

Notes for Week 11

1. We are coming to the culmination of the book and the course, the “one far off, divine event, toward which the whole creation moves”: the transition to post-modern structure of *Geist*, the third phase of its development.

- Hegel tells a story about how determinate conceptual *content* arises out of normative *force*.
- He introduces a novel concept of specifically **historical, recollective rationality**.
- He explains, in terms of the retrospective, reconstructive activity of **recollecting**, what it is to *take* objective conceptual norms to be acknowledged *as* binding on the attitudes of discursive practitioners, and thereby to *make* those attitudes properly intelligible as the adoption of normative statuses: the undertaking of commitments and responsibilities that outrun the conceptions of those whose statuses they are.
- That story is accordingly supposed to be at once a theory and a fighting faith for the first generation of moderns for whom intellectual history came to seem a central and essential undertaking.
- It is, remarkably, **a semantics that is morally edifying**.
- For properly understanding the conditions of having determinate thoughts and intentions, of binding ourselves by determinately contentful conceptual norms cognitively and practically, in judgment and action, turns out to **commit us to adopting to one another practical *recognitive attitudes*** of a particular kind: **forgiveness, confession**, and trust.
- The sort of Hegelian semantic self-consciousness that consists in understanding our discursive activity according to the categories of *Vernunft* accordingly **obliges us to be certain kinds of selves, and to institute certain kinds of communities**.
- In particular, the sort of theoretical understanding he teaches (the explicit *vernunftig* acknowledgment of what he shows to be implicit in our discursive practice) obliges us in practice to **forgive and trust one another: to be *that kind of self* and institute *that kind of community***.
- Practicing the **recollective recognitive hermeneutics of magnanimity** is not just one option among others.

- A proper understanding of ourselves as discursive creatures **obliges us to institute a community in which reciprocal recognition takes the form of forgiving recollection: a community bound by and built on trust.**

2. Next: Exposition of the transition to the third stage of *Geist*.

To do that we begin with the postmodern theory of **practical agency**, as I understand it:

Rehearse account of ancient practical conception of agency as on display in Sophocles's *Oedipus* trilogy.

Key concepts are fate, tragedy, and heroism.

Re-achieving heroism, without fate and (so) without tragedy, in post-modern *Sittlichkeit* with self-conscious subjectivity.

The general issue concerns another way in which my reading of the *Phenomenology* differs from more standard approaches.

For I take it that the ultimate point of Hegel's discussion of the large-scale differences between traditional and modern forms of life is to point beyond them, to a **third, postmodern stage in the development of *Geist*** (which I take to encompass all of our discursive, norm-governed practices and institutions).

In this phase, the metaphysics of normativity has a new and different structure.

This successor to modernity is what he calls in [808] of AK:

“*the new existence, a new world, and a new shape of Spirit...*”

Traditional life, epitomized for Hegel by the classical Greeks, is characterized by what he calls its *Sittlichkeit*.

I understand this to be the way traditional life treats norms as binding on us:

its practical understanding of the authority of **norms** over normative **attitudes**.

The discovery characteristic of modernity is that those norms are not simply there, features of the objective natural or supernatural world, but are in the end our products—that they are instituted by our practices and practical attitudes.

Normative statuses of authority and responsibility (so, superiority and subordination) come into the world when we start taking or treating each other in practice *as* authoritative, when we start holding each other responsible.

This is a genuine discovery about ourselves and the norms that make us what we are. It accordingly incorporates **a new sort of distinctively modern self-consciousness**.

But it brings with it what Hegel calls “**alienation**” from those norms, a practical attitude toward them that is the opposite of *Sittlichkeit*. For it makes the *bindingness* of those norms on us problematic, just because and insofar as they are understood as self-imposed. How can they genuinely constrain us if they are up to us? If they are not to be found in nature, and we can no longer understand them as imposed on us by God or the gods, isn’t everything permitted? Yet being governed by those norms makes us what we are. It is a condition of the meaningfulness or determinate contentfulness of our very thoughts, judgments, and intentions. (This thought is obviously pivotal for my specifically *semantic* reading Hegel’s book.)

What is needed to overcome alienation and the limitations inherent in the specifically modern version of self-consciousness, while retaining its progressive, defining insight into our role in the institution of discursive norms, is first theoretically and then practically to **reconcile the traditional appreciation of the status-dependence of normative attitudes** (the bindingness of norms on practical attitudes) **with the modern appreciation of the attitude-dependence of normative statuses** (the sense in which the norms are creatures of our practices). That will usher in the third, postmodern, age of *Geist*.

As I read it, the overall point of the *Phenomenology* is to develop the conceptual resources needed for us to see how to do this: to achieve the **theoretical self-consciousness** that can guide us in **practically achieving a form of norm-instituting reciprocal recognition** that expresses the lessons that have emerged from Hegel’s recollective rehearsal of the experience of the transition from traditional to modern forms of life.

That is what is needed to put us in position to make the transition beyond modernity that Hegel envisages.

I see the treatment of intentional agency in the Hegel's *Reason* chapter, in which the first half of his book culminates, as the key to understanding the recollection of the stages in *Geist*'s development in the long *Spirit* chapter.

So it is appropriate to focus on some of the details of the treatment of **agency** to assess the larger-scale claims about the shape of Hegel's project.

Premodern Practical Conception of Agency:

Hegel sees the premodern conception of agency as articulated most explicitly in classical Greek drama—paradigmatically, **Sophocles' *Oedipus*** (the eponymous play and the trilogy). The conception expressed there is structured by the interactions of three elements:

fate, tragedy, and heroism.

Each has **quite different senses** from the ones those terms have today, and it is crucial to understanding Hegel to understand how he understands the Greek understanding of them.

Hegel calls **the traditional *sittlich* practical understanding of intentional agency “heroic.”**

Heroism is not a dispositional psychological matter of being *brave*.

It is a normative matter of being *responsible*.

By this he means that agents take responsibility for their doings under *all* the descriptions true of those doings.

No normative distinction is made between what was done intentionally, or what the agent knew he was doing, and what he did unintentionally and without realizing that that is what he was doing.

Thus Oedipus is held responsible for **killing his father and marrying his mother**, even though he did not intend to do those things and was not aware that that is what he was doing.

For those are still things he *did*, not just things that *happened*.

(Anscombe: “I do what happens.”)

Oedipus did intend to, and did, kill *that man* and marry *that woman*.

On the traditional, heroic conception it is the normative **statutes** that matter, not the agent's **attitudes**.

Parricide and incest *ought not to be*.

One should not act so as to incur the normative status of father-killer and mother-fucker.

The “ought-to-do”s governing attitudes are just to be read off of the “ought-to-be”s that articulate statuses.

Attitudes of knowing and intending matter only in determining *that* one is responsible for a deed, not for determining *what* one thereby did and is responsible for doing.

The *status* one acquires by doing something is not itself construed as mitigated by or otherwise relativized in any way to the *attitudes* of intending and knowing in virtue of which it counts as one’s doing in the first place.

That one did not mean to do what one did under some descriptions of it can **engender sympathy**, but it cannot **diminish responsibility**.

It is for this reason, Hegel thinks, that **the traditional heroic practical conception of agency is inevitably always also a tragic conception.**

The tragedy does not consist in the transcendent awfulness of the outcome (which is pretty much what current usage has whittled the concept of tragedy down to).

It consists in the fact that in acting at all one puts oneself at the mercy of forces outside of one’s knowledge and control.

Those alien forces determine the content of one’s actual deed, what one turns out to have done and to be responsible for having done. **Tragedy is the submission of the heroic agent to fate.**

The idea of **fate** does not invoke some sort of determinism or antecedent necessitation of outcome, but just those dark (because unknowable and uncontrollable) forces that engulf and overwhelm what is launched by one’s limited knowledge and intention, transforming it into deeds that reach far beyond those attitudes into an unforeseeable status of culpability.

When Oedipus’s good intentions have evil consequences he could not foresee, it shows that **our normatively assessable doings are transformed by forces that are not responsive—and in that sense, alien—to the normative order. That is the incursion of fate.**

(Hegel quotes in this connection the proverb “When a flung stone leaves the hand, it belongs to the devil.”)

Shouldering the responsibility that fate in this sense brings down upon one who acts,

acknowledging responsibility for what one does in spite of its transformation by fate into deeds not intended and not foreseen is **tragic heroism**.

This is the intimate, mutually presupposing **relation between *tragedy, fate, and heroism*** that Hegel sees as articulating the structure of ancient Greek normativity and *Geist*.

The fundamentally **modern understanding**, which is transformative not only theoretically but practically, is epitomized in the passage:

“The will thus has the right to accept responsibility only for the first set of consequences, since they alone were part of its purpose.”

What the agent is responsible for (a normative status) is now understood to be dependent on the attitudes of the agent: the purpose that motivates the doing and consequences that could be expected to result.

These are what in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel calls the “**rights of intention and knowledge**.” Hegel takes the acknowledgment of this attitude-dependence of normative statuses to be a genuine insight, and to represent moral progress.

Aquinas’s “doctrine of double effect” here shows him as a *modern* thinker in his views on agency. For he is making even finer distinctions than Hegel does:

Thomas Aquinas sees an important difference in their significance for attributions of moral responsibility between **characterizations of an action which the agent endorsed as intentional** and **consequential characterizations the agent merely foresaw**.

His famous “doctrine of double effect” asserts that some characterizations of doings in virtue of which **one would be maximally morally culpable if they were specifications of what one intended** (either as an end or as a means) need not entail the same degree of moral culpability if they specify instead **only consequences one *knew* would ensue in virtue of what one *did* intend**.

This subtle distinction both presupposes and further articulates and elaborates the fine structure of the conceptual and moral progress Hegel sees as an essential component of the practically self-conscious modern form of agency: the advance represented by acknowledging the normative significance of the distinction between intentional and consequential specifications of actions.

Hegel explicitly appeals to this distinction as marking the decisive difference between modern and traditional practical conceptions of agency:

The *heroic* self-consciousness (as in ancient tragedies like that of Oedipus) has not yet progressed from its unalloyed simplicity to reflect on the distinction between *deed* [Tat] and *action* [Handlung], between the external event and the purpose and knowledge of the circumstances, or to analyse the consequences minutely, but accepts responsibility for the deed in its entirety. [RP§118Z]

Hegel takes it that making this modern distinction between *Tat* and *Handlung*—what is done in a wider sense and what is done in a narrower sense—is a decisive advance in our understanding of ourselves as agents. But this new level of practical self-consciousness courts the danger of a distinctive kind of alienation from its deeds.

“Consciousness, therefore, through its experience in which it should have found its truth, has really **become a riddle to itself**: the consequences of its deed are for it not the deeds themselves. What befalls it is, for it, not the experience of what it is in itself, the transition is not a mere alteration of the form of the same content and essence, presented now as the content and essence, and again as the object or [outwardly] beheld essence of itself.”

What is deservedly controversial is my claim that he envisages a *further* advance, which while *retaining* a version of the rights of intention and knowledge *combines* that with the reachievement of a version of heroism. This is synthesizing what was right about the modern insight into the attitude-dependence of normative statuses with what was right about the traditional insistence on the status-dependence of normative attitudes that, in the index example, consists of Oedipus’ heroic acknowledgment of responsibility for parricide and incest as *his* deeds: things he really did. He is responsible, and so acknowledges it.

Postmodern agency is to be understood as reachieving a kind of heroism, without a corresponding notion of fate (and so without tragedy).

What corresponds to **fate** in the postmodern conception of agency is just **contingency (immediacy)**, which is to be **given the normative shape of necessity (mediated by normative attitudes)**.

As with traditional heroic agency, **there is no part of the deed attributed to the agent for which no-one takes responsibility.**

Postmodern structure of agency:

As I understand it, *in addition to* the responsibility distinctive of individual agency, and subject to the restrictions codified as the rights of intention and knowledge, there is a correlative responsibility on the part of the rest of us: of those exercising the recognitive authority of imputing the deed (attributing it, holding the doer responsible for it). In the postmodern structure of normativity-instituting recognitive practices, **the agent's recognitive community has a responsibility** correlative to that of the one who "confesses" responsibility for a doing. That is **the responsibility to "forgive"** it.

What one confesses is that one's practical attitudes and what one actually are not just as the norms require them to be.

Forgiving is incorporating the doing confessed in a distinctive kind of *recollection*: a rational reconstruction of a *sequence* of doings containing it, that is **expressively progressive** in the sense that the forgiving recollection exhibits the deed as an episode in the (fitful, halting, partial, imperfect, but cumulatively progressive in the context of the trajectory in which it is situated) **emerging into explicitness of a norm** that those forgiving the deed can themselves endorse. That endorsement of the norm with respect to which the deed is assessed is itself a way of taking responsibility for the deed. It is **recognizing** the doer in the form of **forgiving**.

Recollective forgiveness is the key to understanding norm-governedness in general.

Taking recollective responsibility for another's doing is practically acknowledging the obligation to tell a certain kind of retrospective story about that doing.

That is **the responsibility to rationally reconstruct it as norm-governed**.

The forgiving recollector must discern an implicit norm that governs the development of the deed. This is the intention [*Absicht*], which stands to the consequentially extended *Tat* as the agent's initial *Vorsatz* stands to the *Handlung*, which is the narrower action specified only under the descriptions explicitly licensed by the purpose for which it was performed.

The meta-norm that governs recollective performances (and the practical attitudes they express) is that the norm one reconstructively discerns or imputes must normatively govern *all* the consequential specifications of attitudes downstream of the *Handlung*.

Any actual recollective story will involve strains: elements of what is actually done, at *every* stage in the developing process, that *cannot* be smoothly, successfully, or convincingly given such a norm-responsive explanation.

As an edelmütig, forgiving assessor of another's doing, one *confesses* that it is (also) one's own fault, that one is not good enough at forgiving.

And one must *trust* that this failure, too—like the failure of the original, inadequately forgiven doer—will be more successfully forgiven by future assessors (who know more and are better at it). The content of the shared recognitive attitudes with which all parties identify is “*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass before us.*”

The attitude-governing norms recollective forgiveness institutes and acknowledges have the rich diachronic recognitive form of *traditions*.

The claim that is crucial for understanding the third age of *Geist* as retaining the progress made by modernity while overcoming its structural alienation is that recognition understood as including the recollective institution of traditions acknowledges both the attitude-dependence of normative statuses and the status-dependence of normative attitudes.

Agency as understood and practiced within the magnanimous recognitive structure of confession and forgiveness **combines these two heroic aspects of the pre-modern conception:**

- *sittlich* appreciation of the status-dependence of normative attitudes and
- acknowledging **total responsibility for the deed** as consequentially extended beyond the knowledge and control of the agent.

The burdens of tragic subjection to fate are replaced by the tasks of concrete magnanimous forgiveness.

Where our normative digestion of immediacy, contingency, and particularity shows its limitations, when (as in each case at some point they must) they outrun our recollective capacity to incorporate them into the mediated, normative conceptual form of universals, **that failure of ours is properly acknowledged by confession and trust in the forgiveness of that failure to fulfill our responsibilities, by more capable future recollectors.**

“The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind. The deed is not imperishable; it is taken back by Spirit into itself, and the aspect of individuality present in it, whether as intention or as an existent negativity and limitation, straightway vanishes. The self that carries out the action, the form of its act, is only a moment of the whole, and so likewise is the knowledge, that by its judgement determines and establishes the distinction between the individual and universal aspects of the action.” *PG* §669.

The responsibility the individual tragic heroic agent takes on himself is accordingly spread out and shared.

The doing of each (in one sense) **is now in a real sense the doing of all** (in another, recognitively complementary sense).

For all share responsibility for each action.

The temporally extended, historically structured recognitive community of those who are alike in all confessing the extent of their failure to be norm-governed, acknowledging their responsibility to forgive those failures in others, confessing the extent of their efforts at recollective and reparative forgiveness, and trusting that a way will be found to forgive their failures is one in which each member identifies with all the others, taking co-responsibility for their practical attitudes.

It is the “‘I’ that is ‘we’, the ‘we’ that is ‘I’.” *PG* §177.

Two concrete worries about this picture are

- a) that “if all are responsible for everything, then no one is responsible for anything,” and that “responsibility implies blame” and
- b) the community should not be blamed for what some wayward individual does.

On the first point, it is a crucial part of the postmodern conception of agency I am attributing to Hegel that the sort of responsibility acknowledged by the agent and the sort of responsibility acknowledged by the community are quite different.

The confessing agent and the forgiving community play distinct, complementary normative roles.

What is distinctive about **the responsibility characteristic of individual agency, including the rights of intention and knowledge, remains in the postmodern picture**—although its significance is changed by the different role it plays in communities whose normative statuses are instituted by reciprocal recognitive attitudes with the structure distinctive of confession and forgiveness (the structure I call “trust”).

The community is not responsible for the deed in the same sense the agent is: the sense in which things are done (only) by agents.

There is a sense in which those deeds, set in motion by agents acting intentionally, are also to be understood as attributable to, and so done by the community that takes responsibility for them in its distinctive way.

But that is a *different* sense of “done by,” corresponding to a different sense of “responsible for.”

The responsibility the *assessing* consciousness undertakes for what is done is complementary to the responsibility the *deliberating* consciousness undertakes for its act, rather than identical with it.

It has two dimensions: **reparative and recollective.**

The **reparative** responsibility is practically to intervene in the still-unfolding consequences of the doing, which provide an ever-increasing stock of consequential specifications of it.

The deed is never done, and part of the generous *edelmütig* way of holding someone responsible for what they do is to acknowledge responsibility for helping to make it turn out well.

One can do that by practically contributing new consequences, thereby making-true new consequential specifications of the deed.

But what counts as “better” consequences? **The standard for such normative assessments of consequences is set by the other, *recollective* dimension of forgiveness.**

The ***reparative* responsibility** to ameliorate the consequences of the doing being forgiven **must be understood in terms of *recollection*.**

The aim is to make the whole that results from one's current action, thought of as a contribution to a tradition, *more fully and successfully recollectable* than that tradition would otherwise be.

The meta-norm that governs recollective performances (and the practical attitudes they express) is that the norm one reconstructively discerns or imputes must normatively govern *all* the consequential specifications of attitudes downstream of the *Handlung*.

That includes the practical-reparative and hermeneutic-recollective attitudes the assessing judge adopts.

So the forgiving agent must endorse the norm being attributed as governing the deed—must acknowledge its authority.

That is part of taking co-responsibility for it.

In forgiving, one makes oneself responsible for the emerging norm one attributes as the implicit *Absicht* of the deed.

This is *identifying with the agent*, in the sense of risking and if need be sacrificing one's own attitudes, by subjecting them to normative assessment according to the norm one both attributes and acknowledges, and being subjunctively sensitive to that norm in one's own attitudes.

In this specific sense, the forgiving agent acknowledges the doing as its own, as the doing not *only* of the agent who initiated it, but *also* of the forgiving recollector.

Forgiving recollection can be understood on the model of the institutional common or case-law jurisprudential practices.

The current judge rationally reconstructs the tradition by **selecting a trajectory of prior precedential decisions that are expressively progressive**, in that they reveal the gradual emergence into explicitness of a norm (the content of a law) that can be seen to have implicitly governed (in the dual sense of serving as a standard and having the precedential attitudes be revealed as subjunctively sensitive to it) all the decisions (attitudes) in the reconstructed tradition.

It is that norm that then justifies the current judge's decision.

The norm that is seen as emerging from the rationally reconstructed tradition of decisions sets the standard for normative assessment by future judges of the current decision, which claims to be subjunctively sensitive to that very norm.

So the recollecting judge subjects herself to (acknowledges the authority of) the norm she retrospectively discerns.

The more of the prior decisions the recollection rationalizes and exhibits as expressive of the norm, the better the recollective warrant that norm provides for the current decision.

Whatever residue there is of decisions that cannot be fit into the retrospectively rationally reconstructed tradition as precedentially rationalizing and expressive of the norm, increases the scope for criticism of the current decision by future judges, who may or may not acknowledge it as correct and itself precedential.

For the only authority the decision has derives from its responsibility to the tradition of prior decisions.

The failure of the judge's recollection to rationalize and show as norm-governed *every* aspect of the prior actual attitudes—what was actually done—is itself a normative failure to be confessed in turn.

This sketch makes clear that what “blame” transforms into in the projected postmodern construal of agency—the sort of normative failure that is confessed, by which confession one petitions for recognition in the form of forgiveness—is different for the agent whose deliberations initially author the deed and the community whose forgiving assessments it elicits.

Both can and will fail to live up to the norms they are committed to and governed by, and so are obliged to confess that failure, as they are committed to forgive the failures of others.

Forgiving is itself a doing, but a doing of a very special recollective kind.

The postmodern form of life arises when the recognitive attitudes that institute its norms take the form of rationalizing, forgiving recollection.

What if what one is given to work with is *too hard to forgive*?

What if the subject of the attitude that is being forgiven as part of the larger enterprise of forgiving something upstream of it is in fact dispositionally unresponsive to the verdict of the norm?

What if (as the *Kammerdiener* alleges) it in fact is sensitive only to other concerns particular to, attitudes of, its subject?

It seems that the criteria of adequacy for *successful* forgiveness, both reparative and recollective, are in many cases *impossible* to satisfy.

Some things people have done (both ourselves and others), we want to say, are simply *unforgivable*. (The last century or so provides a host of notorious, alarmingly large-scale candidates.)

In some cases, though we might try to mitigate the consequences of evil doings, we just have no idea at all how to go about discerning the emergence of a governing norm we could endorse ourselves. And this situation does not just arise in extraordinary or exceptional cases.

Any actual recollective story will involve strains: elements, aspects, or descriptions of what is actually done, at *every* stage in the developing process, that *cannot* be smoothly, successfully, or convincingly given such a norm-responsive explanation.

Indeed. But now we must ask: **whose fault** is it that the doing is unforgivable—**the doer or the forgiver**? Is the failure that of the bad agent or of the bad recollector? Is it a matter of how things anyway just are, given what was done, considered as a settled fact? Or is it because the recollector couldn't come up with a more norm-responsive narrative?

The first is the attitude of the *unsittlich valet*, for whom no-one is a practically norm-acknowledging *hero*, in the sense of being genuinely responsive and sensitive to norms. To treat the recollective failure as *wholly* the fault of the doer, to take it as simply an objective fact that there is no norm we could endorse that governs the deed as the assessor inherits it, is to adopt exactly **the blaming practical attitude of the hard-hearted judge** (the Kantian moral rigorist)—an attitude Hegel criticizes as *niederträchtig*.

The contrasting magnanimous *edelmütig* attitude he recollectively recommends as implicit in the idea of norm-governedness as such is rather to identify with the doer, to take (co-)responsibility for the doing.

That is to acknowledge at least equal responsibility on the part of the unsuccessful forgiver.

For the issue is not properly posed in alethic modal terms of the possibility or impossibility of forgiving what was done.

It is rather **a deontic normative matter.**

Paying one's dues as a member of a recognitive community structured by trust is acknowledging that one is always already implicitly *committed* to forgiving, *responsible for* forgiving what one's fellows do or have done.

We have here a Hegelian version of a Kantian regulative ideal.

That governing regulative ideal is "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner."

One can be *committed to that ideal* (normatively governed by it in the dual deontic and alethic sense) *even if one must confess that in many cases one cannot understand—and so forgive—all.*

It might well be that one is in fact incapable of fulfilling that commitment, of carrying out that responsibility. If and insofar as that is so, it is a normative failure that the unsuccessful would-be forgiver should *confess*. To take proper recognitive recollective responsibility requires the forgiving agent to confess her own inadequacy to the recollective task. Your confession of a failure of your practical attitudes appropriately to acknowledge a norm is a petition for my recognition in the form of my forgiving taking of (co-)responsibility for your doing. My subsequent failure to adopt adequately forgiving recollective recognitive attitudes is something I am in turn responsible for confessing.

That confession is itself an act of identification with you: "I am as you are."

My attitudes, like yours, fail adequately to satisfy the norms that they nonetheless acknowledge *as* binding, *as* governing those attitudes.

For one acknowledges an obligation (the bindingness of a governing norm) insofar as one confesses the extent to which one has been unresponsive to the demands of the recollective norm, unable properly to fulfill a responsibility one acknowledges.

And one is genuinely sensitive to that normative demand in making such a confession.

Confessing is what one must do to *make it the case that one is in fact sensitive to the norm recollected* as governing the attitudes that make up the tradition one has discerned (including one's own attitudes), even though one is incapable of fulfilling the reparative and recollective responsibility one thereby acknowledges.

As an *edelmütig*, forgiving assessor of another's doing, one *confesses* that it is (also) one's *own* fault, that one is not good enough at forgiving. And one must *trust* that this failure, too—like the

failure of the original, inadequately forgiven doer—will be more successfully forgiven by future assessors (who might know more or be better at it). That one *cannot* successfully tell a recollective story is not what matters. That is a deontic failure, relative to one's commitments. It is something to be *confessed*, in *trust* that that failure, too, can be *forgiven*. The well-meaning but incompetent forgiving recollector's confession, like that of the contrite agent, is a petition for recognition in the form of forgiveness. The trusting confession of recollective failure completes the identification of the one playing the role of assessor with the one playing the role of agent. The recognitive attitudes of forgiveness and confession emerge as two sides of one coin, two aspects of the symmetric recognitive structure: the norm-instituting structure of *trust*. Its slogan is: "Attribute responsibility forgivingly, acknowledge responsibility contritely." Or as William Blake puts it: "Down through all eternity,/ I forgive you and you forgive me." But it is not true that all is forgiven.

We are *committed* to forgiving each other everything, and so to confessing our inevitable recollective-recognitive failures and trusting in their eventual forgiveness.

In a normative community with this recognitive structure, everyone forgives to the limits of their ability, and everyone confesses those limits, and trusts that they, too, will be forgiven for them. (Compare: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.") But the most telling formulation of the content of the shared recognitive attitudes with which all parties identify is "*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass before us.*"

This is how I understand the sense in which, as Hegel says in *Absolute Knowing*:

"Spirit, in the absolute certainty of itself, is lord and master over every deed and actuality, and can cast them off, and make them as if they had never happened." [667]

"The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind. The deed is not imperishable; it is taken back by Spirit into itself, and the aspect of individuality present in it, whether as intention or as an existent negativity and limitation, straightway vanishes." [669]

Absolute Knowing

I've been talking about the practical and recognitive aspects of Hegel's view.

This is the edification that his broadly semantic account is supposed to afford us.

It is worth reminding ourselves about the cognitive and semantic aspects of it, in order better to read these passages summarizing where we have gotten.

We are to understand these passages in terms of the *process of experience*. It has two aspects or phases:

- a) The first we now understand not only as the *experience of error*, as in the *Introduction*, but as the full TOTE *cycle of perception, thought, and action* (followed by perception of the result of the action, initiating a new cycle).

This actually already involves two phases: **error/failure and repair**.

- b) The second is the process of *recollection*, retrospectively rationally reconstructing that experience in an expressively progressive way, making it visible as the gradual, inexorable emergence into explicitness of what shows up as having been all along implicit. This is at once the reality responsible for its appearances and the *Absicht* implicit in the *Tat*.

- c) What emerges from this recollection is both in one sense the *product* of the two-phase process (prospective and retrospective, lived forward and understood backward), present only at the (always provisional) *end* of the process, and in another sense is revealed as the *presupposition* of the process, present already at the *beginning* of the process.

It is in the one sense *made* and in the other *found*.

It is the *in-itself* whose process of becoming *for consciousness* is experience with recollection.

What emerges from this process after each two-stage cycle of experience and recollection is both what the objective world is *in itself* and what the subjective self is *in itself*.

The revelation of the one is always also the revelation of the other.

It is the determination of subjective conceptual contents as the revelation of what *really* follows from what and is incompatible with what.

That recollective determination (**a making that is a finding**) of conceptual contents incorporates contingent immediacy and particularity in the necessary (normative) universal conceptual (thoroughly mediated) form.

[798] **the Notion** [*Begriff*], has become the element of existence, or **has become the form of objectivity for consciousness**.

Bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism (BHCR):

that the subjective and objective poles of the intentional nexus are equally and ideally identically conceptually articulated.

[799] **The content is...**the very **movement** just spoken of; for **the content is Spirit that traverses its own self** and does so *for itself* as Spirit by the fact that it has the 'shape' of the Notion in its objectivity.

“The ‘shape’ of the *Begriff* in its objectivity” is its alethic modal shape, as subjunctively robust lawful necessary connections among facts about objects and properties.

The “movement”, which is “traversing” is *recollection*, which is what establishes the *representational* relation between objective reality and its appearance in the subjective normative form of thought.

“Spirit traversing itself,” (also “rehearsing the moments”) is Spirit going through the cycle of perception-thought-action and the perception of the results of action, which is the first, prospective, destructive phase of the experience of error and failure, and then the second, recollective-reconstructive, retrospective constructive phase of experience. This movement is the *determination* of the content, in the sense both of a *making* of it and of a *finding* of it.

[802] For *experience* is just this, that the *content*—**which is Spirit—is in itself substance**, and therefore an *object of consciousness*. But this substance which is Spirit is the *process* in which Spirit becomes what it is in itself; and it is only as this process of reflecting itself into itself that it is in itself truly Spirit. It is in itself the *movement* which is cognition—**the transforming of that in-itself into that which is for itself, of Substance into Subject, of the object of consciousness into an object of self-consciousness**, i.e. into an object that is just as much superseded, or into **the Notion**.

Empirical experience is *of* (represents) objective reality (=“substance” on the objective side), the object of consciousness. That experience is a process, the process by which discursive normativity establishes the relationship between the two poles of the intentional nexus. It is a movement, establishing the identity of the conceptual content of objective being and subjective thought which is the identity of conceptual content = the *Begriff*.

The two-phase process of experience is both the determination of conceptual content as found cognitively and as made in action, and the actualization of the subject through the determination of the *Absicht* implicit in its *Tat*. This is “Spirit becoming what it is in itself.” The recollective phase is “this process of reflecting itself into itself.” That is the form of self-consciousness of itself *as* the “movement of cognition” and action. It is the grasping of substance, including its immediacy as the aspect of opacity to cognition and recalcitrance to action, as in itself determinately conceptually articulated, hence in itself what it comes to be *for* consciousness. In knowing in and acting on the substantial objective world, consciousness as recollectively self-conscious finds only facts that are in the determinately contentful conceptual shape native to its own thoughts.

[804] Spirit, however, has shown itself to us to be neither merely the *withdrawal* of self-consciousness into its pure inwardness, nor the mere *submergence* of self-consciousness into substance...but Spirit is this **movement** of the Self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself

into its substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, **making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between objectivity and content.**

Can now read the bolded conclusion of this passage.

[805] In this knowing, then, Spirit has concluded the movement in which it has shaped itself, in so far as this shaping was burdened with **the difference of consciousness** [i.e. of the latter from its object], a difference now overcome. The **content**, in accordance with the **freedom** of its being, **is the self-alienating Self**, or the immediate unity of self-knowledge. **The pure movement of this alienation, considered in connection with the content, constitutes the necessity of the content. The distinct content, as determinate, is in relation, is not 'in itself'; it is its own restless process of superseding itself, or negativity; therefore, negativity or diversity, like free being, is also the Self; and in this self-like form in which existence is immediately thought, the content is the Notion.**

The “difference of consciousness” = the disparity that knowing and agency essentially involve, between what things are for consciousness and what they are in themselves is “overcome” when the recollective phase of experience establishes the identity of content (now in objective and again in subjective form) that is also their standing in representational relations. This is the result of the recollective reconstruction of an expressively progressive trajectory of experience that exhibits it as the emergence into explicitness (for consciousness) of what shows up as always having implicitly governed that process of revelation (appearance). The governance is of two sorts:

- a) normative, providing a standard for assessment of what counts as a representing of that represented object just in virtue of being responsible to the authority of the represented reality
- b) alethic, in that according to the recollected reconstructed expressively progressive tradition, the actual attitudes of applying the concepts were in fact subjunctively sensitive to the norm of correctness that governed them. That is why the process of experience (as rationally reconstructed) is expressively progressive: the norm is ever-better realized.

[805] **the form of the Notion...unites the objective form of Truth and of the knowing Self in an immediate unity. ...[T]he pure Notion and its onward movement, depends solely on its pure determinateness.**

This process regarded prospectively is the process of *determining* the content in the sense of *making* it *more* determinate, and regarded retrospectively the process of *determining* the content in the sense of *finding out* what the content has (implicitly, *an sich*) all along already been.

[807] Yet this externalization is still incomplete; it expresses the connection of its self-certainty with the object which, just because it is thus connected, has not yet won its complete freedom. The self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: **to know one's limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself**. This **sacrifice** is the externalization in which **Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of free contingent happening**, intuiting its pure Self as Time outside of it, and equally its Being as Space. This last becoming of Spirit, Nature, is its living immediate Becoming; **Nature, the externalized Spirit**, is in its existence nothing but this eternal externalization of its continuing existence and **the movement which reinstates the Subject**.

What the subject sacrifices is its own attitudes, which are now practically understood as more or less mistaken. Those individual, contingent attitudes are now confessed to be *inter alia* the product of “what the judge had for breakfast” rather than simply acknowledgements of the norm set by what is represented. What the subject sacrifices that identification *for*, and therefore, by its sacrifice identifies *with* is the authority of the governing normative standard for attitudes set by the represented objective reality that is now taken all along to have governed the process of experience—in the dual normative and subjunctive sense of “governed by.”

[808] **History, is a conscious, self-mediating process—Spirit emptied out into Time. its fulfilment consists in perfectly knowing what it is, in knowing its substance, this knowing is its withdrawal into itself in which it abandons its outer existence and gives its existential shape over to recollection.**

the new existence, a new world and a new shape of Spirit...

Recollection is what does all this. This new, retrospective rationalizing process—the form of recollective rationality that institutes and now explicitly acknowledges the essential *historical* dimension of the representational normativity of the empirical experience of objectivity is one of Hegel’s great innovations/discoveries (something he both made and found...recollectively, by his own philosophical rational reconstruction, as recounted and rehearsed for us in the *Phenomenology*).

The recollective phase of the experiential process is what turns a *past* into a *history*: something *comprehended*, in the sense of put into an expressively progressive coming to determinate conceptual explicitness (*for* consciousness) of what shows up retrospectively as having been all along implicit (*in* itself).

“*The new existence, a new world and a new shape of Spirit...*” is the third, post-modern phase (and structure) of *Geist* that is ushered in by the achievement of the form of theoretical self-consciousness he calls “Absolute Knowing,” and will be fully achieved when (and only when) we put that theoretical self-consciousness into the practical institutional form (the form in “objective Spirit”) of communities synthesized by reciprocal recognition in the form of confession and forgiveness, that is, **trust**.

[R]ecollection, the inwardizing, of that experience, has preserved it and is the inner being, and in fact the higher form of the substance.

The goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, has for its path the recollection of the Spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm. **Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History;** but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the **Science** of Knowing in the sphere of appearance: the two together, **comprehended History,** form alike the inwardizing and the Calvary of absolute Spirit, the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne, without which he would be lifeless and alone.