to be ambition, and so on. Since, in the action as such, the doer attains to a vision of himself in objectivity, or to a feeling of self in his existence, and thus to enjoyment, the inner aspect is judged to be an urge to secure his own happiness, even though this were to consist merely in an inner moral conceit, in the enjoyment of being conscious of his own superiority and in the foretaste of a hope of future happiness. No action can escape such judgement, for duty for duty's sake, this pure purpose, is an unreality; it becomes a reality in the deed of an individuality, and the action is thereby charged with the aspect of particularity. **No man is a hero to his valet; not, however, because the man is not a hero, but because the valet—is a valet**, whose dealings are with the man, not as a hero, but as one who eats, drinks, and wears clothes, in general, with his individual wants and fancies. Thus, for the judging consciousness, there is no action in which it could not oppose to the universal aspect of the action, the personal aspect of the individuality, and play the part of the moral valet towards the agent. [PG 665; boldface added]

This is a rich and important passage. I see its significance as unfolding in a series of concentric, widening ripples, and I want to follow them as they broaden out from their center. To be a *hero* in the sense in play here is to act out of regard for one's duty. That is to have one's actions proceed from respect for or acknowledgment of the authority of norms. The hero is the one who acknowledges a norm as binding by actualizing it, who does what he ought, because he ought. To play the valet to such a hero is to impute only selfish, particular motives, to trace every action back to some perceived personal advantage, be it only a reputation for virtue, or, where even that is not available, the satisfaction of thinking well of oneself. In any case, only particular attitudes are acknowledged, not governing norms.

Consider the official who exercises state power. He has committed himself to act purely according to universal interests or norms. That is, he commits himself to doing *only* what acknowledgment of the norms requires. But every actual performance is a particular doing, and incorporates contingency. It is always *more* than just the acknowledgment of a norm, and may well also be *less* than that. (I can never *just* turn on the light or feed the poor—I am always *also* doing other things, such as alerting the burglar, or cutting the education budget or raising taxes.) Contingent motives and interests will always also be in play. Thus it will always be possible for

the *niederträchtig* consciousness to point out the moment of disparity, the particularity and contingency that infects each action. It is never *just* an instance of the universal. The *Kammerdiener* can always explain what the hero of service did in terms of self-interested (hence particular, contingent) motives and interests, rather than as a response to an acknowledged normative necessity. There is no action at all that is not amenable to this sort of reductive, ignoble description.

Broadening our horizons a little bit, I think we can see an issue being raised concerning the relations between norms and attitudes quite generally. The *Kammerdiener* does not appeal to norms in his explanations of behavior. The attitudes of individuals are enough. The public official says that he acted as he did because it was his duty. The *Kammerdiener* offers a competing explanation that appeals only to his desires. What his duty actually is, what he *ought* to do, plays no role in this account. Thought of at this level of generality, the moral-psychological valet stands for a kind of nihilism about norms that has more recently been championed by Gilbert Harman for the special case of moral norms.¹ According to this view, invoking moral norms or values is explanatorily otiose. For we can offer explanations of everything that actually happens in terms of people's *views* about what is right and wrong, what they *take* to be permissible or obligatory. It is those *attitudes* that are causally efficacious. And those attitudes—*believing* that it is wrong to steal, for instance—would have just the same causal consequences whether or not there were facts to which they corresponded, whether or not it is in fact wrong to steal. Nor is the case any different if we look upstream, to the antecedents of moral attitudes, rather than downstream at the consequences. My belief that it is wrong to steal was brought about by other beliefs (along with other attitudes, such as desires): some my own, some held by my parents and teachers. The *truth* of the belief need not be invoked to explain why I have the belief, or why anyone else has it. In this way moral beliefs (normative attitudes) contrast with the perceptual beliefs expressed by noninferential reports, for which the frequent truth of such beliefs must be appealed to both in explaining why we have those beliefs and in explaining why having those beliefs has the consequences it does. Acts of applying concepts in judgment and intentional action, and acts of assessing such applications form a complete explanatory structure, one that is capable of accounting for what people do without needing to be

¹ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

supplemented by reference to the conceptual norms or standards that are supposedly being applied and with respect to which applications are supposedly being assessed. Because we do not need to appeal to norms, the best explanation of our actions and attitudes appeals only to attitudes. So we should conclude that there are no norms, only attitudes. This approach sees a massive error standing behind our ordinary ways of talking about norms.

Another way to look at the issue is to ask what sort of theory of practical reasoning the *Kammerdiener*'s meta-attitude depends on. It is one that eschews what are sometimes called "external reasons." A broadly kantian form of practical reasoning and explanation appeals to inferences such as the following:

It is wrong to steal.

Taking that newspaper would be stealing.

So I shall not take that newspaper.

Here the norm, the wrongness of stealing, serves as a premise in a piece of practical reasoning that can be appealed to in deliberation about what to do, assessment of what has been done, prediction of what will be done, and explanation of what was done. That is the sort of practical reasoning to which the *edelmütig* meta-attitude appeals when it sees the official and the counselor acting out of respect for and obedience to communal norms. A broadly humane approach to practical reasoning, of the sort endorsed by Davidson, insists that the kantian radically misrepresents the reasons that actually motivate intentional action. Even if the first premise states a fact, even if it is wrong to steal, that fact would not by itself engage with my motivational machinery. To do that, I must know about or at least believe in the fact. The real reason in the vicinity is that *I believe* that it is wrong to steal. Apart from that belief, the wrongness of stealing is nothing to me, and cannot affect what I go on to do or try to do. Once we have added that belief as a premise, the original invocation of a norm can drop out. The humane principle is that only beliefs and desires (that is, individual *attitudes*) can serve as motivating reasons. Norms cannot. The idea is that what serve as reasons for action must also be causes, and only attitudes such as beliefs and desires can do that.

III. The Authority of Normative Attitudes and Statuses

The issue here concerns the practical conception of the pragmatic notion of normative *force*. How should norms (what is or is not appropriate, correct, obligatory, or permissible) or normative *statuses* (responsibility, authority, commitment, or entitlement), on the one hand, be understood as related to normative *attitudes* (*taking* performances to be appropriate, correct, obligatory, or permissible, *acknowledging* or *attributing* responsibility, authority, commitment, or entitlement), on the other? The traditional, premodern view saw norms as independent and attitudes as dependent. The objective norms have authority over the subjective attitudes of individuals, which are supposed merely to reflect them, acknowledge their authority, apply them in deliberation and assessment, judgment and action. The modern view sees attitudes as independent, and norms as dependent. The subjective attitudes individuals adopt *institute* norms.

The selfish particular motives that are all the *Kammerdiener* attributes are independently authoritative attitudes that can be reflected only in statuses such as usefulness to private purposes, not in statuses such as duty, or being *unconditionally* obligatory—in the sense that the obligatoriness is authoritative for attitudes, rather than conditioned on them, as in the hypothetical, instrumental imperatives arising from prudent pursuit of privately endorsed ends. The *Kammerdiener* banishes talk of values that are not immediate products of individual valuing. The rise of subjectivity is the practical realization that values are not independent of valuing. Quintessential alienated later modern thinkers such as Nietzsche and the British utilitarians conclude that only valuing is real.

Taking it that the dependence of values on valuing implies that valuing is independent of values is a strategy of independence—which understands everything Humpty Dumpty’s way, as just a matter of who is to be Master. If norms are not immediately authoritative over attitudes, then attitudes must be immediately authoritative over norms. Practically applying categories of immediacy (mastery) in this way, epitomized in the *Kammerdiener*’s *niederträchtig* meta-attitude, is a pure form of *alienation* because it makes unintelligible the very acculturating, conceptual norms subjection to which makes even the *Kammerdiener* a discursive, *geistig* being: a knower, agent, and self. *Kammerdiener* explanations, which admit only normative attitudes,

not only cannot make sense of normative *force*, but also in the end make the notion of conceptual *content* unintelligible. The relation between these is the topic of the last part of the *Spirit* section of the *Phenomenology*.

Moving from the practically alienating standpoint of *Verstand* to the practically *sittlich* standpoint of *Vernunft* requires breaking out of the seeming inevitability of this restricted pair of alternatives—either norms are immediately, hence totally, authoritative over attitudes, or *vice versa*—by making intelligible the possibility of *reciprocal* dependence between norm and attitude. To do that, it is not enough, of course, simply to mouth the phrase “reciprocal dependence between norm and attitude.” To make good on that phrase, Hegel offers a richly articulated metaconceptual apparatus laying out the nature of the complex interdependence of the authority of actual applications of concepts over the contents of those concepts and the responsibility of actual applications of concepts to the contents of those concepts. It requires reconceiving the relations between normative force and conceptual content in terms of a process of experience (a cycle of perception-and-action) that is at once the institution and the application of conceptual norms, both a making and a finding of conceptual contents. His account of how that is possible requires the interaction of a social-recognitive dimension and a historical-recollective dimension, on the side of normative pragmatics, and an incompatibility-inferential and representational-referential dimension, on the side of semantics.

There is a third, still more general issue being raised by the *Kammerdiener*'s meta-attitude, beyond treating attitudes as purely independent of norms (which remain in the picture only in an adverbial capacity, in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to individuate the contents of the attitudes). That concerns the relation between reasons and causes generally, or, still more abstractly, the place of norms in nature. For the *Kammerdiener* essentially treats the hero of duty as a merely *natural* being. The only way of making the hero's actions intelligible that the *Kammerdiener* admits are of the sort that are available in principle for unacculturated creatures, those merely “immersed in the expanse of life.” Though the wants attributed to the hero (for instance, the “inner moral conceit” that consists in “the enjoyment of being conscious of his own superiority and in the foretaste of a hope of future happiness”) go beyond the biologically dictated desires of mere animals, the *Kammerdiener*'s view of the hero is as one who “eats,

drinks, and wears clothes”—that is, at base, as a being driven by creaturely comforts and discomforts. The most general issue Hegel is addressing in his discussion of the *Kammerdiener* is that of *reductive naturalism* about normativity.

This sort of naturalism is the most fundamental possible challenge to the Kantian picture of us as normative creatures, as distinguished from the merely natural precisely by our subjection to norms, by the fact that we can bind ourselves by (make ourselves responsible to) norms, by applying concepts, whose contents settle *what* we have made ourselves responsible for and to. Is there really any such thing as authority or responsibility, as commitment or entitlement? Or is that sort of normative talk wholly optional and dispensable, indeed, a positively misleading mystification: a fundamental error of the sort of which Enlightenment accuses Faith? For the *Kammerdiener* utilitarian, the work of Enlightenment is only half done when superstitious belief in a magical, invisible, supernatural objective Authority has been banished, so long as human behavior is still described in any terms that invoke norms not immediately derivable from the sensuous inclinations of desiring beings.

The *Kammerdiener* stands for a *niederträchtig*, relentlessly naturalistic alternative to this *edelmütig*, normative description of concept use. In place of the picture of “heroic” practical sensitivity to norms—trying, in deliberation and assessment, to determine what is really correct, what one ought to do, what one is obliged to do (what “duty” consists in), acknowledging genuine normative constraint on one’s attitudes—this meta-attitude appeals *only* to attitudes, which are not construed as the acknowledgment of any normative constraint on or authority over those attitudes. Reasons are traded for causes. It is this large-scale, fundamental disagreement between the reductive naturalist and the rational-normativist that Hegel is committed to resolving in his discussion of what the *Kammerdiener* gets right, what he gets wrong, and what lessons we should learn from him. This project, broadly construed, is to provide a response to Kant’s Third Antinomy—the challenge to integrate reasons and causes. A significant proportion of Hegel’s claim to contemporary philosophical attention, I think, should be seen as deriving from his response to this issue of normative naturalism. So the stakes are very high.

Hegel takes it that he shares with Kant at least the aspiration for an account that manages to acknowledge both the attitude-dependence of norms and their genuine authority over attitudes. That is why the Kantian structure of *Moralität* opens the third section of the *Spirit* chapter. Kant's view is transitional between the alienated modernity epitomized by the moral valet and a new kind of *Sittlichkeit* compatible with the rise of subjectivity. For Hegel, Kant opens the door to the third structural stage in the development of self-conscious Spirit, even though he does not succeed in helping us through it. For Kant's conception of us as creatures who are bound not just by rules (the laws that govern the realm of nature) but by *conceptions* (or representations, *Vorstellungen*) of rules (the norms that govern the realm of freedom), together with the tight conceptual connection he insists on between autonomy and normativity express an attempt to reconcile the attitude-dependence of norms with their genuine bindingness. All genuinely *normative* binding (authority) is *self-binding*. In the end, each of us *is* committed only to what we *have* committed *ourselves* to. Our *real* commitments are just those that we have (at least implicitly) *acknowledged*. In this sense, it is our *attitudes* that bring *norms* into force. We apply the concepts that only then bind us, by determining what we have thereby authorized and made ourselves responsible to and for. This is what I have called the "Kant-Rousseau demarcation of the normative in terms of autonomy." This approach offers a structural solution to the reconciliation of the attitude-dependence of norms and the norm-dependence of attitudes that appeals to a distinction between the *force* of conceptual norms and their *content*. It is up to us, as knowers and agents, what norms we bring into force. For it is up to us what concepts we apply. But it is *not* then up to us what the content of those norms is—the details of *what* we have committed ourselves to by applying the concepts we did, rather than some others.

IV. Naturalism and Genealogy

The general thought is that the possibility of offering a certain kind of *genealogical* account of the process by which a conceptual content developed or was determined can seem to undercut the *rational* bindingness of the norms that have that content. This is a form of argument that was deployed to devastating effect by the great unmaskers of the later nineteenth century. Suppose that the correct answer to the question of why we draw the distinction between right and wrong as we do in some area of discourse is a causal explanation in terms of economic class structure,

or a quasibiological account in terms of the limited number of ways the will to power can manifest itself in the weak, or a description of how early traumas incurred while acting out the Family romance reliably recathect libido into standard repressed adult forms. If any such genealogy can causally explain why our normative attitudes have the contents that they do—why we make the judgments we do instead of some others—then the issue of the rational justifiability of those attitudes lapses. We appear to have reasons for our deliberations and assessments, and it may be comforting to ourselves to think that is why they have the contents they do. But talk about what reasons there are for adopting one attitude rather than another is unmasked by a convincing genealogy of the process as a *mere* appearance. The genealogy tells us what is *really* going on, by presenting the underlying mechanism actually responsible for our taking this rather than that as appropriate, fitting, or correct. Seeing ourselves as creatures who are genuinely sensitive to reasons, who are trying to figure out what is in fact appropriate, fitting, or correct—what we really have reason to do—then comes to seem naïve and old-fashioned: the result of applying an exploded explanatory framework couched in a fanciful vocabulary, whose adoption can itself be explained away genealogically as the result of a process quite different from the reasoning to which it pretends.

A clear illustration of how a genealogy of content can undercut normative force is found in the principal model I have suggested throughout for Hegel’s account of conceptual content: the way concepts of common law develop through the decisions of judges to apply them or withhold application of them in particular cases. I originally invoked this example as a model of the way in which a process of *applying* conceptual norms in making judgments and practical decisions can also serve to *institute* conceptual norms and *determine* their contents. The key point in the present context is that there is nothing outside the previous judges’ decisions to determine the contents of the concepts each judge must apply in a new case. Those prior cases are the only source of *reasons* for the current judge to apply or not apply the concepts in question to the new set of facts. Here, too, a *genealogical* characterization of the process is possible. For in each of the prior cases appealed to in justifying a contemporary judgment it may be possible to explain the earlier decision by appealing to what *caused* the judgment, rather than what *reasons* there were for it. One may be able to account for the precedential decision by looking at, in the slogan of jurisprudential theory, “what the judge had for breakfast.” Less fancifully, such a genealogical

explanation might invoke the nature of the judge's training, the prejudices of his teachers, the opinions of his culture circle, his career ambitions, the political emphases, issues, and pressures of the day, and so on. Playing the moral valet to the judge is offering such a genealogical account of a judgment: revealing it as not a response to reasons properly provided by precedent and principle, not a matter of acknowledging as binding the content of an antecedent norm, but as the product of extrajudicial, rationally extraneous motives and considerations.

Such genealogical accounts reveal the contingency of the conceptual content a later judge inherits from the tradition. For they make clear that *had* various judges happened to have had different "breakfasts" (had the contingencies the *Kammerdiener* appeals to as causes been different), the current content of the concept *would have been* different. Different decisions would have been made in the past, and would accordingly have provided a different field of possible precedents. In fact, it is a commonplace of jurisprudential genealogy that another sort of contingency infects the process. For it is often clear that the *order* in which various difficult cases arose crucially affects the contents that emerge from the process. In such situations, the present state of the law would be very different had the case that happened to arise for adjudication later had to be decided before the one that in fact came up first. Similar contingencies affecting the content of concepts handed down as precedents derive from the happenstance of what particular jurisdiction a particular set of facts arises in. The issue I am focusing on is how the availability of such a contingency-riddled genealogical explanation for why the concept currently has the content that it does affects the intelligibility of the norm embodied in that concept as *rationally binding*, as providing genuine *reasons* for the current decision to go one way or the other. This is the issue of the relation between genealogy and justification. There is a temptation, indulged and fostered by the genealogical tradition that stretches from Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud in the nineteenth century through Foucault at the end of the twentieth, to take it that explanations in terms of causes trump explanations in terms of reasons, showing the latter to be illusory. Exhibiting the contingent features of things, not addressed by a conceptual content or commitment, that caused it to be as it is, unmask talk of reasons as irrelevant mystification. *Niederträchtig* explanations take precedence over *edelmütig* ones.

Why should that be? The answer lies in ways of thinking about reason that are deeply rooted in the philosophical tradition. Both the ancients and the moderns defined reason in part by what it excludes. The Greeks introduce the notion of reason in terms of the contrast between *rational* persuasion and *sophistical* ways of producing attitudes: the distinction between what *ought* to convince and what merely in fact *does* convince. One explains the advent of the first sort of attitude by rehearsing an argument. One explains the advent of the second sort of attitude by producing a genealogy. The Enlightenment notion of reason is similarly structured by the contrast between the rational authority of *argument*, and the merely habitual influence of *tradition*: between what we *ought* to believe and what we merely as a matter of fact *have* believed. When Enlightenment offers a genealogy of religious belief in terms of interests of priests and despots, or describes the contingent processes by which scripture was transmitted, it understands itself as undercutting the rational authority of Faith. Both the ancient and the modern conceptions of reason motivate a project of *purifying* reason, by extruding the alien, extraneous influence of what is merely in fact efficacious in bringing about beliefs. On their conceptions, what merely as a matter of fact *is* or *has been* believed—the judgments (applications of concepts) that *have in fact* been endorsed—should be granted *no rational* weight or force—that is, authority. Kant is only making fully explicit a way of thinking that is already fully in play in Descartes' *Meditations* when he decisively separates *causal* from *justificatory* grounding, criticizing Locke for producing, in effect, a mere genealogy of empirical beliefs rather than an account of how they are rationally warranted. Hegel thinks that reason as so purified is reduced to something empty, contentless, purely formal—and so inevitably set on a road that leads to skepticism. Hegel's notion of reason is not opposed to the authority of tradition; it is an aspect of it. What merely *is* *does* have *rational* (defeasible) authority. ("The actual [wirklich] is the rational; the rational is the actual.") How we have in the past *actually* applied a concept—from one point of view, *contingently*, because not *necessitated* by the norm antecedently in play—helps determine how it is *correct* to apply it. Conceptual norms incorporate contingency, and only so can they be determinately contentful. This is how they come to be *about* what there actually *is*, to *represent* it, not in an *external* sense, but in a sense that involves *incorporating* into the representing the reference to what is represented.

I think the later Wittgenstein worried about this issue. I think he saw the temptation to see a demonstration of the parochiality of the content of a norm—its dependence on or reflection of certain kinds of contingent features of the practitioners and their practices—as undercutting the intelligibility of that norm as genuinely binding, as being a real norm, as having normative force. Wittgenstein does not, as Hegel does, take it that to be determinately contentful at all a norm must have a *conceptual* content (though he does take the considerations about the dependence of the content of norms on contingent matters of fact to apply also to the case of the conceptual norms expressed by terms such as “rigid”). The effect of the contingency of their content on the *rational* bindingness of our norms is accordingly not exactly the way to put Wittgenstein’s problem. But he does worry about the thought that showing, for instance, that what counts as the *right* way to go on depends on a reproducible consilience in how practitioners actually *would* go on makes mysterious the sense in which there *is* a *right* way to go on, a difference between doing so correctly and incorrectly. And I take it that he is concerned both to reject that inference and to diagnose it as the consequence of a traditional, but ultimately magical notion of normative force. The effect of the demonstration of the parochiality and contingency of the practices in which our norms are implicit is not meant to be normative nihilism. Rather, space is to be opened up for new ways of construing the relations between genealogy and justification.

The issue of how to recover a sense in which conceptual norms can be understood as genuinely binding in the face of the revelation of the contingency of their content by a genealogical account of their origin and development is particularly pressing for Hegel because his response to what he takes to be Kant’s uncritical attitude toward determinate conceptual contents is to offer a conception of *experience* as a single process that is at once the application and the institution of conceptual norms. (That is what the common-law model is a model of.) The slogan I suggested there was that in this regard, Hegel is to Kant as Quine is to Carnap. Each replaces a two-phase story—according to which first meanings are specified, and then they are applied to make judgments (language first, then theory)—by a one-phase story in which the two functions are intermingled. *Kammerdiener* genealogies pose a threat to pragmatists of this sort. The possibility of a norm-free, *niederträchtig* account threatens the justifiability and even the intelligibility of norm-acknowledging, *edelmütig* ones. And for Hegel, the issue concerns the *rational* force of conceptual norms: their capacity to provide real *reasons* for saying or doing one

thing rather than another. In situating *edelmütig* characterizations of our discursive practice with respect to *niederträchtig* ones, Hegel will be explaining how we should understand what the *normative force* of a *reason* consists in. To repeat the earlier observation: the stakes are high.

V. Four Meta-meta-attitudes

In order to see what the Hegelian account of the relation between normative pragmatic *force* (articulated by the distinction between norm and attitude) and semantic *content* adds to the story about the Hegelian version of the Fregean semantic distinction between *sense* and *reference* discussed in Chapter 12, it is important to be clear about the nature of the distinction between the two meta-attitudes toward the relations between norms and attitudes: *Niederträchtigkeit* and *Edelmütigkeit*. There are four different ways of thinking about that distinction—four different statuses it can be taken to have. They are progressively more insightful and sophisticated, representing an expressive progression—the cumulative emergence into explicitness of implicit features of the relations between norms and attitudes—that corresponds to the stages by which Hegel sees Spirit as a whole developing its self-consciousness.

The first way of understanding the relation between the *edelmütig* normativist and the *niederträchtig* naturalist is as a cognitive disagreement about a matter of objective fact. They disagree about the correct answer to the question: Are there norms, or not? If one makes an exhaustive catalog of the furniture of the universe, will one find norms on it, or only normative attitudes? On this way of construing it, the issue is put in a box with the question of whether there are leprechauns, and whether there is a bird in the bush. One or the other party to the dispute is wrong. Who is right and who is wrong is settled by an attitude-independent matter of fact—in the sense that whether there are norms or not is not reference-dependent on the meta-attitudes of the normativist or the naturalist. (For the normativist could be correct if it turned out that there are norms, but they are reference-dependent on normative attitudes.) On the side of epistemology, rather than ontology, the normativist takes it that normative attitudes are themselves cognitive attitudes, and that at least when things go right, they involve knowledge of norms. The hero may in fact know what his duty is and do it because it is his duty. The

objectivist meta-meta-attitude to the issue takes it additionally that both the normative and the naturalist attitudes are themselves cognitive attitudes, only one of which can be right about what there really is.

This objectivist, cognitivist way of understanding the status of the two meta-attitudes toward norms and normative attitudes is not the only one available, however. It is possible to adopt instead an almost diametrically opposed subjectivist meta-meta-attitude. According to this way of thinking, the normativist and the naturalist employ different vocabularies in describing the world. Using one rather than the other is adopting a *stance*. The two stances are incompatible; one cannot adopt them both. One either uses normative vocabulary or one does not. But both of them are available, and both of them are legitimate.

Just as every action is capable of being looked at from the point of view of conformity to duty, so too can it be considered from the point of view of the particularity [of the doer]. [PG 665]

As for the legitimacy of the reductive, *niederträchtig* attitude, Hegel acknowledges that the *Kammerdiener* is *not wrong*.

No action can escape such judgement,” there is no action in which it could not oppose to the universal aspect of the action, the personal aspect of the individuality, and play the part of the moral valet towards the agent. [PG 665]

Every intentional action is “charged with the aspect of particularity,” in that the agent must have had some motive for performing it, some attitude that was efficacious in bringing it about. Norms are efficacious only through attitudes toward them, so one can always short-circuit explanations that appeal to the norms the attitudes are directed toward (what the agent ought to do, her duty), appealing only to the attitudes themselves. In the broader reading, I take it that Hegel is acknowledging the possibility of purely naturalistic descriptions of the world, including human actions.

Just so, “every action is capable of being looked at from the point of view of conformity to duty”—that is, in the *edelmütig* normative vocabulary. What shows up in the causal-psychological vocabulary of the *Kammerdiener* is nature, natural beings, and natural processes:

the world of desire. What shows up in the normative vocabulary of the hero is Spirit, *geistig* beings, and discursive practices: the world of recognition. The realm of Spirit comprises experience and agency. It is a structure articulated by relations of *authority* and *responsibility*, of *commitment* and *entitlement*, of *reasons* and *concepts* with the *obligations* and *permissions* that they involve and articulate. This normative, discursive realm of Spirit is Hegel's topic. (The book is titled *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, after all.) It, too, is real. According to the stance (meta-meta-attitude), the reductive naturalist is wrong to take it that the explanatory completeness of the naturalistic-causal vocabulary in its own terms indicates its expressive completeness—so that any claims it cannot express cannot be true. For it must leave out concept-use as such (and hence the whole *geistig* dimension of human activity), even though every application of concepts in judgment and action can be explained in naturalistic terms, if it is described in naturalistic terms of noises and motions. But the normative vocabulary is *also* sovereign and comprehensive within its domain, and can achieve a corresponding explanatory equilibrium. For it is a vocabulary for describing the use of vocabularies—including the vocabulary of natural science. Everything the scientist does, no less than the activities and practices of other discursive beings, can be described in the language of judgment, intentional action, and recognition. The *Kammerdiener's* attitude, too, is a *discursive* attitude.

One of the great questions of modernity—transposed into a new key by Kant's normative reconceptualization—concerns the relation between Spirit and Nature. As Hegel says at the end of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: “Nature and the world or history of spirit are the two realities. . . . The ultimate aim and business of philosophy is to reconcile thought or the Notion with reality.”² One strategy for doing that is to see the naturalistic and normative vocabularies as incommensurable, but as each providing a legitimate, valid, in some sense comprehensive perspective on things. They are understood as just expressing different features of things. The choice of which to employ in any particular case can then be understood to be pragmatic in the classical sense: a matter of what best conduces to securing the ends and interests motivating the subject making the choice of vocabulary at the time. Rather than disagreeing about an objective matter of fact, the naturalist and the normativist are seen as expressing

² Volume 3, p. 545, in the Haldane and Simpson translation of 1896 (repr., Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983).

different subjective preferences, adopting different attitudes, which reflect different interests. Whichever vocabulary one adopts makes possible genuine knowledge of some aspect of how things really are.

There is something right about this pragmatic, perspectival way of construing the relations between what is expressed by normative and naturalistic vocabularies. But the conception of *Niederträchtigkeit* and *Edelmütigkeit* as still basically *cognitive* stances misses something essential to Hegel's approach. When he introduces it, Hegel said that the *niederträchtig* meta-attitude "clings to the disparity between the two essentialities" [PG 501]—the distinction that action and (actual) consciousness involve. This is a partial, one-sided attitude. The *edelmütig* meta-attitude seizes one-sidedly instead on the complementary moment of unity or identity. We have seen various ways of conceptualizing these formal aspects of discursive activity, corresponding to different ways of thinking of what is distinguished or united. Judging and acting are species of concept-application. So they involve a distinction between a universal and a particular to which it is applied, and their unity in an individual: a particular as characterized by a universal. The universal is the concept being applied, what sets the standard of correctness of the judgment or action. On the broad construal, the *niederträchtig* attitude does not admit that there are standards of correctness (norms) in play at all. The particulars are actual and real, the universals are illusory. There are no genuine individuals that really unite universals and particulars. The issue comes up explicitly for intentional action; the *Kammerdiener* does not admit that what is done can be acknowledgments of the bindingness of a norm, can be simply an application of it to a particular. There are just particular performances, but no question of them genuinely falling under norms according to which they can be assessed. Judgments and actions as such are visible only from the *edelmütig* point of view, which discerns the unity, and hence the content, of consciousness and action.

So far, this characterization is compatible with a purely cognitive reading of the two meta-attitudes. But immediately after the *Kammerdiener* passage, Hegel says of the moral valet:

The consciousness that judges in this way is itself base [*niederträchtig*], because it divides up the action, producing and holding fast to the disparity of the action with itself. [PG 666]

Adopting the *niederträchtig* meta-attitude not only *holds* fast to the “disparity of the action with itself,” but “divides up the action” and *produces* the disparity. This sounds much more practical than cognitive—a matter of making something, not just finding something. But in what sense does the moral valet *produce* the disparity? It cannot be that what he produces is the “distinction that action implies.” [PG 400] For that distinction—between achievement and intention, between the context of assessment and the context of deliberation, between particular performance and universal conceptual norm that sets a standard for correctness for it—is a ubiquitous and essential part of the metaphysical structure of action. That distinction is not a product of modern alienation. Alienation is only one structure that a practical conception of that distinction can take. That alienated structure of agency is what the *Kammerdiener* produces by adopting the reductive *niederträchtig* attitude, which denies that knowers and agents are genuinely sensitive to conceptual norms.

The claim is that adopting the *niederträchtig* normative meta-attitude institutes a kind of normativity that has a distinctive, defective structure. To say that is to say that *Niederträchtigkeit* is in the first instance a kind of *recognition*, rather than of *cognition*. After all, recognition in general is taking someone to be a subject of normative statuses and attitudes (hence a knower and agent), and specific recognition is attributing particular normative statuses and attitudes. The magnanimous historian, who takes the hero to be genuinely sensitive to and acknowledging norms beyond his own desires, *recognizes* the hero in a very different sense than does the one who plays the moral valet to him. Just so, Enlightenment’s taking Faith to consist in a simple cognitive mistake is taking up a *recognitive* stance to Faith. It not only makes a cognitive mistake when it takes Faith’s defining commitments to be cognitive rather than recognitive (belief in the existence of a peculiar kind of thing rather than instituting a community of trust), it also commits a recognitive injustice:

Faith . . . receives at [Enlightenment’s] hands nothing but wrong; for Enlightenment distorts all the moments of faith, changing them into something different from what they are in it. [PG 563]

To faith, [Enlightenment] seems to be a perversion and a lie because it points out the otherness of its moments; in doing so, it seems directly to make something else out of them than they are in their separateness. [PG 564]

Its ungenerous, *niederträchtig* failure to recognize Faith's cognitive achievement *changes* that achievement, *making* it less than it would be if properly acknowledged. By adopting that attitude, playing the moral valet to Faith, refusing proper recognition, Enlightenment rejects community with Faith, makes impossible the reciprocal recognition that would institute a community exhibiting the structure of trust, and pushes the corresponding sort of self-consciousness out of reach.

The moral valet does not just *notice* or *point out* the disparity that action and consciousness involve, he *identifies* with it. For his cognitive act is also a cognitive sacrifice. What the *Kammerdiener* gives up is the possibility of a certain kind of self-consciousness: consciousness of himself as genuinely bound by norms. The principled grounds he has for refusing to recognize the hero as a norm-governed creature apply to himself as well. His position is that the idea of someone practically acknowledging a norm as binding is unintelligible. This characterization may seem wrong, at least for the narrow, literal construal of the *Kammerdiener* story. After all, he does attribute practical reasoning, and hence concept-use to the hero—just nothing that is not immediately self-serving, the satisfaction of some actual, contingent, motivating desire. So he does in some sense recognize the hero as a discursive being. But the claim will be that this is an unstable kind of recognition. If all anyone can do is fulfill felt desires, then concept-use is not in the end intelligible as such. The argument is the one rehearsed for the conscientious consciousness. A notion of duty showing some sort of independence from attitudes is needed to give content to the idea of assessing performances accordingly as they were or were not performed out of a *conviction* that they were what duty demanded. (Failing to appreciate that was the flaw diagnosed in the conscientious normative self-consciousness.) Normative *attitudes* are not in the end intelligible as contentful apart from the norms that identify and individuate their contents. What the *Kammerdiener* is *doing* by adopting the *niederträchtig* cognitive stance is *making* his own and others' performances and practices into something that is unintelligible as *discursive*.

The third construal of the *niederträchtig* and *edelmütig* meta-attitudes toward norms and normative attitudes is then that they are recognitive attitudes that have the effect of *practical commitments*. Adopting the *edelmütig* stance of spirit is committing oneself to *making* what we are doing being binding ourselves by conceptual norms, so acknowledging the authority of such norms, by practically *taking* it that that is what we are doing—by recognitively treating ourselves and our fellows as doing that. On this view normativity (which, because the norms in question are for Hegel all *conceptually* contentful, is the same phenomenon as rationality) is not feature of our practices independent of our practical meta-attitude toward it. “To him who looks at the world rationally, the world looks rationally back,” Hegel says.³ Normativity and rationality are *products* of our *edelmütig* meta-attitudes, of our practically taking or treating what we are doing (recognizing each other) *as* acknowledging rational commitments. Spirit exists insofar as we *make* it exist by *taking* it to exist: by understanding what we are doing in normative, rational terms. We make the world rational by adopting the recognitively structured constellation of commitments and responsibilities I have—following Hegel’s usage in connection with the community Faith is committed to instituting—denominated *trust*. As we will see, this means that Spirit is brought into existence and sustained by our recollective commitment to rationally reconstruct the tradition of experience in Whiggish terms—finding trajectories through it that are expressively progressive, that exhibit what we have been doing as the unfolding into explicitness of norms that were all along implicit.

This third understanding of the meta-attitudes of *Niederträchtigkeit* and *Edelmütigkeit*, as practical, recognitive, hence community- and self-constitutive, like the second, still presents them as options available for the subject freely to choose between. It is up to us whether to make ourselves into merely natural or genuinely normative beings. On this account, Hegel might be urging us to not to make the *Kammerdiener*’s choice, but he is not claiming we are compelled to do so. There is, however, a fourth way of understanding the status of these two stances. Its leading thought is that we have always already implicitly committed ourselves to adopting the *edelmütig* stance, to identifying with the unity that action and consciousness involve, to understanding ourselves as genuinely binding ourselves by conceptual norms that we apply in

³ Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, published in English as *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartmann (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), p. 13.

acting intentionally and making judgments. For we do judge and act, and we cannot avoid in practice taking or treating those judgments and actions as being determinately contentful—as materially incompatible with certain other judgments and actions, and as materially entailing still others. We count some judgments as reasons for or against others, and some intentions and plans as ruling out or requiring others as means. Even the *Kammerdiener* and his resolutely reductive naturalist generalization offer contentful *accounts* of our doings (performances and attitudes), accounts that aim to satisfy the distinctive standards of intelligibility, adequacy, and correctness to which they hold themselves. *If* the determinate contentfulness of the thoughts and intentions even of the *niederträchtig* is in fact intelligible *only* from an *edelmütig* perspective, *then* anyone who in practice treats what he is doing as judging and acting is implicitly committed thereby to *Edelmütigkeit*. The semantic theory that I have been extracting from the *Phenomenology* has as its conclusion the antecedent of that conditional.

If that is all right, then the apparent parity of the two metanormative stances is an illusion. No genuine choice between them is possible. By talking (engaging in discursive practices) at all, we have already implicitly endorsed and adopted one of them, whether we explicitly realize that or (like the *Kammerdiener*) not. On this reading, what Hegel is asking us to do is only to *explicitly* acknowledge theoretical and practical commitments we have already *implicitly* undertaken just by taking part in discursive practices—which is to say, by being acculturated. Explicitly adopting the *edelmütig* practical-recognitive attitude is accordingly just achieving a certain kind of self-consciousness: realizing something that is already true of ourselves. So the issue is, in the end, in one sense a broadly cognitive one: a matter of finding out how things in some sense already are. But the achievement of this definitive kind of self-consciousness is also, as must be so according to Hegel's social account of what self-consciousness consists in, the adoption of a distinctive kind of recognitive relation to others and to oneself.

The realization that *Edelmütigkeit* simply consists in doing explicitly what one has implicitly committed oneself to do by adopting discursive attitudes and engaging in discursive practices also exhibits that recognitive attitude as a *moral* necessity, in a sense that develops a Kantian idea. (This is part of the reason Hegel's expository development of his novel positive account of the shape of an explicitly *edelmütig* reciprocal recognitive relation closes the section

titled “Moralität”). Kant seeks to ground moral imperatives in the presuppositions of rationality and discursivity, hence of normativity and the sort of positive freedom that consists in being able to bind oneself by conceptual norms. His thought is that whatever can be shown to be a necessary condition of being a knower and agent at all is thereby shown to have a grip on us that is unconditional in the sense of not being relative to any particular endorsement or commitment of ours, whether theoretical or practical. Hegel tells a different story than Kant does about the relations between treating *others* as one minimally must in order to be treating them as rational, discursive, norm-governed, free beings (that is, recognizing them), on the one hand, and one’s self-consciousness *as* oneself rational, discursive, norm-governed, and free. But he takes over the idea that recognizably *moral* norms are to be derived from the presuppositions of discursivity in general. Self-recognition, recognizing oneself, treating oneself as a discursive being, as able to undertake determinately contentful commitments, exercise determinately contentful authority and so on, requires recognizing others: attributing that kind of responsibility and authority to them. Any practical or theoretical presupposition of *that* is a structural presupposition of one’s own self-consciousness. That is the source of moral requirements on how we treat others. Transposed into the key of Hegel’s expressive idiom, edification concerning what is necessary shows up as the making explicit (*für sich*) of what it is already implicitly (*an sich*) committed to. Doing that always has both a cognitive aspect of finding out how things already really were (in themselves) and a recognitive aspect of self-transformation and constitution of oneself as a new kind of self-consciousness.