# A MIND OF ONE'S OWN: HEGEL ON BECOMING RATIONAL

by

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ABSTRACT

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The 'Self-Consciousness' chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Traditional readings, however, often do not emphasize Hegel's proclamation that the servile consciousness "acquires a mind of its own" and becomes "thinking consciousness" in the transition from 'Self-Consciousness' A to B. Here, I show how to understand the end of part A and its transition to part B. In this transition, Hegel argues that the servant 'comes to have a mind of their own' and becomes 'thinking consciousness' or 'stoic consciousness' in virtue of beginning to become *rational*. To this end, I argue that Hegel's argument in 'Self-Consciousness' A provides *realization conditions* for rationality: (1) one must fear and submit to conditions of servitude; (2) one must devote one's practical activity to the service of another; and (3) one must come to understand one's practical activity (service) to have a particular form. Humans are always potentially rational, but they must realize this potentiality by fulfilling these conditions. The argument of 'Self-Consciousness' A establishes both *that* these are the conditions and *how* they come about. Self-consciousness, as a result, becomes capable of judging propositions to be true or actions good.

# Table of Contents

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> *Therefore, through this retrieval, [the servant] comes to acquire through himself a mind of his own [eigner Sinn], and he does this precisely in the work in which there had seemed to be only some outsider's mind [fremder Sinn].*
>
> GWF Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

# 1 Introduction

What is necessary in order for someone to *become* rational? That is, what allows for one to come to be able to reason about what is good or what is true?[1] Further, does this process matter after one has become rational? That is, are the realization conditions of rationality irrelevant to its constitutive features? John McDowell, in *Mind and World*, suggests the following answer: "there is no particular reason why we should need to uncover or speculate about [the human mind's] history, let alone the origins of culture as such. Human infants are mere animals, distinctive only in their potential, and nothing occult happens to a human being in ordinary upbringing" (pp. 123).[2] This response suggests that it does not matter *how* one becomes rational, so long as one *does*. Put otherwise, the suggestion is that *realization conditions* are irrelevant to *constitutive features*; how one *becomes* rational does not matter for what it is to *be* rational.

Contrary to McDowell's suggestion, I argue that the realization conditions *do* matter. To do so, I will reconstruct Hegel's transition from 'Self-Consciousness' A to B in his *Phenomenology* as an account of the realization conditions for rationality. In virtue of this, I argue that Hegel, and a proper Hegelian philosophy, cannot accept McDowell's indifference to such an account.

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[1] Throughout, I refer only to 'good' and 'goodness', in the interest of brevity and readability. However, everything that applies to good and goodness holds just as well for truth and theoretical judgements generally.

[2] It would seem to also be the case that Kant, and Kantians, are committed to something similar; Kant treats both theoretical and practical reason as 'given' or 'innate' faculties, whereas the Hegelian approach is to suggest that they are *achievements*. Cf. Pippin (2008): "being an individual subject is something like a collective or social normative achievement" (pp. 9).

It is necessary to explain briefly the precise sense of rationality that is relevant for Hegel's argument. We can distinguish between two levels of rationality: rational activity as such, and rationality in the sense of some normative standards underlying this activity. This is, roughly, the distinction between the playing of a game, and the playing of a game well. Here we are concerned with the former, with our ability *to* reason, and not any particular account of what it is to reason *properly* or *well*. What is realized in the transition from 'Self-Consciousness' A into B is the very first standpoint from which one can engage in rational activity. Both this standpoint — the playing of the game — and its constitutive norms — what it is to play the game well — will undergo further developments as the *Phenomenology* progresses. What is essential for Hegel is that in 'Self-Consciousness' B one reaches the *first* 'rational standpoint'.[3]

This capacity to reason is, further, what Hegel calls a *universal* consciousness, or a universal standpoint.[4] This ties in with Hegel's remarks regarding our usage of 'I'. There, he suggests that when we become capable of reasoning, our usage of 'I' as it relates to reasoning refers to the speaker, but also makes an implicit claim to universality. That is, when one says 'I judge that $x$ is good' it is the speaker who is thereby committed to the goodness of $x$, but the standpoint from which one makes the claim is such that one is claiming it to be good not merely for oneself, but for rational beings as such (in relevantly similar circumstances).[5] Through the undertaking of

[3]Unless otherwise specified, in the course of the argument offered 'reason' and 'rationality' refer to the formal capacity indicated here.

[4]Cf. PhG ¶199: "stoicism is the freedom which always immediately leaves servitude and returns back into the *pure universality* of thought. As a universal form..." and also EG ¶387Z where Hegel identifies reason with universal consciousness as such. References to Hegel's *Phenomenology* will be abbreviated as 'PhG' with the paragraph number; references to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* will be abbreviated 'PhR' with the paragraph number; references to Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, part 3 on the Philosophy of *Geist* will be abbreviated as 'EG' with the paragraph number.

[5]Cf. EG ¶381Z: "when we say I, we indeed mean an individual; but since everyone is I, we thereby say only something entirely universal, we only say something quite universal".

commitments, one becomes capable of self-governance or self-legislation, of determining oneself in particular ways. The standpoint of reason thus brings together the capacity to judge something good with the recognition that such a capacity is universal, that our judgements are valid not only for ourselves, but for all.[6] Hegel calls this standpoint *reason*, *thinking consciousness*, *universal consciousness* and *stoicism*, depending on where in the path of the *Phenomenology* one is.[7]

Hegel's account of rationality, I argue, is developmental and historical. That is, Hegel argues that rationality *as such* develops both within an individual and over the course of history. The key mechanism underlying this process is the development of social structures of authority and accountability (or responsibility).[8] This may also be called the self-conscious life-forms of humans.[9] In virtue of the historical development of these social structures in which individuals are both

[6]There is, thus, a weak affinity with Brandom's allegorical reading of the 'Self-Consciousness' chapter here. Brandom seeks to derive from the developments of the chapter the notion of undertaking commitments, which I agree is part of the story (cf. Brandom (2019) ch. 8-10).

[7]Because of where we are placed in the *Phenomenology* here, I use the terms interchangeably. However, later on it would be inappropriate to identify reason with stoicism; it is merely stoicism in its first appearance.

[8]The idea that Hegel's recognitive structures consist in relations of authority and accountability/responsibility is indebted to the work of Robert Brandom.

[9]What I call here 'formal social conditions' or 'social structures of authority and accountability' may alternatively be rendered as 'life-form', or at the very least *part* of a life-form. I choose 'formal social conditions', partially because the terminology is more accessible. However, adopting this terminology comes at the cost of obscuring the relation to 'life' in 'Self-Consciousness' chapter. My argument works the same using the Hegelian language of life (and life-forms). Cf. Ng (2020): "With respect to the difference between life and self-conscious forms of cognition, the key logical difference lies in cognition's self-conscious reflexivity concerning its own life-form" (pp. 277). Ng's point is that self-conscious life is different in kind in virtue of being conscious of its own life form. This neatly fits with my later claims: the servant, becoming self-conscious of his own life-form, realizes his difference in kind from non-self-conscious life, becoming rational. See Boyle (2012) for a canonical explanation of the view that humans are different in kind in virtue of their being rational, which is what my view presented here (and Ng's) amount to. (Ng (2020) herself notes this, see pp.9n12 and pp.278n48.)

accountable to and authoritative over each other, individuals become able to reason as to which actions are good. This is similar, if not identical to, the Kantian 'Incorporation Thesis' dubbed by Allison (1990): individuals are determined by some incentive (reason) only insofar as it is incorporated into one's maxim (subjective principle of action) (pp.39-40; cf. also Kant, *Religion* 6:24). Here, for Hegel, one is able to act for a reason (to be determined by an incentive through incorporating it into one's maxim) only in virtue of being able to abstract away from one's immediate desires, allowing for one to reason as to which actions are good. This accords with Hegel's account of the first and second moments of the free will in the *Philosophy of Right*. There, Hegel tells us that in order to be able to determine oneself — act for a particular reason — one must be able to abstract from all particular contents (desires, inclinations, etc.) (PhR ¶5+6). Both Kant and Hegel here agree that in order for one to act for a reason, one must be able to make the reason a determination of oneself as *subject*, either through being incorporated into one's maxim, or through being incorporated into a chain of reasoning whose conclusion is the goodness of an action.

The crux of Hegel's account of the realization conditions of rationality can be seen from two passages. First, Hegel tells us that "[the servant] comes to acquire through himself a *mind of his own* [*eigner Sinn]*, and he does this precisely in the work in which there had seemed to be only some *outsider's mind* [*fremder Sinn]*" (PhG ¶196). Accomplishing this, the servant comes to consider himself as 'I' in a universal sense (PhG ¶197); he refers to himself, but understands himself to be making claims that must hold equally well for all subjects in relevantly similar circumstances. However, this is only done through what Hegel calls 'the universally necessary moments' of *fear*, *service*, and *Bildung*;[10] these are the three *realization conditions* for coming to be *rational* and understand oneself as 'I' in this (formal) universal sense.

[10]The German word '*Bildung*' is notoriously difficult to translate. I thus leave it untranslated throughout. However, as a cursory understanding, one may understand it as 'education' in a very broad sense — it applies both to what we normally mean by 'education' in English, as well as acculturation and enculturation. Additionally, *Bildung* does not only occur for individuals, but also collectives — a community is also 'educated' over the course of history. Cf. Bykova 2020 for an in-depth explanation of *Bildung* in Hegel's works.

Second, this idea is supported by Hegel's exposition of the same aspect of his thought in his *Encyclopedia*. There, Hegel tells us that "without having experienced the discipline that breaks self-will [*Eigenwillen]*, no one becomes free, rational, and capable of command. To become free, to acquire the capacity for self-government, all peoples must therefore undergo the severe discipline of subjection to a master" (EG ¶435Z).[11] Here, undergoing the discipline that breaks the self-will is presented as a realization condition for rationality. This discipline that breaks the self-will is simply the aforementioned combination of fear, service, and *Bildung*. Understanding the argument of 'Self-Consciousness' A in this way allows us to better grasp why the dialectic progresses through the servant, rather than the master: the issue is not merely that the recognition between the two is not reciprocal, but that the master does not undergo the process through which he can become rational.

The task of the argument, as indicated above, is to spell out the realization conditions of rationality. Hegel takes there to be three of these:

1. One must fear and submit to conditions of servitude.
2. One must devote one's practical activity to the service of another.
3. One must come to understand one's practical activity (service) to have a particular form.

These three realization conditions correspond to the universal necessity of fear, service, and *Bildung*.[12] Hegel's argument *for* these realization conditions, as I reconstruct it, is composed of four steps, each of which I will explain in turn:

[11]There is a question which I leave unaddressed as to what, if any, significance there is to Hegel's, use of *Eigenwillen* in the *Encyclopedia* versus *Eigensinn* in the *Phenomenology*. Given the contextual similarities, I treat the two as interchangeable, as expressing the same concept.

[12]There is a question as to why these conditions are *necessary* rather than merely *sufficient*. I take it that Hegel's argument is meant to develop, in part, what is required for genuine rule-following, the ability to determine oneself in accordance with the conclusion of chains of reasoning. It is in virtue of this that the realization conditions, represented here by fear, service, and *Bildung* are universally necessary. The realization conditions must, thus, generally remain the same, although they may be instantiated differently at different historical moments, cf. fn35.

1. Self-consciousness begins as desire, or activity, generally; humans are active in the world (PhG ¶167-175).
2. If one is to become rational, it must be through coming to stand in recognitive relations with other self-consciousnesses (PhG ¶175-184).
3. The particular form of recognitive relations, at first, is servitude, or command and obedience (PhG ¶186-193).
4. Rationality, in its most primitive form, is realized through the servant's overcoming and comprehension of his condition (PhG ¶194-201).

# 2 Desire and Recognition

The 'Self-Consciousness' chapter, in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, must be briefly situated within the project generally. The *Phenomenology* is, ostensibly, an epistemological treatise. The book's first three chapters, 'Sense-Certainty', 'Perception', and 'Force and Understanding', are attempts at an account of knowledge of an independent world — the object of knowledge, truth, is conceived to be independent of the knower. It is the task of the subject to conform himself to this object in order to know it. The result of the first three chapters is the failure of this approach, the details of which cannot concern us here. However, what is essential is the result of the first three chapters, something akin to Kant's Copernican Revolution — we come to realize that objects conform to our cognition of them because objects are only *for us*. It is only in virtue of our being self-conscious and *active* in our knowing of the world that objects *as such* are possible.[13]

The opening of the 'Self-Consciousness' chapter is, in virtue of this revolution in our knowing, shaped by a transformation. In the first three chapters, 'the true' was the object, conceived independently of the activity of the subject. However, through the failure of one's attempt to know

[13]Cf. PhG ¶164: "Consciousness of an other, of an object as such, is indeed itself necessarily *self-consciousness*"; and PhG ¶166: "The way the object immediately was in itself, as sensuous-certainty's entity, perception's concrete thing, or the understanding's force, proves not to be the way it is in truth. Rather, this in-itself turns out to be a way in which the object is only for another."

such an object, a standpoint is reached in which 'the true' is the knowing subject's own activity.[14] However, because the objects immediately appear to be independent, to be something that is not only for us, it must be shown how this initial appearance is illusory. That is, we must show how the seemingly independent object is actually constituted by self-conscious activity. Self-consciousness is thus *desire*; it is the activity through which it is shown that the object is only *for it*, that the object is not independent of, but dependent on self-consciousness (PhG ¶167).

The 'Self-Consciousness' chapter, then, turns to an inquiry into subjects, rather than objects. Self-consciousness will undergo a series of failures in attempting to understand how its activity is constitutive of its objects — how the objects are only for it — and in doing so, will undergo a series of transformations of its self-conception, what it takes itself to be. Initially, self-consciousness knows itself to be 'the truth', that in virtue of whose activity the object is an object *as such*. Thus, it seeks to show its object to be *inessential*, as dependent on self-conscious activity. This is done, at first, through the destruction of the object (PhG ¶174). The knowing subject no longer conforms its cognition to some independent object, but the object conforms to self-conscious activity — the object is only an object *for* a self-conscious subject.

However, through this, self-consciousness learns of the reciprocal dependency between it and its object. That is, self-conscious activity cannot be the truth of its object if the object is destroyed.[15] Further, because self-consciousness *is* desire — the activity through which the object is shown to be dependent on it — insofar as the object is lost, self-consciousness itself is lost: self-consciousness, to be self-conscious, is reliant on its own activity which is active *through* objects. In virtue of this failure, self-consciousness must undergo a transformation, taking on a new kind of object. Self-consciousness still knows itself to be essential, to have its objects be constituted by its activity; however, it now knows its object must be such that the activity of self-consciousness

[14]Cf. Kant: "the formal aspect of all truth consists in agreement with the laws of the understanding" (KrV A293-294/B350). Error occurs when something merely subjective intrudes in a universal activity (KrV A294/B350-1). Cf. Kern 2017 for a contemporary defense of this notion of knowledge.

[15]Cf. Neuhouser 2009, pp. 43–44 for an elaboration on ways of understanding this theme.

neither destroys the object nor eliminates its significance — the object must still be something *for* self-consciousness. Hegel tells us that the only object that can initially fulfill this criterion is another self-consciousness (PhG ¶175).

The key point in this transition is that self-consciousness can be shown to be inessential — to conform to another self-consciousness's activity — while not falling out of the picture altogether. This is because of certain *potentialities* that self-consciousness has, certain things that a self-consciousness can uniquely do. This, Hegel tells us, is *self-negation* — the new object of desire, another self-consciousness, must "effect the negation in itself". That is, self-consciousness must, by its own lights, become inessential in relation to another and conform to the other's activity. To do so is to *take* oneself to be inessential in relation to another, to place oneself under the command of another's authority. This process, we will see, is at first not one that the self-consciousness is aware of — the fact that *one makes oneself inessential* is initially hidden from view. This is because one only does so in virtue of fearing death at the hands of the other. This, then, brings us to the so-called 'life and death struggle'.

The life and death struggle is an attempt by two self-consciousnesses to take each other's life (which, we will see, amounts to each attempting to get the other to submit to its command). Additionally, each seeks to prove itself worthy of the other's submission, to prove itself worthy of being recognized by the other self-consciousness as 'the true', as the one whose activity constitutes the truth of objects as such.[16] The result of this struggle is the submission of one self-consciousness to the other in virtue of *fearing* death at the other's hands. It is only through fearing death at the hands of the other that one submits to them (PhG ¶189, 194). As a result of this submission, sociality — recognitive relations between two (or more) subjects — is brought into the picture. This is the so-called master-servant dialectic.

Our task, in understanding the master-servant dialectic, is to understand how the servant will

[16]This is to be a sort of normative authority, although we will see the master is not conscious of himself *as* a normative authority.

'come to have a mind of its own' and become 'thinking consciousness'.[17] It is in elucidating this process that I have suggested we ought to understand the 'Self-Consciousness' chapter as providing realization conditions for rationality. Thus, we seek to understand how we arrive at self-conscious rational activity from this master-servant relation. The key to accomplishing this, I will argue, is to understand how this social form, this particular way of relating to each other, shapes the activity of the servant and enables him to become rational.[18]

# 3 Sociality and Servitude

Sociality, or the life-form, for Hegel, is essential to the understanding of action and activity generally. One cannot properly understand an action in abstraction from (in this case, and for our purposes) the social conditions under which it occurs. As Rawls puts the point, acting within a practice (here, servitude) changes the form of the action (Rawls 1950, pp. 36–37). What we seek to understand is how sociality, in this case, conditions of *servitude*, interacts with what Hegel calls the 'universally necessary moments' of fear, work, and *Bildung*.[19] Understanding how sociality and these 'universally necessary moments', our realization conditions, are so related will allow us to see how one becomes rational. That is, we will see how: (1) fear allows for the possibility of service; (2) how work, in conditions of servitude is *essentially* service; and (3) how the comprehension of the previous two elements has a transformative effect on the servant's self-conception, allowing him to understand himself to be a universal, thinking consciousness, to be rational (as

[17] This is merely one of the many threads one could follow through the 'Self-Consciousness' chapter.

[18] Cf. Ng (2020): "all cognitive capacities are fundamentally shaped by the corporeal reality and the relation to the environment actualized in particular species" (pp. 277). For our purposes here, the key point here is that one's environment (including relations to others) shapes one's activity.

[19] Cf. PhG ¶196: "the two moments of fear and service, as well as the moments of culturally formative activity are both necessary, and necessary in a universal way."

Hegel says, to have a mind of his own).[20] Through the comprehension of the effect of fear, the servant understands himself to be a normative authority, as capable of affording things normative significance — because he feared death, the servant attributed to the master the status of master. The comprehension of service teaches the servant that nothing has an immediate normative significance. In serving, the servant must set his desires to the side and take them to not be worth acting on, to be normatively insignificant in comparison to the commands of the master. In comprehending both of these things, one reaches the standpoint of reason through which one understands oneself to be 'I' in a universal sense. One comes to understand one's activity to be self-conscious *rational* activity.[21]

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[20]This tracks the reciprocal dependence of the three moments that Hegel makes clear in PhG ¶196: "Without the discipline of service and obedience, fear is mired in formality and does not diffuse itself over the conscious actuality of existence. Without culturally formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness will not become for it [consciousness] itself. If consciousness engages in formative activity without that first, absolute fear, then it has a mind of its own which is only vanity [nur ein eitler eigner Sinn], for its form, or its negativity, is not negativity in itself, and his formative activity thus cannot to himself give him the consciousness of himself as consciousness of the essence. If he has not been tried and tested by absolute fear but only by a few anxieties, then the negative essence will have remained an externality to himself, and his substance will not have been infected all the way through by it. While not each and every one of the ways in which his natural consciousness was brought to fulfillment was shaken to the core, he is still attached in himself to determinate being. His having a mind of his own is then only stubbornness [der eignes Sinn ist Eigensinn], a freedom that remains bogged down within the bounds of servility."

[21]Ng (2020) puts it as such: "Empowered by the schema of logical life [the formal structure of service], the living, self-conscious I, beginning as drive and inner purpose, once again seeks to realize itself as objective, but this time the result is the reproduction of self-certainty by means of the rational activity of pursuing the true and the good" (pp. 280-1). She does not raise this in the context of the *Phenomenology*, but it neatly fits. The subtitle of the 'Self-Consciousness' chapter is 'the truth of self-certainty', which matches her talk of the reproduction of self-certainty. She also suggests that the comprehension of the logical schema of life allows for rational activity, the pursuing of the true and good, which is the standpoint at which we arrive in 'Self-Consciousness' B.

## 3.1 Fear

Now that we understand both where we are going — a formal understanding of the capacity to reason — and how we will arrive — through fear, service, and *Bildung* — we may turn to fear, service, and *Bildung* individually and in greater detail. As noted briefly in section 2, it is in virtue of fearing death at the hands of the master that the servant submits to him. In fearing, Hegel tells that the servant "had inwardly fallen into dissolution, trembled in its depths, and all that was fixed within it had been shaken loose... this pure universal moment... is the simple essence of self-consciousness" (PhG ¶194). By this, Hegel means to say that the servant, through fearing, becomes unattached to any particular content. That is, no content immediately matters to him. Since the 'Self-Consciousness' chapter is primarily concerned with one's activity, we can understand this to be claiming that the servant's self-conscious activity, his immediate ways of acting, are interrupted. In order to *be* a servant, this is necessarily the case — the servant could not have submitted to the master had he not given up on attempting to prove himself to the master, to assert that his [the servant's] activity was what mattered. This idea of the simple essence of self-consciousness mirrors how Hegel talks about free will in the *Philosophy of Right*, where he says "every limitation, every content, whether present immediately through nature, through needs, desires and drives, or given and determined in some other way, is dissolved" (PhR ¶5). Because the servant fears for his life, he puts his desires to the side (most specifically, his desire to conquer the now-master) and becomes willing to obey the now-master in exchange for his life.[22] [23] Through being divorced from any

[22]It is important that, for Hegel, desires are not 'static' mental states. One desires in virtue of undertaking some action towards the object of desire's attainment. Hegel's account of mental content, thus, has some sort of functional aspect. Cf. DeVries 1988 for an explication of Hegel's theory of mental activity that draws connections to functionalism.

[23]One may wonder here why the desire for life being retained is not holding onto a particular content. This desire is, at the very least, different in kind in virtue of being *general*, or what may be called an 'infinite end', an end not exhaustible in any one action. Cf. Neuhouser (2009) pp.51 for this point made in this context and Rödl (2007) pp.34-38 for an explanation of infinite ends, in contradistinction from 'finite ends'.

particular content, one becomes *potentially* capable of understanding oneself as the formal 'I', the 'I' that can be attached to any action (or thought).[24] In Hegelian terms, through fearing, one becomes 'in-itself' this formal 'I', one is potentially able to understand oneself as such. However, this is at first only a potentiality — the servant requires the proper conditions in order for it to be realized.

The significant distinction between master and servant brought about here is that what the master merely attempted to prove — his lack of attachment to anything — the servant actually *experiences*. Both the master and servant attempt to prove this through risking their lives but, through fearing, the servant experiences this through a transformation in his self-conception. The master has a sort of 'false consciousness' — he takes himself to be elevated above death by risking his life and not submitting; however, because he did not *fear* death, he cannot be elevated above it. Contrariwise, by fearing the master, the servant actually undergoes a kind of death, the death of his own subjectivity. The servant no longer regards himself as *subject* but as *object*, as a tool for the master's satisfaction. There is a passing-away of his former self-conception and an arising of his new self-conception. It is because the servant comes to regard himself as an object of the master that what previously mattered to him no longer does — what matters for the servant now is what matters for the master. However, the servant's having such a self-conception, devoid of subjectivity, does not make him, in himself, into an object — he was, and remains, implicitly a subject; it is only in virtue of his being subject that it is possible for him to take himself to be an object.

We have thus seen both how fear allows one to submit to servitude and helps to maintain conditions of servitude — the servant begins to serve, and continues to serve because he fears death at the hands of the master. However, fear also allows for the conditions of the possibility

[24]One would do well to think of the 'I think' of Kant's synthetic unity of apperception in relation to this talk. For Kant, the 'I think' is the *form* of human representation, capable of being attached to any thought (Cf. KrV B131-2). Cf. also McDowell 2009, Houlgate 2009-10, and Jenkins 2017 for readings of the chapter that similarly emphasize the connection to Kant's synthetic unity of apperception.

of overcoming servitude. The servant, in the first place, only becomes so because he fears for his life. Further, in serving, the servant continues to fear the master. This is why, in characterizing the servant's work, Hegel tells us "work is desire *held in check*" (PhG ¶195). In becoming the servant and *serving* the master, the servant continually keeps his desires in check: he becomes the master of his own desires *because* he fears death at the hands of the master.[25] To overcome servitude, though, is to overcome fear and regain one's subjectivity in an altered form, becoming a proper subject. To accomplish this, the servant must 'move past' fear and no longer take himself to be merely an object or a tool of the master. In telling us how fear contains the conditions for the possibility of overcoming servitude, Hegel tells us that "obedience is the beginning of all wisdom; for through obedience the will... accepts within itself the rational will coming to it from outside and gradually makes this its own will" (EG ¶396Z).[26] What Hegel means to tell us is that, through fear, the servant's immediate attachment to contents, to particular desires, is broken, and it becomes possible for him to *reason* about particular contents, e.g. whether certain actions are good. That is, the servant is opened up to the possibility of explicitly recognizing his own capacity to undertake commitments as to some action's goodness.[27]

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[25]Recalling our earlier mention of the Kantian 'Incorporation Thesis', the argument here claims that reaching the standpoint presupposed for incorporation is itself an achievement, something people, and individuals generally, must learn to do. This is similar to Rawls' complaint that Kant ignores "the background social conditions" required for the realization of a conception of ourselves as reasonable and rational, cf. Rawls (1980) pp.340.

[26]The acceptance of the rational will is not completed at the conclusion of the argument offered here, but only begun.

[27]There is a certain tension in Hegel's *Phenomenology* regarding this point: if the entire time we are attempting to know things, how can we take Hegel at his word that one only becomes rational, capable of reasoning in 'Self-Consciousness' B? I cannot fully adjudicate this tension here. However, I believe the point can be made by relying on Hegel's distinction between *representational thinking* and *conceptual thinking*. The capacity to reason allows one to think conceptually; conceptual thoughts, for Hegel, are such that there is no gap between my cognition of the object and the object. This is opposed to representational thought where my thoughts are not the same as the object — representational thought remains committed to some sort of thing-in-itself, some notion of the object of cognition

## 3.2 Acts of Service

As Hegel said above, both fear and service are 'universally necessary'. We now understand why the former is so: it allows for one to be, in principle, detached from any content, what Hegel calls 'the simple essence of self-consciousness'. The importance of service, then, is to allow for one to take a further step, the realization of what we said above was only brought about in principle, or potentially. Through service, one realizes one's ability to detach oneself from any particular content by holding desire in check (PhG ¶195). That is, one does not act on *one's own* desires, but according to the commands of the master. The realization of this is, at the same time, the realization of one's ability to bind oneself, to commit oneself, to particular contents: the servant does not simply refuse to act on his desires and sit in complacency — rather, he holds off his desires *in order to* work for the master, in effect acknowledging the master's commands as what he ought to do (although the servant does not, initially, understand this feature of his action explicitly). This paves the way for genuine normative obedience — the holding off of one's particularities in order to conform to rational demands: laws, rules, and norms. We must now understand the specifics of how this learning process occurs.

There is a traditional understanding of work that does not adequately lend itself to our goal of understanding how one becomes rational. This reading emphasizes where Hegel tells us that "this formative *doing*, is at the same time *singularity*, the pure being-for-itself of consciousness, which in the work external to it now enters into the element of lasting. Thus, by those means, the working consciousness comes to an intuition of self-sufficient being *as its own self*" (PhG ¶195).

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beyond my cognition of it. Cf. PhG ¶197: "However, in that this content is at the same time a conceptually grasped content, *consciousness remains immediately self-aware of its unity with this determinate and distinguished existent, not as it would be in the case of representation*, in which consciousness especially has to remind itself that this is its representation; rather, the concept is to me immediately my concept" (emphasis mine). The idea is similarly put by referring back to our claim that, for self-consciousness, its activity is constitutive of truth; representational thought attempts to grasp at truth not constituted by its own activity, whereas conceptual thought grasps at truth constituted by itself, by its own activity.

Ludwig Siep, for example, suggests that Hegel is borrowing here from Aristotle's notion of *poiesis*: someone who possesses a *techne*, a practical skill, "transfers the form of the planned product from his soul into the material" (Siep 2014, p. 95).[28] The significance of service, according to this reading, is more appropriately the significance of *work*. What matters is that the servant comes to see himself in some object in the world: he knows he created it, and so he comes to see himself in the object when it is created.

However, this way of understanding the significance of the servant's activity threatens to render it irrelevant that one does not simply *work* but *serves* the master. In light of this, one may question *why* or *how* the servant comes to see himself in his object. Is it simply the essence of work to see oneself in the resultant object? If so, why is it necessary that the servant *is* a servant? If what matters is simply forming an external object, why must the object be formed in conditions of *servitude*? If object formation was the key point, the servant could "experience independence from the threatening external power of nature" (ibid., pp. 95) without being in servitude. Hegel himself seems to stress the importance of understanding service in light of the actual conditions of servitude:

> If consciousness engages in formative activity without that first, absolute fear, then it has a mind of its own which is only vanity [*ein eitler eigner Sinn*], for its form, or its negativity, is not negativity in itself, and his formative activity thus cannot to himself give him the consciousness of himself as consciousness of the essence [...] His having a mind of his own [*eigne Sinn*] is then only *stubbornness* [*Eigensinn*], a freedom that remains bogged down within the bounds of servility (PhG ¶196).

The suggestion, then, is that work must be performed *in light of* the fear of death *at the hands of the master*, in light of the work being *service*. We must, thus, attempt to read the passage in such a way that the conditions of servitude are essential to work and the servant's coming to 'see himself in his object'.

To understand service properly, then, we must understand it *not* simply as work but *essentially* as service — the creation of an object for another's satisfaction at the other's command. This means

[28]Cf. also Neuhouser 2009.

that we must understand the work itself as being essentially shaped through an understanding of the conditions under which it occurs. Each action formed in conditions of servitude must be understood according to the form of '*I serve you by $\phi$ing because you command it*', where 'I' is the individual fulfilling the role of servant, and 'you' is the individual fulfilling the role of master, and $\phi$ is the particular action performed. The significance of the second-personal 'you' here is to emphasize that one is only self-conscious insofar as one is socialized. That is, one can only realize one's potential to be a self-conscious being insofar as one is socialized; the realization conditions given here are essentially social.[29] The second-personal 'you' emphasizes that the master is not simply an object, but a subject, another self-consciousness.[30] Hegel tells us that "to servitude, the truth is the self-sufficient consciousness existing for itself, a truth which for servitude is nonetheless not in servitude" (PhG ¶194). What he means to say is that the master is authoritative (the truth) over the servant. The servant is accountable to an authority, but this authority is someone other than himself (a truth which *for servitude* is nonetheless not *in servitude*). Thus, the formal structure of service is one in which there is some 'I', the servant, who is totally accountable or dependent on some 'you', the master, who is totally authoritative or independent.

It is through this formal structure that particular actions must be understood — what the servant does, his practical activity, is essentially service. For example, my baking of a cake is to be understood differently depending on whether I bake it *for myself* or *for you* and, further, *why* I bake it for you. Here, the servant 'bakes the cake' for the master *because* the master commands it of him. While there is a sense in which the actions are the same — they result in a cake being baked — they remain different insofar as the *purpose* of the action, why it is done, depends in part on the

[29]Cf. PhG ¶177:"A self-consciousness is for a self-consciousness. Only thereby is there in fact self-consciousness, for it is only therein that the unity of itself in its otherness comes to be for it.

[30]While the master cannot, as we will see shortly, explicitly understand himself as 'I' in the same way as the servant, he is still potentially self-conscious and thus the second-personal 'you' is not inappropriate.

broader social structure under which the action occurs.[31] It is important that this formal structure is, at first, implicit, and only eventually recognized by the servant. The master, in commanding, does not (and cannot) recognize what he is doing as issuing commands the servant *ought* to obey; to do this, the master would have to treat the servant as a subject. But, this is precisely what the master does not and cannot do — the servant is an *object* to the master, not a subject (and thus not the sort of thing that could be subject to normative requirements). The master treats the servant as an object, as a tool to help him satisfy his desires. The way the master acts towards the servant is thus no different from how he acts towards any other object: he uses the servant.

The structure of service, of the servant's work, is, thus, essentially dyadic.[32] However, we have yet to see how understanding the servant's work as essentially service allows us to better grasp how he comes to understand himself as 'I' and have a mind of his own. How could this way of understanding the servant's work enrich our understanding of his subsequent transformation from servile to thinking consciousness?

To accomplish the above task, we can turn to Sebastian Rödl who tells us, in relation to the dyadic structure of transactional actions generally that:

> Peter, giving an apple to Paul, knew him to be such as to be given something before he set out to give him the apple. He was conscious of him as a potential partner in transaction. This consciousness, Peter's consciousness of Paul as a partner, precedes and underlies any transaction of Peter and Paul (Rödl 2014, p. 311).

This idea, applied to our circumstances, is that the servant, *in serving*, implicitly knows himself and his master to be self-consciousnesses — to be the 'I' and 'you' that correspond to the formal structure under which the servant's actions are performed. In submitting to the master, the servant knew the master to be such as could be served, or obeyed. Similarly, in particular actions, the servant always implicitly understands the master to be authoritative over him, to be the 'you' for

[31] One would do well here to think of Anscombe (1957) who tells us that the proper specification of an action depends on the answers to 'why' questions addressed to he who acts — what is done depends on why it is done.

[32] The dyadic structure of service is similarly noted by Arel 2013.

whom he, the 'I', serves. There is a certain formal structure underlying the activity of Peter and Paul, in Rödl's example, and the master and servant, in ours. This formal structure which is always implicit makes it possible to comprehend the particular actions with that form (I serve you by $\phi$-ing). What is done is not extricable from this context, and it is in virtue of this context that the servant will overcome servitude and become rational.

While we may grant that there is a certain implicit form to the servant's action, how does this become *explicit*? That is, how does the servant graduate from implicit to explicit understanding of this formal structure of his action? This explicit understanding is not to suggest that the servant must think to himself 'I serve you' but rather that he must come to understand what is implicit in his action: he is independent of any particular content — nothing is immediately binding for him, he holds his desires off — and he can make himself dependent on particular contents — he can undertake commitments, as he does in recognizing the master to be master.[33] It is at this point that it becomes possible that "the working consciousness comes to an intuition of self-sufficient being as its own self" (PhG ¶195). *Pace* Neuhouser and Siep, one cannot immediately understand some created object as the object of *one's* work. Rather, one can only understand some created object as *one's owns* in virtue of it being formed in conditions of servitude (*I* made *this* for *you*). In coming to understand the object as one's creation, one, *at the same time*, understands it to be an object one has created *for the master*. The object created by the servant must be understood as an act of service, as something the formal, wholly accountable 'I' creates for the wholly authoritative 'you'. It is only through this formal structure underlying the servant's actions that objects created take on the significance of being objects of *his* work, allowing the servant to come to an understanding of himself as the 'I' who has created the object. In virtue of the formal structure of his action, the servant returns from his taking of himself to be an object, coming to understand himself to be the

[33]There is a sense in which the master's commands are immediately binding insofar as there is no thought in virtue of which the servant binds himself, it is a reaction to the fear of death at his hands. However, there is also a sense in which it is mediated insofar as the servant, prior to fearing death at the master's hands, was not determined to serve him.

subject that *created* some object.

## 3.3 *Bildung*

These two points — seeing one's practical activity as one's own and understanding oneself as 'I', as a subject — are thus inseparable. One cannot come to understand oneself as 'I' in the formal, universal sense except through practical activity. Additionally, one cannot come to understand oneself as manifest in one's practical activity except through understanding oneself, implicitly, as 'I'.[34] There is no problem of bootstrapping to be had, as it is always implicit in the formal structure of the action that the servant is this abstract 'I'. Pippin (2019) also stresses the reciprocal dependence, albeit slightly differently, when he tells us "I am not acting if I am not aware of my acting, and this in no sense as self-observation" (pp. 304). The talk of awareness is a bit misleading as it suggests something closer to an occurent mental state like 'I am acting'; the point, in the same spirit, is that we cannot come to see ourselves as acting through a form of self-observation — identifying the created object as ours — without already implicitly understanding ourselves as acting, as making the object, made possible in virtue of the formal social structure of service. The explicit understanding that I have created some object is possible only insofar as I implicitly understand myself as 'I', as the subject of an action, in acting at all.

This line of argument accords with the way in which Hegel talks about mastery and servitude in his *Encyclopedia*. There, he tells us that "without having experienced that discipline that breaks the self-will, no one becomes free, rational, and capable of command" (EG ¶435Z). Hegel then, using the examples of the rule of Pisistratus in Athens and the monarchy of Rome, suggests that these were historically necessary in order for both Athens and Rome to become truly free. Thus, he writes "Bondage and tyranny are, therefore, in the history of peoples a necessary stage and hence something *relatively* justified" (EG ¶435Z). While, out of context, this can appear to be a sinister

[34]Hegel puts the point as so: "Without culturally formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness will not become for it [consciousness] itself" (PhG ¶196).

thought, it is important to understand the point Hegel is trying to make: bondage and tyranny are necessary in order to allow freedom to flourish, to allow people to become self-conscious rational actors. It is only following these conditions that it is possible for individuals to consider themselves as 'I' in this universal sense, the first step to the realization of freedom. This does not mean that Hegel justifies tyranny and bondage *writ large*. Tyranny and bondage, here, allow for a culture, a 'people', to reach the universal standpoint of reason. Once this is done, individuals merely need to internalize this accumulated knowledge and the tyrannical conditions are no longer justified.[35]

The servant, thus, comes to comprehend the formal structure of his social world. He does not merely understand himself as independent of any particular content, but also as capable of undertaking commitments, of taking particular actions to be good. This is because, in comprehending the formal structure through seeing himself in the object of his work, the servant understands that the master was only master in virtue of being taken as such by him. In understanding this, the servant-now-stoic comes to understand himself as the 'I' that *can give itself content*. That is, he at once knows himself to be independent of any particular content, and also knows himself to be able to bind himself to particular contents by undertaking commitments; the stoic is a self-legislator, one who is the source of his own commitments.

This new self-understanding is, again, only a making explicit of what was always implicit. This is because the servant's initial condition was only possible in virtue of this self-legislative capacity. In comprehending the particular recognitive form of his social world, the servant understands how he himself helped to create it. Only in virtue of the servant's submission to the master could the master be such. The identities of 'master' and 'servant' are not natural identities — neither self-consciousness was 'master' or 'servant' prior to their life-and-death struggle, but only in virtue of the outcome of the struggle. That is, they are identities gained only through a particular way of relating to each other — through an asymmetric recognition. The master was master and the servant was servant in virtue of the servant's activity, his submission to the master. The arising

[35]Cf. PhG ¶28; cf. also, EG ¶395Z where Hegel gestures at what this process of internalization looks like for an individual who is a part of a 'rational people'.

of such a social world was only possible in virtue of the capacity of the servant to undertake commitments, to bind himself, through which he assigned the master this total authority over him.

While it is contingent exactly *when* (that is, at what particular moment, through which object) the servant comes to understand himself as what he implicitly is, the abstract, formal 'I', the possibility of his coming to do so is accounted for through the formal structure underlying his action.[36] One cannot answer as to exactly *when* the servant understands himself thus, but one can answer as to the possibility of such a realization generally. In coming to have a mind of his own and understand himself as 'I' through the comprehension of the social structure in which he acts, the servant *overcomes* servitude: he becomes the thinking, or stoic consciousness. This is because in understanding himself as this abstract, formal, universal 'I', the servant understands himself as *free* — he is not committed to any action being good unless he himself undertakes such a commitment through his own rational activity.

This reading, further, allows us to not only see why the social form of servitude is insufficient (the recognition inherent in it is not reciprocal, cf. PhG ¶191), which is typically noted, but one is able to answer the further question of why the dialectic advances through the servant and not the master, a point not often treated in significant detail. The servant is the path forward in the dialectic because he begins the process of becoming rational, and the master remains enslaved to his desires in virtue of his self-will never being broken. The breaking of the self-will is the key to being able to think, to judge things to be good from a universal standpoint, that of reason. The master, though, remains stuck in his particularity: he commands the servant to create what he desires and satisfies himself with this object of his desire. For the master, rationality cannot enter the picture until he too undergoes the discipline of servitude and obedience. This explains why the servant is the way forward in the dialectic — his self-conception is able to progress, whereas the master remains stuck

[36]While the servant is only coming to realize what he was implicitly the entire time, there is a sense in which he becomes something different too. However, this becoming something different is in virtue of his taking himself to be different. As Brandom puts the point, for Hegel, humans are self-constituting, they can change *what* they are by changing what they take themselves to be (Brandom 2007, pp. 25–26)

in his ways.[37] It is only for the servant that the realization conditions of rationality obtain.

### 3.3.1 Universal Consciousness: The Standpoint of Reason

Where does this educative process that the servant-now-stoic has undergone now leave us? We noted in the introduction three features: (1) the servant obtains a mind of his own; (2) the servant comes to a new understanding of himself as 'I'; and (3) the servant becomes capable of self-legislation. It is at the attainment of these three features that we have arrived. The servant has obtained a mind of his own insofar as he has become capable of reasoning as to what is good and undertaking particular commitments. The possibility of this is accounted for through the attainment of the universal standpoint of reason in which everyone is, in principle, capable of occupying. In virtue of this, one comes to a new understanding of oneself as 'I': one is 'I' in a universal sense. When *I* judge something to be good, it is, of course, myself who is doing so. However, in virtue of the universality of reason, I, at the same time, acknowledge it to be appropriate for *everyone* to reason as I do — in making particular judgements, I also claim that all should judge as I do. This activity through which one makes judgements and undertakes commitments is, lastly, the explicit realization of one's capacity for self-legislation. One is able to give laws to oneself, one binds oneself in particular ways through the commitment to the goodness of certain actions.

Hegel's argumentative path in the *Phenomenology* continues by attempting to now understand this newly achieved standpoint. One, at first, realizes that one lacks the *criterion* of truth and goodness (PhG ¶200), the normative standards underlying the activity of reason. In coming to understand this, one sees that there are ways in which one *ought* to judge, with this ought being internal to oneself. How one ought to judge is determined in virtue of what one is: a free, rational, self-conscious agent.[38] To be *fully* rational, one must, thus, not only be capable of reasoning about

[37] Cf. Redding 2009 and also Moyar 2021 (pp.61), who similarly hint at this.

[38] Hegel, I contend, is thus some sort of *constructivist* or *constitutivist*. His view will be importantly distinguished in virtue of the role of sociality in subsequent developments.

what is good, but understand *how* to do this correctly. The culmination of these developments would be the necessary supplement to the account offered here of the realization conditions for rationality. The path of the Reason chapter will largely show that our capacity to reason fails on its own terms if it is not understood socially. The path of Hegel's dialectic moving forward shows the relevance of keeping the sociality of reason in mind when considering how to reason well. Reason, according to Hegel, is social both in its genesis, and its mature operation.

# 4 Conclusion

At the outset, we suggested that there are two key passages to the understanding of our task. The first was the one in which Hegel tells us that the servant comes to have a mind of his own *[eigner Sinn]* in service, where there had seemed to be only an outsider's mind [*fremder Sinn*] (PhG ¶196). The second was the one in which Hegel tells us that to be free, rational, and self-governing, one must break one's self-will [*Eigenwille, Eigensinn*]. There is an air of paradox to this governing idea (especially given the etymological proximity of *eigner Sinn* and *Eigensinn*), namely, how is it that by means of the breaking of the self-will [*Eigensinn]* we arrive at the former [*eigner Sinn*].[39] The task of this paper has largely been an attempt to understand this. That is, how one's self-will being broken — through fearing and serving — allows for one to have a mind of one's own.

Self-will can alternatively be translated as 'stubbornness' (as Pinkard does in PhG ¶196). Keeping in mind this dual aspect of the German *Eigensinn*, we can understand what the self-will is more clearly — it is a sort of stubborn activity. That is, if one's self-will is not broken, one remains 'stuck in *one's* ways'. However, there is also a sense in which these ways are not, strictly speaking, *one's own*. That is because the determinations of the self-will are not the determinations of one *as subject* — it is only in overcoming one's self-will that one becomes, properly speaking, a subject.[40]

[39]There is a certain literalness to the breaking in the printed word: we can imagine *Eigensinn*, literally broken in half, becomes *eigner Sinn*.

[40]Recall, again, the Kantian 'Incorporation Thesis' (Cf. Allison 1990, pp.39-40).

Humans are rational *animals*, and we can understand the self-will in relation to the latter aspect of humanity — one's animality. Insofar as one is merely a self-will, one is only distinguished in *potential* from a mere animal.

What, then, of the relation to coming to have a mind of one's own? As we said above, the human with their self-will intact is still potentially a rational being. It is through being placed in a command and obedience structure — as a servant who serves a master — that one begins to realize this potentiality.[41] Through fearing and serving, one's self-will is broken; one's activity is not immediate, or instinctual, but is mediated or determined by the master's commands. The combination of fearing and serving allows for the self-will to be broken, for one to be able not merely to determine oneself for another, but for oneself. This is why Hegel says that freedom and self-governance require the discipline of subjection to a master: it is through subjection to a master, learning to determine oneself in accordance with another's commands, that one becomes capable of self-determination, subjecting oneself to *one's own* commands.

We began from self-consciousness in general, which, Hegel tells us, is *desire*. Through self-consciousness's own activity, we have arrived at a standpoint in which self-consciousness has become capable of reasoning, self-legislating, and understanding itself as 'I' in a universal sense. It is through self-consciousness's own immanent development that it shows itself to be capable of reasoning and to be free. However, it remains to be seen how self-consciousness, reason, and freedom will develop further on in the dialectic. To do so now is beyond the scope afforded by this paper; however, the dialectic winds ever onward.

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[41] Keeping with the theme of the previous footnote, one comes to learn how to incorporate incentives into the maxims of one's actions.

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