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# Hegel's Account Of The Unconscious And Why It Matters

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## Hegel's Account of the Unconscious and Why it Matters

Richard Eldridge

### I

In 1842, Franz Exner, professor of philosophy in Prague, notoriously characterized the entire enterprise of Hegelian psychology as “an undisciplined fooling about with empty concepts, which not infrequently lapses into being completely scatterbrained.”<sup>1</sup> Given the difficulty of Hegel's terminology and the tendentious character of his method of description, determined by the scheme of the teleological development of categories in *The Science of Logic*, it will be best to begin with fairly straightforward preliminary claims about what is interesting and important in Hegel's philosophical psychology. This philosophical psychology appears primarily in Hegel's Anthropology and Phenomenology, that is, the first two sub-sections of Section I, “Mind Subjective,” of Part III, *Philosophy of Mind*, of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, published in 1817, revised and reissued in 1827 and 1830, and supplemented with Additions from Hegel's lecture notes, published by Boumann in 1845. Why might Hegel's philosophical psychology, that is, his treatment of Subjective Mind in his Anthropology and Phenomenology, be important?

Four interrelated features of Hegel's treatment of mindedness in individuals are of particular interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Exner, *Die Psychologie der Hegelschen Schule* (Leipzig, 1842, 1844, pp. 108-9), cited in M. J. Petry, “Introduction,” in G. W. F. Hegel, *The Berlin Phenomenology*, ed. and trans. M. J. Petry, (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1981), lxxxvii.

1. That treatment is resolutely non-dualist but also non-reductionist and non-eliminativist. “The soul,” Hegel writes, “is no separate immaterial entity.<sup>2</sup>” In fact, it is no entity at all, but rather, as in Aristotle, a form or mode of organization of a natural being that determines that being’s capacities or powers, its second-order abilities to develop explicit first-order abilities. Nor are the capacities and abilities in question themselves understood in solely material terms. The organization of the human being rather makes it the case that, under suitable conditions, that being actively, from its own organized activity, grows into participation in rational life in culture. That is, human beings by nature possess capacities for free and meaningful life. Or, as Hegel puts it, “The soul stands midway between Nature, which lies behind her, on the one hand, and the world of ethical freedom which *extricates itself* from natural mind, on the other hand” (391Z, 36, emphasis added). Nowadays we might call such an account of mindedness as a set of powers for self-determining rational activity *emergentist*, though that is more a promissory-note label than an explanation of what goes on in human cognitive and ethical development. In any case, the account that Hegel puts forward is, again, interestingly non-dualist but also non-reductionist and non-eliminativist.

2. Abstracting from his reliance on the categories of the *Logic*, Hegel’s general way of proceeding in giving an account of mindedness can be characterized as a contribution to *developmental-cognitive ethology*. Hegel describes the development of forms of behaving in the human being from initial sensory responsiveness to the emergence of a primitive sense of self, to the development of concepts, and ultimately to higher forms of thinking and rational action. As

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<sup>2</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), §389, 29; cited hereafter in text by section or Zusatz number plus page number.

Murray Greene usefully notes, like Kant, Hegel takes it for granted that possession and employment of concepts is a necessary condition for discursive self-consciousness and apperceptive identity over time, but beyond Kant Hegel undertakes to describe how concepts, including the Kantian categories, are actually developed within a course of initially sensate, emergently rational life, hence to trace, as Greene puts it, “the emergence of a thinking ego as a sublation of feeling subjectivity.”<sup>3</sup>

Without yet trying to unpack what actually goes on in this sublation, it is nonetheless clear that Hegel rejects representationalism as well as dualism. That is, his account specifically aims at avoiding reliance on any language of thought or any set of innate, inherent representers somehow ‘just built’ into mind as substance. Instead, as already noted, mindedness or soul is not a substance at all but rather a mode of organization of a physical being, and thinking in the sense of the possession and deployment of concepts on the part of a thinking being with a continuing, discursively-structured self-identity will be described as developing naturally out of more primitive processes and activities. Or as Hegel puts it, in the earlier accounts that he is rejecting,

mind was treated as a thing; [its] categories were regarded, in the general manner of the abstractive intellect, as inert, fixed; as such they are incapable of expressing the nature of mind. Mind is not an inert being but, on the contrary, absolutely restless being, pure activity...not an essence that is already finished and complete before its manifestation, keeping itself aloof behind its host of appearances, but an essence which is truly actual only through the specific forms of its necessary self-manifestation [and] ...inwardly

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<sup>3</sup> Murray Greene, *Hegel on the Soul* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 168.

bound to [the body]. ... The entire development of mind is nothing else but the raising of itself to truth, and the so-called psychic forces have no other meaning than to be the stages of this ascent. (378Z, 379Z; 3, 6).

While this is, on the face of it, less than fully clear in its details, the general point is evident enough. The only thing that we are to consider in considering mindedness is the living human being, and Hegel's developmental-cognitive ethology will trace how the living human being through its own activity, enabled by its organization and in response to its environment, comes to develop concepts and a sense of self, without relying on the positing of any simply given representations in mind, hence also without separating representing from responding, at least in initial stages of development.

3. Hegel treats the developmental actualization of mindedness (as a mode of organization of the human being) into explicit, first-order abilities as an *achievement* that is reasonably endorsable over time. "Mind," as Hegel puts it, in the sense of mindedness "comes to authenticate itself and to be in fact what it ought to be according to its Notion" (382Z, 15). That is, when we come to possess normative standards for judging (in the form of concepts) and acting, and when we act according to those standards, then mindedness as organization has made evident and endorsable what it is naturally *for*, under good enough circumstances of development, something like the way in which a painter might in and through the work of at last making this painting authenticate himself as a genuinely talented painter. Importantly, the normative standards apply both to judging and to acting, so that the theoretical life and the practically rational life are treated as inseparable aspects of one another.

All this is a significant point of contrast with Freud, who represents the development of the ego as the result of forces or agencies simply impinging on one another. Both in the early

topographic model of the unconscious, where there are notoriously problems in conceiving exactly how consciousness and the unconscious interact (as Sartre pointed out<sup>4</sup>), and in the later dynamic and economic models, independent forces or agencies act on each other in order to set up ego-abilities and to determine what falls within the scope of consciousness, where occurrence within consciousness is a derivative and secondary phenomenon. In contrast, for Hegel that we naturally become discursively conscious and aware of the normative standards that we impose upon ourselves and that we can continue to endorse is itself the primary phenomenon, and modes of forgetfulness, incoherence, and unawareness are essentially derivative and exceptional.

4. Despite, however, his emphasis on the actualization of mindedness in rule-following as a rationally endorsable achievement, Hegel also notes a persistent difficulty or lack of transparency that attaches to the achievement of apperceptively unified, rule-following discursive consciousness. Except at the final stages of free and rational life, yet also possible even then in various regressions or flaws or copy errors, “all consciousness,” Hegel writes, “contains a unity and a dividedness, hence a contradiction. Thus, for example, the idea of a ‘house’ is completely contradictory to my ‘I’ and yet the latter endures it. ...Actual freedom does not therefore belong to mind in its immediacy but has to be brought into being by mind’s own activity” (383Z, 16). Unpacking this a bit, the thought is that a house—the actual house in the world—is a given something that is not itself an instance of free activity. It resists free activity by presenting the problem of *how*—according to what normative standards or under what empirical concepts—it is to be judged and responded to. It is a particular kind of something

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<sup>4</sup> See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Citadel Press, 2001), Chapter II, “The Origin of Negation,” Part V, “The Origin of Nothingness,” 21-45.

that calls for but is also immediately resistant to judgment and reasonable, responsive action.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the problem is mostly solved readily enough, as our repertoires of concepts and responses come to be increasingly adequate to what we encounter. There may be various persisting difficulties. Is a yurt a house? What about a furnished cave or an RV? But on the whole the problems of judgment and reasonable responsiveness posed by houses get solved well enough with the development of the concept *house*. And yet, again, “all mind ... contains a contradiction” or is burdened with difficulties of judgment and responsiveness, especially “mind in its immediacy.” An important issue, therefore, will be exactly how and how far mindedness as organization and activity is able to generate normative standards and modes of response and judgment that overcome immediacy and its perplexing contradictions or blockings of free activity. Just how, and how far, is free life possible? As will become clear, regressions into various forms of unfree activity, for example, in the forms of dreams, parapraxes, and neuroses—that is the very modes of activity that we associate with the life the unconscious—are, for Hegel, always possible.

These, then, are the four interrelated features that are central to and of central interest in Hegel’s account of mindedness: non-dualist, non-reductionist, non-eliminativist naturalism, a

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<sup>5</sup> David Morris, explicating the chapter on “Force and the Understanding” in the *Phenomenology*, notes usefully that the object is experienced as a resistant object *for* consciousness, that is, as a problem *for* it that requires appropriate response. This means that the object is not *simply* given, but is rather given essentially as a particular kind of problem for consciousness. As Morris puts it, “consciousness resists itself with and through its object” in finding its activities and responses blocked in a specific way. David Morris, “Hegel on the Life of the Understanding,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 46, 4 (December 2006), 417.

non-representationalist, developmental-cognitive ethology, the actualization of mindedness regarded as an achievement of judgment and action according to reasonably endorsable norms, and awareness of the permanent possibility of regressions from these norms and into unreasonableness. In order to bring into view, however, certain difficulties that attach to Hegel's account of these features of mindedness, we must turn explicitly to the structure and method of Hegel's text.

## II

The main categories of Hegel's *Science of Logic* are *Being*, *Essence*, and *the Notion*. According to that work, these categories are simultaneously categories of thought and of being, which itself hence displays a categorial and, as it will emerge, a developmental structure. This categorial structure is both increasingly actualized substantially over time, especially in the development of human social and institutional life, and increasingly actualized intellectually in the development of adequate philosophical thought. *Being* indicates the initial stage of these developments, a stage of implicit, ideal, not yet developed unity in difference or harmonious interaction that embraces opposition. *Essence* indicates actualized difference or opposition of increasing degrees of complexity. *Notion* indicates mediated unity, the successful achievement of unity in difference. These categories of Hegel's metaphysics organize the text of his *Philosophy of Mind* at multiple levels, according to the following scheme:

<u>Metaphysical Categories</u>	<u>Major Textual Divisions of <i>Philosophy of Mind</i></u>	<u>Subsections of Mind Subjective</u>	<u>Subsections of Anthropology</u>
Being	Mind Subjective = the development of mindedness in individuals	Anthropology	Physical Soul
Essence	Mind Objective = the development of mindedness in social life; Hegel's social philosophy	Phenomenology	Feeling Soul



Notion	Mind Absolute = the development of mindedness in thinking; Art, Religion, and Philosophy	Psychology = explicit or actualized theoretical and practical life	Actual Soul
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Hence in both the text overall, in the Subdivision *Mind Subjective* (as well as in the other major subdivisions), and within the Subsection on Anthropology, a course of development from merely ideal, implicit, not yet actualized unity in opposition to explicit differentiation and opposition and then finally to mediated, harmonious unity is traced.

Of primary interest for contemporary philosophy of mind, therefore, are the Subsections on Anthropology and Phenomenology. Here is where Hegel describes in detail a development from the physical soul--that is, the human being as a merely physically organized something, in possession of not yet actualized capacities and still sunk in nature—to an awakening into feeling soul—the human being as having sensations coupled with awareness of them as a first form of self-awareness—and finally to actual soul, the human being as the possessor of a fully discursively structured consciousness. Here, in the details of these developments, if anywhere, is where Hegel's non-dualist, non-reductionist, non-eliminativist, emergentism is made clear and plausible.

Unfortunately, the news about plausibility is not altogether good, although perhaps not altogether bad either. The bad news is that Hegel offers neither a proper cognitive-developmental ethology confined to stages of individual development (as in Freud or Piaget, say) nor a proper biological evolutionary theory of the development of capacities in the species, but instead something oddly in between these two. Worse yet, this mixture of individual-developmental and species-developmental description is itself supposedly grounded in the putatively necessitated teleological scheme of the development of categories-in-being of the *Logic*. Thus, Hegel, writes,

“As is demonstrated in Logic, the *implicit* difference *must* also be made *explicit* [gesetzt; posited], *must* be developed into an *actual* difference” (413, 154; emphases on “must” added);” “it is to this goal that the whole anthropological development presses” (412Z, 152). The goal determines the course of development. This goal is “not merely the last stage that has resulted from something extraneous to it but is, on the contrary, the foundation of consciousness and self-consciousness, therefore the *prius*, and by the supersession of [its] two one-sided forms it proves itself to be their original unity and truth” (417Z, 158). With this taken-for-granted constraint on description—a goal must be achieved—held in place, there is at least a significant risk of failing to look carefully for mechanisms and instead positing in the so-called as yet undeveloped material that is being described implicit ‘strivings for’ ends to be achieved. As with teleological explanations of natural processes generally, Just-So stories are all too likely to result.<sup>6</sup> The giraffe acquired its long neck *because* of its striving to reach higher leaves; that striving was implicit in the giraffe material-to-be-developed--never mind about predators and other putatively mere externalities. Finally, not only is the goal of individual development the mediated unity of subject and object, consisting in the emergent subject’s having available categories for thought and action that enable it to engage with its world freely, rationally, and harmoniously, it is also the case that the goal immanently being realized of mindedness or Spirit in-and-as Nature in

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<sup>6</sup> Here we can and should distinguish teleonomic descriptions of goal directed behavior or function-serving structures (as in “the sea turtle climbs onto the beach in order to lay its eggs” or “the function of the heart is to circulate the blood”) from teleological explanations involving appeal to a predetermined end that explains such behaviors and structures. The mistake is to take teleonomic description to imply teleological explanation. I thank Daniel Dahlstrom for pressing this clarification on me.

general is the overcoming of brute opposition in favor of mediated unity in general. As Hegel puts it in *The Philosophy of Mind*,

Mind or spirit is thus the absolutely universal certainty of itself, free from any opposition whatever. Therefore it is confident that in the world it will find its own self, that the world must be reconciled with it, that, just as Adam said of Eve that she was flesh of his flesh, so mind has to seek in the world Reason that is its own Reason. We have found Reason to be the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, [that is], of the Notion that exists for itself and of reality (440Z, 179-80).

This is obviously a lot of metaphysics to swallow. The riposte to the charge against Hegel of implausibility, even fantasy is, of course, to return to the putatively presuppositionless and rigorous arguments of the *Logic*, where it is supposedly demonstrated that the only ultimately coherent description of Being is the one according to which it consists in Mindedness immanently actualizing itself so as to achieve mediated unity. This riposte is unlikely to prove satisfying to anyone struck by at least the power of the more tentative and groping efforts of modern experimental physics to discern mechanisms of change in nature and to generate law formulations.

Yet one might also concede two important points to Hegel's general way of thinking about mindedness in nature. First, it is not clear that we possess any adequate, well-founded characterization of what Being or Nature ultimately consists in. We have for certain purposes certain well-founded law-formulations and characterizations of what is going on that enable prediction and control of natural phenomena within certain domains. Yet we remain quite unclear about what Nature as such really, essentially, at bottom *is*. The words "physical" and

“material” are often used in criticizing supernaturalisms to mean, tendentiously, only “anything that current physics talks about,” thus stigmatizing other forms of naturalism (Aristotelian, Hegelian, MacDowellian, or what have you) without really specifying the nature of the ultimate metaphysical reality that constrains where physical investigation must go. One might even hold, with Wittgenstein, that “It makes no sense at all to speak absolutely of the ‘simple parts of a chair’”<sup>7</sup> or of anything else. In particular, we just do not know that every event in nature falls under a mechanical or physical explanation in any reasonably constraining and still obligatory sense of the terms “mechanical” and “physical.”

Second, it is difficult to deny that human beings possess discursive consciousness and that they often enough think and act according to norms. Descriptive adequacy in giving an account of what is going on in the world is not obviously well-served by seeing only responses, mechanisms, brain-processes, and bodily movements in place of human actions generated and criticizable in accordance with norms. Some form of non-dualist, non-reductionist, non-eliminativist, emergentist naturalism about mindedness has at least in principle a claim to be taken seriously as a contribution to an adequate description of what is going on in nature.

The bottom line, then, is that while Hegel arguably fails to ground his own metaphysics and establish its superiority to all possible competitors, and while the descriptions of the development of mindedness that he generates may suffer from tendentiousness and insufficient attention to mechanisms, it is also the case that his developmental-cognitive ethology may be worthy of attention in offering some descriptive illumination of the development of mind-in-nature, never mind metaphysics, and never mind whether it either *must* do so, as Hegel

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<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Rev. 4<sup>th</sup>. Ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §47, 26e.

tendentiously argues, or *could not possibly do so*, as contemporary physicalism tendentiously urges. We would do better simply to look and see what might be interesting and plausible within the details of Hegel's developmental-cognitive ethology, recognizing that any descriptions of what is going on will remain provisional and open to revision. Surely, too, somehow individual cognitive-ethological development must instantiate what is possible for the species as a whole. There is no necessary problem in mixing individual-developmental descriptions with species-developmental descriptions. That is, it is possible to describe the development that is typical in members of the species as a whole. And while we would do well to keep the desirability of specifying physical mechanisms in mind, we should also not clearly allow that desideratum to distract us from taking the demands of descriptive adequacy seriously, however provisional their satisfaction must remain. So let's look directly at the details of Hegel's ethology and try to see to what extent it might make sense.

### III

Just how, then, is Actual Soul—that is, a fully discursive, apperceptively unified consciousness—achieved? How is it, an actualized mode of organization of a physical being, such that that being produces discursively structured thought and action, itself generated as a natural result of the activity of a merely physical soul, initially only sensible and the locus of physical qualities and physical alternations, and then the activity of a feeling soul, organized to have sensations and to develop an initial self-feeling in relation to them? As Hegel himself puts it, this is “the question that should be asked: ...How does the soul, which is shut up in its *inwardness* and is immediately identical with its individual world, emerge from the merely *formal*, empty difference of the subjective and objective and attain to the *actual* difference of these two sides...?” (408Z, 129-30). Importantly, Hegel's answer to this question—the

developmental-cognitive ethology that he lays out—is predominantly biological in its terms of description, not physical. That is, Hegel traces natural stages of growth and development, without worrying about physical or chemical processes that somehow might underlie and explain those stages. In this he joins Aristotle as one of the two greatest theorists who think about mindedness in predominantly biological, not physical, terms. As Eckart Förster has recently usefully reminded us, Hegel was intimately acquainted with Goethe’s botanical work, especially Goethe’s theory of the metamorphosis of plants, where close descriptive attention is paid to successive stages of development of organs, both in individual specimens and in the kingdom of plants as a whole, and this may well have influenced Hegel’s way of describing human development.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the claim that the text is comprehensively organized to show necessary progressions of stages of development, Hegel’s developmental-cognitive ethology is in fact loosely presented throughout the sections on Anthropology and Phenomenology, with, for example, anticipatory remarks about language-learning, puberty, and the cathartic power of poetry appearing early in the section on Anthropology, which should properly treat only the development of the physical and feeling soul. These interjective anticipations disrupt clear attention both to mechanisms of development and to necessary sequences of stages. Hence Hegel’s actual account of stages of development must be reconstructed from the text somewhat freely—yet another reason for taking that account only as a potentially illuminating descriptive ethology, not as somehow metaphysically necessary.

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<sup>8</sup> Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 290-91.

Variouly located within the text, then, there are three discernible temporally distinct and successive stages of development, within which capacities afforded by organization are increasingly actualized through sensory experience and interactions with others. (The actualized powers that appear in the earlier stages continue also to be operative in the later stages—a point that is important for Hegel’s understanding of the unconscious and a point that will be taken up later.)

1. The first waking state: In its initial life subsequent to birth, and arguably to some extent before that, the infant undergoes physical alterations, just as plants produce greater amounts of chlorophyll when the number of hours of daylight increases. It also reacts to sensible stimuli and moves its body, as animals in general do. Initial experience of these alterations and bodily reactions to stimuli resembles sleep, in that in this initial state things ‘just happen’ to the infant and reactions to these happenings ‘just take place.’ What Hegel calls the first waking state then occurs insofar as the soul—that is, the infant as organized physical being—partitions itself. That is, it begins, dimly and far before any grasp of a first-person pronoun, to distinguish between its being awake, its directing its gaze, and its moving its limbs, on the one hand, and its being asleep, on the other. Somewhat tendentially, Hegel describes this waking or coming to distinguish between being asleep and being awake as “brought about by the lightning-stroke of subjectivity breaking through the form of the mind’s immediacy” (398Z, 67). But he is careful to add that this first awakening to wakefulness involves only the infant’s “*finding of itself*, which, to begin with, only gets as far as sensation, but still remains quite remote from the concrete determination of intelligence and will” (398Z, 67). As yet there is nothing that can be called either thought or choice. Coming to make this first distinction or partition between sleeping and wakefulness is thus certainly not anything consciously articulated by the infant. It is, instead, simply something that the infant comes to do as its body grows and develops and, as Hegel

notes, under the influence of “the [natural] alternation of day and night” (398, 68). Hegel explicitly notes that it is a mistake to suppose that there are two distinct species of mental representations—waking-representations and dream-representations—that are somehow very like one another but distinguished by when they occur (§398, 65-6). Rather, as yet there are properly speaking no representations at all, just two different modes of bodily engagement with one’s world—sleeping and waking as “*alternating conditions*” (§399, 71)—and the dim, unarticulated registering of a difference between them.

To the extent that there is content present at all here, it takes the form of visual images and other sensations that have not yet been conceptualized. Hegel explicitly marks a distinction between mental content properly so-called, which is conceptualized, and sensation as “something merely present” (400Z, 74). In being merely present and without “necessary, objective, rational connection” (398Z, 70)—that is, without yet being conceptualized and thus subject to rules that objectively exclude the co-presence of certain conceptualized contents, rules such as “nothing is both red and green all over”—the successive alterations of mere sensation that the subject undergoes are like what Freud calls contents generated by the primary process. Hegel compares unconceptualized content to the kind of non-conceptualized “mere picture-thinking” that occurs in dreams, where “everything drifts apart [and] criss-crosses in the wildest disorder” and the subject does not yet compare “all its sensations, intuitions, and general ideas in order to ascertain ...the objectivity or non-objectivity of [their] content” (398Z, 74). Dreams hence represent on the part of a fully formed subject a reversion to the kind of not yet full content, to content not yet subjected to rules, that is the sole form of occurrence of content in the subject who is coming into formation. Here there are, again, only alterations of sensations and images plus a dim sense of bodily activity and of the turning of attention, without conceptualization.



The subject-in-formation comes, however, to work itself up out of this initial state of sensory awareness and what Hegel calls mere “self-feeling” (§408, 123) into a subject that conceptualizes its contents and in doing so explicitly distinguishes itself as a subject from those contents and from the things in the world that they represent. As Hegel puts it, in this initial waking state, the subject’s nascent “being-for-self”—that is, its as yet non-actualized capacity for rational activity in the form of taking contents to fall under rules—“preserves, develops, and authenticates itself in [its] alteration[s] (399Z, 72); that is, by its further activity in response to sensory alterations it makes itself into a fully fledged subject. How does this happen?

2. The feeling soul: What Hegel calls the life of “the feeling soul” is the domain of “the struggle for liberation which the soul has to wage against the immediacy of its substantial content in order to become completely master of itself . . . , to make itself [explicitly] what it is *in itself* [or implicitly]” (402Z, 91). At “this *intermediate* stage” the subject as yet only “*feels* or *glimpses* itself in its totality;” “it possesses a content in which the universal and the individual, the subjective and the objective, have not yet become separated. At this stage, what I feel, I *am*, and what I am, I feel” (402Z, 89-90). And yet, again, somehow within this intermediate stage “the sensed object becomes something ideated,” (402Z, 89) that is, conceptualized, where concepts stand in necessary relations of inclusion and exclusion according to rules.

Three interacting features of the life of the feeling soul are crucial for the development of explicit ideation, conceptualization, and subject/representation/object differentiation. The first is that merely sensory contents do not simply come and go, but also persist in the form of an as yet involuntary memory trace. The sense of seeing, tasting, hearing, smelling, or grasping something can last longer than the moment of experience alone. “The sensations which crowd each other out do not, however, vanish absolutely without a trace, but remain in the soul as ideal moments” (402Z, 90) that is, as something that the subject holds before itself, initially involuntarily, but

subsequently with increasing control. Under the influence of this memory trace, itself a complex of sensory content and body-pervading pleasures and pains, the developing subject can begin to direct its bodily attentions toward this and that, as a way of trying to retain or reproduce certain sensory contents and felt satisfactions. Mere self-feeling begins simply to be infused with a sense of emerging agency.

Second, the emerging subjecthood of the feeling soul “is then set in vibration and controlled without the least resistance on its part” by another “actuating subject” who “may be called its *genius*” (§405, 94-95). Initially and very frequently, this controlling genius is the biological mother, who carries the child and who determines many of the alterations of its sensory environment and so of the sensory content available to it. Later the mother and others who play the role of “controlling genius” as “self-possessed subjectivity” (§405, 96) function crucially to shape, correct, and reinforce the child’s attention. This or that is called to the bodily attention of the child by means of gesture, voice, and direction of gaze as worthy of attention and remark. In this way, the child takes on patterns of attending and becomes a more active notice and attender.<sup>9</sup> Under the influence of the other as presiding genius, coupled with the persistence of the memory trace and the development of bodily control generally, the child comes to be

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<sup>9</sup> Compare Michael Tomasello on “joint attention games” between parents and children (*The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001] and Donald Davidson on “triangulation” (“Rational Animals,” reprinted in Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001]). Morris notes that discursively structured object-consciousness is fused with an emerging self-consciousness that “a dynamic and open-ended relationship that is not a possession” (“Hegel on the Life of the Understanding,” 416).

aware of itself not only in mere self-feeling, as a haver of feeling, but also of itself as being explicitly able to attend to—that is, to look *at*, reach *for*, shy *from*, and so on—this or that. Conceptualization and ideation are not yet fully present, but feelings are no longer simply occurrent to the child and merely suffered.

Third and both drawing on and reinforced by the memory trace and the other subject as genius is the repeated attentive activity of the child in grasping, gazing, avoiding, and so on, or what Hegel calls habit. Habit is, as Hegel puts it, “the soul’s . . .reducing the particulars of feelings (and of consciousness) to a mere feature of its being” such that it “has [these contents] and moves in them” (§410, 140). Habit as initiated *repetition* is, as Hegel puts it “indispensable for the *existence* of intellectual life in the individual” and “part and parcel of his being” as a subject in possession of an intellectual life (§410, 141, 143). In its initial repetitions, the emerging subject is not yet fully free and has not yet fully arrived at ideation and conception. Instead its repetitive directions of attention and bodily motion occur in something more like a fugue state of half-awareness of what it is doing.<sup>10</sup> Yet, supported by the memory trace and coupled with the shaping of attention by the other as genius, what the subject is doing becomes explicit to itself in the form of a rule. It moves *from* “I am doing this now, again,” *to* “I will do this now, again.” “The soul brings into its bodily activities a universal mode of action, a *rule*, to be transmitted to other activities. This rule is so concentrated in its simplicity that in it I am no

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<sup>10</sup> As Charles Taylor notes, explicating a point that he sees as shared by Kant and Hegel and that is taken up by Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, “what we think of as conscious human experience is an awareness that arises in a being who is already engaged with his world” actively and not merely causally. (Charles Taylor, “The Opening Arguments of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*,” in *Hegel*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 185.

longer conscious of the *particular* differences of my single activities” (410Z, 146). Rather than being aware of this sensory content then that, this bodily motion then that, taken individually, I am aware of myself as doing something over time to which I am holding myself, so as, inter alia, to sustain and develop that very self-awareness. (Freud on the fort-da game is an obvious point of comparison here. About his grandson who played this game, Freud writes that “At the outset he was in a *passive* situation. He was overpowered by the experience [of the absence of his mother]; but by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part.”<sup>11</sup>) In a wonderful simile, Hegel compares the difference between the explicit self-awareness and subject/object differentiation that emerge through habit and repetition and earlier, dimmer mere self-feeling to the difference between learning to write—that is, to form alphabetic letters—and writing fluently.

When we are learning to write we must fix our attention on every detail. ...If, on the other hand, the activity of writing has become a habit with us, then our self has so completely mastered all the relevant details ...that they are no longer present to us as single details, and we keep in view only their universal aspect. We see, therefore, that in habit our consciousness is at the same time *present* in the subject-matter, *interested* in it, yet conversely *absent* from it, *indifferent* to it; that our self just as much *appropriates* the subject-matter as, on the contrary, it *draws away* from it, that the soul, on the one hand, completely *pervades* its bodily activities

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<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (Seattle: Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010), 18-19.

and, on the other hand, *deserts* them, thus giving them the shape of something *mechanical*, of a merely natural effect. (410XZ, 146-47).

That is, I know that *this*—something different from me—is what *I* am now, repeatedly, *doing*.

3. Language and the Second Awakening: Interfused with and building on the development through habit of a sense of self as possessor of an actualized power is the further articulation of the contents of consciousness under concepts. This takes place through the learning of language. “Speech enables man to apprehend things as universal, to attain to the consciousness of his own universality, to express himself as ‘I’” (396Z, 59). What takes place here is “a waking ...of a higher kind than the natural waking” that is arrival at sensate life (412Z, 152). Blending its doings and attendings with the sounds it hears, the cries it makes, and the shapings of attention wrought by others, the child not only *does* such-and-such self-consciously, it also names or articulates its own doing under a universal, using language. A kind of click or fit takes place, as the child in its doings, attendings, and noise-makings grasps that *this-is-to-be-called that*.<sup>12</sup> A *ball* is what is wanted, a *dog* is what attracts the gaze, *milk* is what I am drinking. Through this blending of doing with naming, the child “gains the position of a thinker and subject—specially a subject of the judgment in which the ego excludes from itself the sum total of its merely natural features as an object, a world external to it” (§412, 151). I am aware of *this thing that I take to be a ball or a dog or milk* as something external to me and that I am taking as something that is correctly so classed and so called. “It is to this goal that the whole

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<sup>12</sup> Compare Wittgenstein on the ‘click’ of ‘fitting’ a phenomenon into an appropriate context of comparisons, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 19.

anthropological development presses forward” (412Z, 152), as the initially implicit powers or capacities of the organized physical being have, across stages and through engagements with stimuli and with others, been actualized as explicit abilities to think and speak.

#### IV

Hegel’s treatment of the development of soul as the organization of a living physical body from initial mere receptivity to the development of explicit, active powers of conceptualization and thought begins in the Anthropology with an account of “mind which is still in the grip of Nature and connected with its corporeity, mind which is not yet in communion with itself, not yet free” (387Z, 27), that is, not yet confident, secure, and satisfied in its possession of discursively structured abilities to think, judge, and act. As we have seen, the early stage’s of the development of the powers of mindedness involve such things as merely suffering and dimly registering changes of physical state, forming memory traces, and generating visual, aural, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory images of objects that have not yet been conceptualized. Given this history of development, we may well then wonder just how much of this history persists and makes itself felt within the life of a fully formed discursive subject and, if it does, exactly how it does. John Sallis suggests that there may remain in the life of the mature subject, given its history of formation, “a dark residue, something not recoverable in universality, something resistant to that subjugating of images that would make them in the end only the mirror for spirit.”<sup>13</sup> And in fact Hegel is quite explicit that during development “both modes of mind, rational consciousness [and the free play of images] ...can ...exist as more or less

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<sup>13</sup> John Sallis, *Spacings—of Reason and Imagination in Texts of Kant, Fichte, Hegel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 155-56.

*mutually interpenetrating*” and that even a fully formed subject is liable to “relapse” into modes of consciousness in which rational control in the form of judgment according to rules is *not* exercised (405Z, 96). The possibility of relapses into non-rational modes of consciousness is in fact a permanent possibility, given the involuntary formation of some images as memory traces and given the fact that, as Hegel puts it, “I can form a mental image of something wherever I am, even of what is remotest from me in external space and time” (452Z, 203). That is to say, the work of the imagination in generating images is often enough neither under control by a present external object, nor voluntary, nor subject to rational control, with images classified under concepts that stand in relations of necessary inclusion and exclusion. It is possible for me in what Hegel calls *Phantasie*, a mode of free “creative imagination” (§446, 209) to generate an image of a non-present impossibility, such as a flying elephant or a mermaid. Absent rational control, both passions and wit, operating in conjunction with *Phantasie*, can produce a striking “difference in the way images are connected” (455Z, 209). Hegel cites both witty conversation and punning as modes of *Phantasie*, where the imagination operates more on and with the “immediacy or sensuousness” of the image than with the object that it presents taken as falling under a concept. Likewise in dreams and their “mere picture-thinking,” as already noted, “everything drifts apart, criss-crosses in the wildest disorder; objects lose all necessary, objective, rational connection and are associated only in an entirely superficial, contingent, and subjective manner” (398Z, 70). The memory traces and merely successively conjoined sensuous images of what Freud calls the primary process are always present within the life of the subject, and if rational control and voluntary judgmental attention to objects lapse, as in joking, punning, slips of the tongue, and dreams, then the content of the mental life of the subject will be thrown up only by the primary process. Intelligence (*Intelligenz*)—Hegel’s general term for the condition of actualized discursively structured consciousness—includes what Hegel calls a “night-like mine or pit in

which is stored a world of infinitely many images and representations, without being in consciousness” (§453, 204).

The contents of dreams, parapraxes, improvisatory wit, jokes, and puns result, then, from the operations of *Phantasie* in throwing up material images from the pit of imagination in a way that is momentarily free from rational control. The reassertion of rational control by means of explicit, discursively structured judgment about objects presented in images is always possible, but so too are intermittent slippages away from the lives of judgment, inference, theory, and norm-guided action. In admitting these intermittent slippages, the mental lives of fully formed subjects who are in control of concepts and norms retain also the mark of their formation out of the more immediately sensitive-reactive-imagistic processes of the merely physical and feeling soul.

Hegel goes on to treat further forms of more disturbing loss of rational control of image generation, including somnambulism, magnetism (primarily mesmerism, that is, hypnosis, but also other forms of imagistic captivation by another that would fall under the Freudian heading of ego-idealization), and madness. Somnambulism and other magnetic states are marked by an “absence of intelligent and volitional personality” and “a state of passivity,” where there is only “mere nominal consciousness, without any distinctions between subjective and objective, between intelligent personality and objective world” (§406, 104-5). Mental illness involves a more serious, standing, not simply momentary, rupture or separation between free psychophysical image generation via *Phantasie*’s activation of materials from the pit of images on the one hand, and the life of rational, judgmental responsiveness to an objective world, on the other. Mental illness “results [when] the merely *psychical* side of the organism, freeing itself from the power of the *mental* or *spiritual* consciousness, usurps the latter’s function, and mind or spirit, in losing control over the psychical element belonging to it, no longer retains its self-



mastery but itself sinks to the form of [mere] psychical life” (406Z, 106). The various forms of insanity that Hegel explicitly distinguishes—distracted, rambling mind or idiocy, madness proper or obsession with a fixed idea, and mania or frenzy--then involve different forms of this loss of control. Full distractedness of mind is a near complete regression into primary process or the simple succession of materials from the pit of images. Obsession is domination by a particular image, with an inability to subsume the image under concepts, hence a tendency, without judgment, to see it manifested everywhere, in a way that motivates inappropriate attractive or aversive response. Mania involves obsession coupled with a half-awareness or intermittent awareness of being thus possessed, hence a kind of schizophrenia or split between moments of obsessiveness and moments of more appropriate judgmental awareness. In all three cases, however, the underlying problem is a serious “rupture ...between my psychical and my waking being, between my spontaneous natural feeling and my mediated, intellectual consciousness, a rupture which, since everyone embraces these two sides in himself, is of course a *possibility* in even the healthiest individuals, but does not actually *exist* in everyone” (406Z, 116).

## V

As the passage just cited elegantly indicates, given the roots of properly cognitive-judgmental life, both theoretical and practical, in the physical responsiveness and merely psychical image generation of the physically organized human being, given the persistence of the primary processes associated with these roots within adult life, and given finally the possibility of slippages of rational control, regressions into primary process and freely associative, imagistic ideation are possible for everyone. Yet nonetheless the development through the human organism’s own activity of latent rational capacities, given in its organization, into explicit

abilities to judge objects under concepts and to act according to norms is itself normal and natural. It is, again, “this goal [to which] the whole anthropological development presses forward” (412Z, 152).<sup>14</sup> The I or ego is not itself a substance, but is instead both the activity and the result of the organism’s active, natural development of the abilities to judge and to act under concepts (See 413Z, 154). One might compare this thought to Fichte’s characterization of selfhood as achieved through a continuous activity or *Tathandlung*, where selfhood is both product (as status) and process, now, however, essentially embodied biologically and essentially interpersonally interactive. Hegel compares the relation between initially latent, then increasingly actualized and explicit ‘takings’ of objects to fall under concepts and the I, on the one hand, to the relation between the will and freedom, on the other. Just as will is an initially latent, unactualized power that comes to actualization in and through increasingly free and reason-supported action, so is the I an initially latent, unactualized power that comes to actualization in and through increasingly explicit, increasingly revised and monitored ‘takings’ of objects to fall under concepts (413Z, 154).

One may, of course, wonder for good reason whether the developmental-cognitive ethology that lays bare the development of these ‘takings’ is itself sufficient to reveal what is really going on. Perhaps it is an optional description that amounts to a Just-So story, as long as it remains unsupported by an account of neurochemical or other material mechanisms in which this development is inscribed. Here, however, while a search for mechanisms is always potentially both of theoretical interest and able to support material therapies, we should also be wary of allowing the interest and results of such materialist theorizing and experimentation to suppress or

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<sup>14</sup> Again, we may and should take this goal as teleonomic, not teleological, whatever Hegel’s own wider metaphysical commitments may be. See note 6.

deny the very existence of what might be called the human reality of judgment and action according to norms. We have, further, no better, less tendentious account available of the development of a command of concepts in judgment and response than developmental-cognitive ethological description of how the human organism's natural active responsiveness yields this command under the impress of training and the guidance of others. Talk of languages of thought or neural connections as accounting for discursively structured, norm-guided thought and action is arguably more tendentious, more unsupported by experimental results, and descriptively more inadequate to what we come to be able to do than Hegel's is developmental-cognitive ethology.

Hegel's closeness of attention to cognitive-ethological development yields, moreover, important accounts of maturity and how to achieve and sustain it, accounts that resemble what is found in the psychoanalytic developmental literature, but in some respects are both richer and more plausible than Freud's. In particular, Hegel emphasizes the importance of having one's 'takings' of objects coming to be increasingly shaped and structured by concepts in social use, where these uses are made available by the modeling and guiding attentions of others, especially caretakers functioning as the genius of development that is simultaneously cognitive and ethological. Maturity will then involve coming into mastery of concepts in use that are themselves rationally supportable as making available stable, apt, productive response to one's natural and social worlds. Here Hegel's thought resembles Freud's supposed claim that the aim of psychoanalysis that corrects misfires in development and adult regressions is "to work and to love." Yet Hegel's rich account of the uses of concepts in his social and political philosophy connects the mastery of concepts in use, active responsiveness to the world in work, and the phenomenon of love much more closely to the availability and fruitfulness in supporting free and stable life of specific social institutions and roles than does Freud's markedly more individualist orientation toward psychic pathologies and cures. This is why Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*

includes Section II, Mind Objective, comprising Hegel's social and political philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Development here into occupying a valuable social role under institutions is inseparable from cognitive development more generally. If Hegel is more optimistic than we are likely to be about the availability of forms of social and institutional life that are fruitful for the equal freedom of all, he nonetheless also helps us to see how specific psychic pathologies may be functions of specific failures of social and institutional life, not matters of mere individual psychological happenstance.

Given his rich account of the intermingling of cognitive development with ethological and social development, Hegel is also significantly aware of the importance of others to the development of a healthy psychological life and social identity. Well before Freud, he all but identifies the importance of transference in curing adult regressions from healthy psychic life in remarking that "the lunatic acquires the ability forcibly to restrain his subjectivity which is in conflict with the objective world ...in learning to respect the one who is treating him" (408Z, 137). Beyond transference, this broader account of the role of respect for the guiding other in establishing, maintaining, and restoring psychic health also helps us to see the importance of parents, friends, and teachers for cognitive, ethical, and emotional maturity.

With less about cognitive-ethological development a matter of internal psychic forces or agencies and with more emphasis on subject activity, natural development, and the significances of others and of social life than in Freud, Hegel also helps us to see the role of art in cognitive-ethological development. Building on an Aristotelian account of catharsis, Hegel notes that "it is

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<sup>15</sup> As Morris puts it, for Hegel discursive consciousness or "understanding is no mere faculty, but a self-conscious activity oriented by living interests, an activity that surpasses singular interests through the life of a community" ("Hegel on the Life of the Understanding," 418.)

the writing of poetry especially,” as a well as, perhaps, participation via active reading in the writer’s working through of difficult material, “that has the power to liberate one from emotional distress” (401Z, 87-8). “Goethe, for instance, particularly in his *Werther*, brought himself relief while subjecting the readers of this romance to the power of feeling. The educated man, because he contemplates what is felt in all its various aspects, feels more deeply than the uneducated, but is at the same time, superior in his mastery over feeling because he moves especially in the element of rational thought which is raised above the narrowness of feeling” (448Z, 197). Hence art, especially poetic art has, in virtue of the process of working through that is manifested in it as difficult material images thrown up by *Phantasie* encounter tentative thought about how these material images might be ordered so as to make sense, a crucial role in the development, maintenance, and restoration of healthy psychic life in its simultaneously cognitive, ethical, and emotional dimensions. Art for Hegel, as Kirk Pillow puts it in commenting on Hegel’s account of the workings of *Phantasie*-inspired artistic imagination, “elevates natural contingency toward the necessary unity of thought by having the Concept take possession of and express itself through the sensuous,”<sup>16</sup> as sensuous materials are improvisatorily fitted to developing plot. In Hegel’s account of cognitive ethological development, art makes what Pillow calls a distinctively “aesthetic contribution to the development of second nature,”<sup>17</sup> that is, to individual psychic maturation within culture.

Whatever scientific psychology may some day come to be, and whatever the vicissitudes of social life may continue to be, it would be unwise to ignore the insights of Hegelian

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<sup>16</sup> Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 179; emphases added.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

psychology into the naturalness of cognitive-ethological development, into that development's interminglings of activity, feeling, and sociality, and into possibilities of regression and cure. Hegel helps us to see, as Jonathan Lear puts it, that "psychoanalysis is a peculiar extension of our capacity to acquire and develop a second nature."<sup>18</sup> Properly understood, as Hegel helps us to see, it is "the activity of bringing together the aspiring [libidinal and idealizing] and pretending [forming, ordering, controlling] parts of the psyche,"<sup>19</sup> an activity that is continuous with the development of ego-identity as such in and through active growth into acculturation. The ongoing life of unconscious sensuous materials becoming more present to consciousness, a life that is simultaneously cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical, and a life that is also open to regressions as well as advances, is the very life of the human subject as such.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Therapeutic Action: An Earnest Plea for Irony*, (New York: Other Press, 2003), 173.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>20</sup> I thank Paul Katsafanas for the initial invitation to write this essay for the Boston Workshop on Modern Philosophy and the co-panelists and members of the audience there for their responses to it. Thanks also to Terry Pinkard for helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.