
As is well known, one of Hegel’s primary means for motivating his own ethical and political theory is to complain about the “empty formalism” of Kantian and Fichtean approaches. If Hegel’s complaint has seemed controversial – and I will wade into that controversy in Chapter 2 – his alternative conception of freedom has been no less so. If his charge of empty formalism has seemed to Kantians uncharitable, his own theory of free will in terms of a concrete theory of social institutions has seemed to Kantians a cynical attempt to change the question. But one of Hegel’s most interesting comments on the empty formalism objection – in his first preface to the Science of Logic – puts a rather interesting historical spin on the issue:

However, the period of fermentation that goes with the beginning of every new creation seems to be past. In its first manifestation, a new creation usually behaves towards the entrenched systematization of the earlier principle with fanatical hostility; in fear of losing itself in the expansion of the particular, it also shuns the labor that goes with scientific cultivation and, nevertheless in need of it, it grasps at first at an empty formalism. The demand for the elaboration and cultivation of the material becomes at that point all the more pressing. There is a period in the formation of an epoch in which, just as in the formation of the individual, the foremost concern is the acquisition and reinforcement of the principle in its undeveloped intensity.
But the higher demand is that such a principle should be made into science (WL 21,7).

Now that Kant and Fichte have (successfully) manned the barricades, along comes Hegel to establish social services, law and order in the newly formed philosophical polity. In French Revolutionary parlance this is to see Hegel as Thermidorian, and the question for all Thermidorians is whether the regime that they offer is a consolidation or a betrayal of the original revolutionary impulse.¹

But these are not just metaphors: the “elaboration and cultivation” of the Kantian-Fichtean principle of autonomy proceeds through a social theory obsessed with levels and aspects of organization – represented perhaps most fully in Hegel’s attribution of central roles for the family, estates and corporations – where these forms of organization are rigorously interrogated for their ability to support individuals’ attempts to pursue their interests and develop their talents.

This work is an attempt to show that such a social theory can be an elaboration rather than a betrayal of the concept of autonomy; the argument proceeds in two parts. In Part I, I trace Hegel’s deep critical involvement with the Kantian conception of autonomy as Kant himself tried to elaborate it and cultivate it in his Doctrine of Virtue, particularly in the necessary end of developing our own talents. This culminates in a presentation of Hegel’s alternative moral psychology grounded in talents and interests as a way of understanding his distinctively expressivist inflection of the notion of autonomy. In Part II, I use this moral psychology to interpret Hegel’s investigations into one of the main forms of the

¹ For a fuller historical treatment of this revolutionary trope, see Pinkard, *German Philosophy*. 
experiments in living he found in his own society – his theory of the estates (Stände). This represents one line of the “expansion of the particular” that Hegel holds to be essential to a concrete account of free will. In Part III, I close the circle by showing how Hegel’s positive account responds (at least partially) to the desiderata that are generated by his diagnosis of the shortcomings of the Kantian expansion.

More specifically, the interpretive thesis that is developed and supported in Parts I and II is fourfold:

First, Hegel’s expansion of Kantian autonomy begins by analyzing the notion into three related problems: self-appropriation, specification of content, and effectiveness. Self-appropriation is the existential moment of identification with one’s own life, of success in overcoming estrangement, of affirmation. This is a general element of all self-consciousness, on Hegel’s view, as one can see in his unique description of Kant’s “pure apperception” as “the activity of making something one’s own [die Tätigkeit des Vermeinigens]” (EL§42Z1). But it also has an affective dimension of Selbstgefühl or self-assurance to which Hegel is particularly alive.² More specifically, for Hegel the affective presentation of the self-appropriation of other wills is trust, in the same way that the affective presentation of the self-appropriation of the content of one’s own will is enjoyment (Genuß).

Specification of content seems more straightforward but it includes for Hegel not only the determining of individual needs, desires and preferences but also crucially the identification of objective goods and specific principles of right. More

² For a discussion of the importance of Selbstgefühl see Wildt, Autonomie und Anerkennung. Hegels Moralitätskritik im Lichte Seiner Fichte-Rezeption, 23 and 350–1.
personally, this is the problem of determining which and what aspects of the events in which one is entangled are the signal of one’s life, and which and what aspects are noise. Finally, effectiveness is the problem of translating one’s ends into reality in such a way as to be able to recognize oneself in that reality. As literature such as Sartre’s *Dirty Hands* has taught us, this project is more complicated and success more uncertain than one might have thought at first. But Hegel accepts the Fichtean insight that without success at this project, one cannot become objective to oneself and therefore one’s purported autonomy is a sham. I support this general interpretive claim of the threefold project of autonomy in Chapters 1-3 by examining in detail Hegel’s criticism of both Kant’s and Fichte’s theories of virtue in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. These chapters are primarily analytical and deconstructive in the rather limited, literal sense that they show Hegel taking apart the Kantian and Fichtean apparatus and distinguishing the essential parts (to be used in reconstructing the apparatus) from the inessential and unhelpful. Or one might say that these chapters trace Hegel’s deweaving of the Kantian and Fichtean fabric, saving the warp and discarding the weft.

Second, each of these three projects has an objective aspect and a subjective aspect, and the objective side is best understood via the notion of talent whereas the subjective side is best understood via the notion of interest. Each of the three projects then becomes a problem of connecting the subjective and the objective, interest and talent, through action. I support this interpretive claim in Chapter 4 by reconstructing the moral psychology to be found both in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (primarily in the Spiritual Animal Kingdom) and the *Philosophy of Right*. The
notions of talent and interest are developed by Hegel on a different basis (i.e., not primarily by analysis or deweaving of the Kantian and Fichtean theories), and describe the texture for the new weft to be wound around the Kantian-Fichtean warp.

Third, Hegel derives from Fichte the insight that the three projects are in some tension with each other, though success in each is not mutually exclusive with success in any other and in fact at least partial success at every project is a condition for the possibility of success at each of the other projects. One can draw an analogy here with the bodily energy systems relevant for athletics: there is one anaerobic system that provides maximum energy for very short periods of time (< 10 seconds); a second anaerobic system that provides maximum energy for more extended periods of time (up to two minutes); and the aerobic system that can provide energy for hours at a time. All human bodies require all three energy systems, and all sports rely on all three, but they are provided genetically and utilized in practice in very different proportions. Strength in one system generally entails relative weakness in the other systems. In cycling, for example, good sprinters are generally poor time trialists. On Hegel's view, autonomy can be trained, but all training involves choice of emphasis and reference to antecedently given talents. The talent for and interest in autonomy is both omnipresent in human beings, on Hegel's view, and yet qualitatively diversified in that presence. Though I show how this insight into trade-offs between successes at the different component projects of autonomy is present in Fichte in Chapter 3, Hegel’s generalization of the insight and working through the permutations of possible combinations of relative
success and failure occupies the work of the first sections of Chapters 5, 6 and 7 through a reading of the Morality section of the *Philosophy of Right* as a re-weaving of the weft of talent and interest around the warp of the three projects. In her work on a Kantian theory of autonomy, Katerina Deligiorgi has characterized autonomy as a composite concept; in the tensions and combinations of the different parts of the composite in Hegel’s view, its fine structure becomes apparent.³ To continue the metaphor, here the qualitative differences between the threads and the specific consequences of their various combinations for the pattern and feel of the whole become apparent. We can distinguish three different basic kinds of pattern, which Hegel in his lectures on Morality characterizes as three different kinds of accountability.

Fourth, these different kinds of accountability are embodied in different ways by individual members of the different social estates (*Stände*). Hegel’s taxonomy of the estates varies throughout his different presentations, but taking the *Jenaer Realphilosophie* of 1805/6 as representative we can divide them into six: farmers and soldiers, craft and industrial producers and scholars, public officials and merchants.⁴ Each of the estates distinctively embodies one of the kinds of accountability, and each kind of accountability is embodied by two different estates in importantly and even radically different ways. This reading is substantiated through a reading of Hegel’s discussions of the estates, primarily in the *Jenaer Realphilosophie*.

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³ *The Scope of Autonomy*.
⁴ For a more historical treatment of the development of Hegel’s theory of the estates, see Waszek, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel’s Account of “Civil Society,”* 171–9.
*Realphilosophie* and the lectures on the *Philosophy of Right* in the second and third sections of Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant rejects the idea that there could be schemata of practical reason, arguing instead that the idea of a law of nature can play a role for the moral law analogous to that of schemata of the categories in the first *Critique*, i.e., the role of guiding judgment in the application of the universal moral law to particular circumstances, of mediating between a law of freedom and the empirical world:

But no intuition can be put under the law of freedom (as that of a causality not sensibly conditioned) and hence under the concept of an unconditioned good as well – and hence no schema on behalf of its application *in concreto*. Thus the moral law has no cognitive faculty other than the understanding (not the imagination) by means of which it can be applied to objects of nature, and what the understanding can put under an idea of reason is not a *schema of sensibility* but a law, such a law, however, as can be presented *in concreto* in objects of the senses and hence a law of nature, though only as to its form; this law is what the understanding can put under an idea of reason on behalf of judgment, and we can, accordingly, call it the *type* of the moral law (*KpV* 5:69).

Hegel rejects this move as disastrous, but my argument in Chapter 2 is that he understands this move on Kant’s part as a retreat from a better and fuller account to
which Kant partially gives life in the Doctrine of Virtue. And, indeed, in the latter text Kant appears to reopen the possibility of schemata of practical reason:

These (duties of virtue [of human beings toward one another with regard to their condition [Zustand]]) do not really call for a special chapter in the system of pure ethics...They are only rules modified in accordance with differences of the subjects to whom the principle of virtue (in terms of what is formal) is applied in cases that come up in experience (the material). Hence, like anything divided on an empirical basis, they do not admit of a classification that could be guaranteed to be complete. Nevertheless, just as a passage from the metaphysics of nature to physics is needed – a transition having its own special rules – something similar is rightly required from the metaphysics of morals: a transition which, by applying the pure principles of duty to cases of experience, would schematize [schematisieren] these principles, as it were, and present them as ready for morally practical use.

How should one behave, for example, toward human beings who are in a state of moral purity or depravity? Toward the cultivated or the crude? Toward men of learning or the ignorant, and toward the learned insofar as they use their science as members of polite society or outside society, as specialists in their field (scholars?) toward those whose learning is pragmatic or those in whom it proceeds more from spirit and taste? How should people be treated in accordance with their differences in estate [Stände], age, sex, health, prosperity or poverty and so forth? These questions do not yield so many different kinds of ethical obligation (for there is only one, that of virtue
as such), but only so many different ways of applying it (corollaries) (MM 6:468-9).

But whereas Kant appears to see in such diversity a blooming, buzzing empirical confusion, Hegel sees a largely stable and conceptually tractable pattern of social relations.

For reasons we will come to in Chapter 1, Hegel doesn’t put his own moral psychology in terms of the conditions of possibility of judgments of practical reason, but the fourfold interpretive thesis I argue for in this book nonetheless presents his theory of the proper system of mediation between the universality and particularity of practical reason and thus autonomy. There is a universal concept of autonomy as a composite problem of three different projects (self-appropriation, specification of content, and effectiveness), where each project embodies a need to productively connect different kinds of talents and interests. Then there are different images of the way such talents and interests are combined, and here at two levels. First at the level of Morality there are the three kinds of accountability as three different possible coordinated solutions to the three problems, each with their distinctive advantages and disadvantages. Then, at the level of Ethical Life there are two different actual ways of life that embody each kind of accountability in such a way that one can not only comprehend them philosophically and obtain recognition within them socially, but also write stories, celebrate religious rituals, and sing songs about them, i.e., in such a way that one can feel one’s own life permeated by deeply valuable relations to oneself and to others. As a result, one might take Hegel’s theory to offer an account of the connection between practical reasoning
and moral psychology in our own contemporary understanding of the terms. The estates are only one aspect of this second level of images, but I have chosen to focus on them in this work because the qualitative plurality of images is more striking than in Hegel's treatment of the family or the state as a whole.  

Three final notes are in order. First, in tracing out these developments within Hegel's thought, I have made extensive use of unpublished manuscripts and student transcripts of his lectures on the Philosophy of Right, particularly the Hotho and Griesheim transcripts from 1822/23 and 1824/25, respectively. Since Hegel only comes to his fully developed theory of the three projects of autonomy as relations between subjectivity and objectivity with the published text of the Philosophy of Right in 1821, it is not surprising that the lectures given after publication are particularly informative. Certainly, one cannot put as much weight on any particular wording in the manuscripts and lecture transcripts as opposed to the published texts, but I hope that the breadth and extent of support from those texts refutes any potential objection that I have cherry-picked questionable readings from unreliable sources. Second, I have rather pedantically refrained from exploring the political aspect of Hegel's theory of the estates, despite the fact that there are natural connections and extensions of the claims for which I argue for here. I have chosen to focus on the more distinctively moral or ethical autonomy of the members...

In this respect my reconstruction tries to do justice to the role within practical reasoning of both concrete practical identities (using the example of the estates in the fourth step) and the (still social) self-conceptions that underlie them. On my view, such self-conceptions are plural in different senses at the different levels of abstraction represented by the first three steps. Cf. Walsh, "Reasons Internalism, Hegelian Resources" and Laden, "Evaluating Social Reasons."
of the estates both because this form of autonomy strikes me as what is most directly at stake in the debate between Kantians and Hegelians, and because their political role is complicated by Hegel’s unique philosophy of law. Finally, it should be noted that none of the four levels of self-determination are a priori, either in Hegel’s understanding or in my own. The three sub-projects are the least readily revisable aspect of Hegel’s view and the system of estates the most, which tracks both Hegel’s biographical process of development and revision, and the relative conceptuality of the three projects as compared with the relative historicity of the estates. But as we shall also see, the myriad of tensions within the expanded form of the first two levels makes (logically) possible far more then three basic forms of accountability; nonetheless Hegel only treats three as being significant, and here he is clearly exercising historical judgment that we can only hint at in this work. In any event, we should avoid the stereotypically Hegelian sin of fetishizing the number three. The point of tracing the structure in its gory detail is to see how a pluralistic moral psychology could work in a modern context, not to argue that we should or even could adopt Hegel’s view whole cloth.