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Part II. Hegel's Interdisciplinary Concept of the Will

3. Rousseau and Hegel on the Will 'for itself'

The Will in social theory

Despite the protests of Luther, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Spinoza, and the scepticism to which the Empiricists had been subject, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) accepted the reality of the Will (*la volonté*) as it was commonly understood in his time. Rather than relying on Psychology or Theology, Rousseau reasoned that the Will is known from his perception of his own actions and observation of the actions of others. No further proof was required.

As Rousseau put it:

> There is no real action without Will. This is my first principle. How does a Will produce a physical and corporeal action? I cannot tell, but I perceive that it does so in myself, I will to do something and I do it; I will to move my body and it moves, but if an inanimate body, when at rest, should begin to move itself, the thing is incomprehensible and without precedent. *The Will is known to me in its action, not in its nature*. I know this Will as a cause of motion, but to conceive of matter as producing motion is clearly to conceive of an effect without a cause, which is not to conceive at all.
>
> …
>
> The motive power of all action is in the Will of a free creature; we can go no farther. … Man is therefore free to act, and as such he is animated by an immaterial substance.
>
> Rousseau, 1755

It was Rousseau who first made the concept of the Will foundational to social philosophy, and Hegel followed Rousseau in making the Will the starting point of his *Philosophy of Right* (1821). Holding that man was free in the "state of nature," Rousseau claimed that:

> … every one must see that as the bonds of servitude are formed merely by the mutual dependence of men on one another and the reciprocal needs that unite them, it is impossible to make any man a slave, unless he be first reduced to a situation in which he cannot do without the help of others: and, since such a situation does not exist in a state of nature, every one is there his own master.
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> Rousseau, 1754

Famously:

> Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains.
>
> Rousseau, 1762

Hegel responded to the contrary, saying that man is born unfree, but in a modern state he could *become* free:

> The Christian doctrine that man is by nature evil is loftier than the opposite that he is naturally good, and is to be interpreted philosophically in this way. Man as spirit is a free being, who need not give way to impulse. Hence in his direct and unformed condition, man is in a situation in which he ought not to be, and he

must free himself. This is the meaning of the doctrine of original sin, without which Christianity would not be the religion of freedom.

Hegel, 1821, §18 Addition

The Will had been the central problem of Ethics and Moral Philosophy since Augustine. Hegel agreed with Rousseau that Will must also be the central concept of social and political theory. Both writers saw human society in ethical terms, rather than as a domain of cause and effect.

For Hegel, human beings were in essence free, but must actualise that freedom in and through the social formation they construct. Thanks to the concept of Will, Rousseau and Hegel overcame the individual/social dualism in modern philosophy and science. When a person exercises their own Will, they cannot but do so as an individual part of sovereign whole.

Freedom and personal autonomy

For Rousseau, Freedom means obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself, but the "self" is collective, not individual. Someone who refuses to obey the law may be *forced to be free*.

In order then that the social compact may not be an empty formula, it tacitly includes the undertaking, which alone can give force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free;

1762, Book 1, Chapter 7

This goes further than the enforcement of the law by crime-and-punishment, and perhaps contains the seeds of the Terror unleashed by the French Revolution when it attempted to make Rousseau's philosophy the official creed.

Hegel on the Free Will

Rousseau had openly declared that he had no response to the conundrum posed by Descartes and Elisabeth of Bohemia and offered no analysis of the nature of the Will. Hegel, however, had established the nature of the Will in the *Philosophy of the Subjective Spirit*.

Having the capacity to take objects in the external world as *sign*s, a person can develop a *free intelligence*. As such, a person is capable of determining a course of action which can realize its happiness rather than reacting directly to the immediate situation. The Will is the impulse of such a free intelligence to realise itself by regulating its natural striving and make itself objective.

Most of the Introduction to *The Philosophy of Right* is taken up with a discourse on the development of the Will. The question to be answered is this: how can human action become genuinely free, rather than being determined by basic psychological drives, structural imperatives, ideology, human needs and so on?

The territory of Right is in general the spiritual, and its more definite place and origin is the Will, which is free ... the system of right is the kingdom of actualised freedom.

op. cit. §4

The German word *Recht*, translated as "Right," refers simultaneously to three different domains of activity. Firstly, "Right" in the sense of a person having certain rights; secondly, in the sense of doing what is "right" according to one's own moral reflection; and thirdly, in terms of obedience to the law. Accordingly,

the *Philosophy of Right* has three sections: "Abstract Right," "Morality" and "Ethical Life."

Hegel's logical reconstruction of the Will begins from a "state of nature" in which human beings are taken to be living in localised subsistence economies in immediate connection with Nature.

Human beings construct a "second nature." It is noteworthy that both Rousseau and Hegel built what would nowadays be called a *social* theory on *ethical* foundations. This approach reflects the fact that both writers took human beings to be in essence "free creatures" (Rousseau, 1755), rather than natural creatures governed by the laws of cause and effect. Human beings collectively create norms of action which individuals respond to ethically. I will return to this later.

The first phase of the Will is the natural or direct will. The direct will is all the "impulses, appetites, inclinations, by which the will finds itself determined by Nature" (op. cit. §11). This content itself comes from the Will, since as natural beings, what we strive for is given by our vital needs, not caprice or fancy, so the Will is also implicitly rational, but "in its immediate directness it has not yet the form of rationality" (op. cit.).

As a natural being, I am subject to impulses, but as a result of having intelligence, I can determine whether and how I respond to an impulse.

The contradiction inherent in the direct will is that it "exists only as a *multiplicity* of impulses, … but at the same time universal and undetermined, having many objects and many ways of satisfaction" (op. cit. §12). Recall that Augustine invented the concept of the Will precisely because of the need to resolve a conflict of impulses. The Will actualises itself by resolving this conflict of impulses, not by *creating* an impulse. In this sense, every action is a judgment, and indeed a mediated judgment, and in that sense every action is a *syllogism*.

The conflict between different impulses and means is resolved by reflection. For Hegel, in thinking we are active, and the intellect and the Will are inextricably tied up together in this activity. The only distinction is that between the theoretical relation and the practical relation – they are not two distinct faculties, and both are present in every thought and every action.

Hegel says that so long as people live in a "state of nature," Will is necessarily untrue and finite because the subjective side is still different from the objective side. In this sense, the Will is still other-determined. Hegel explains this in terms of the great artist who, when completing their work, knows that it *had* to be just so. Any action, if it is rational, is found to be necessary, and not a matter of 'free choice'. Hegel agreed with Rousseau when he said that: "when I will the rational, I do not act as a particular individual but according to the conception of ethical life in general" (op. cit §15).

The human Will is undetermined and therefore universal – human beings can turn their Will to any task. But in order to be free, the Will must first make *itself* its own object. That is, rather than willing this or that, the subject must rationally determine what it is that they should be trying to do. Only by closing upon itself in this way, making a circle, can the Will become infinite (i.e., unlimited), rather than being determined by some object. This "closing upon itself" is achieved collaboratively through the construction of institutions which direct, constrain and educate the Will.

As was determined in the *Logic*, we learn about the external world by using aspects of it to realise our subjective aims. In doing so we also collectively shape

each others' activity. The result of this process is that human beings construct institutions which allow them to fulfil their aims but which at the same time tend to direct their activity towards the general good. The *Philosophy of Right* is an exposition of *how* this takes place.

> That a reality is the realisation of the Free Will, this is what is meant by a right. Right, therefore, is, in general, Freedom as idea.
>
> op. cit. §29

Social Theory as Ethics

17 years before Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), he published *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), and the subject matter was essentially the same. When other people's preferences have been objectified in practices and institutions, then those same institutions appear to you as part of the external world, as a "second nature."

In establishing the science of Political Economy, Smith and the other Political Economists studied human behaviour in the industrialising countries as a quasi-natural process which exhibited "laws of second nature" in the way people dealt with each other. It could be argued that this shift reflected the character of life in these societies as more and more experienced by their denizens as a "state of nature," in which the world was governed by economic laws, indifferent to an individual actor.

Bourgeois society, the social formation in which independent producers exchange their products on the basis of necessary labour-time, is based on an ethical principle equality which was also reflected in the voting system instituted in the guilds when artisans and merchants formed voluntary associations. As Brenkert (1983) wrote: "much of Marx's writings, for example the Economic *and Philosophic Manuscripts*, the *Communist Manifesto*, even *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, sound very much like moral tracts," even though Marx never uses the traditional language of ethics and morality, words like " 'good,' 'bad,' 'right,' 'wrong,' etc." Economic science, like Political Science and all the human sciences are sciences of the Will.

The nature of the Will is not a purely psychological question, but as Rousseau saw, can be determined by a study of human activity. But the objective status of activity which makes it a possible object of science does not detract from the fact that actions are the mode of being of human beings, and human beings are not "black boxes." When we get to Vygotsky we will see that the functioning of the mind can be a subject of science. As a result, human activity en masse is not "natural," but the product of both internal subjective processes as well as objective interpersonal processes.

Those sciences, such as Economic Science, Sociology and Political Science as they are generally practised today, treat human behaviour as natural processes which can be studied with the precision of natural science, and so can rightly be described as "inhuman."

Once we recognise human behaviour as the product and manifestation of the exercise of Will we can construct a genuinely human science without recourse to voluntarism.

Rights, Morality and Ethical Life

The Free Will must, in the first instance, give itself reality in external things, and this leads to the first category of *The Philosophy of Right*, Property.

If a person simply possesses something, they are left in the unenviable situation of having to defend that possession against all comers. He or she becomes the prisoner of their own possession. The advent of Property means that a person's possession is given recognition and becomes their Right. This is how the Will becomes something objective – not simply imputable to a person's behaviour, but existing in the human community beyond the horizons of a single person's activity.

For Hegel, Property is the simplest, immediate, undeveloped form of Right, thus "abstract" Right. Hegel finds that abstract Right is *implicitly* personal autonomy, that is, the right against slavery and coercion. So for Hegel, you can't be "forced to be free" (Rousseau, 1762). Note that Freedom arises not from possession, which is found in Nature, but through property, a *right*, which is located in the whole social formation. Freedom begins from Right, not from natural will.

Hegel uses this conception as the definition of "person." It follows that everyone must be a person respecting the rights of every other person. This is more or less what came to be called "human rights."

However, the rights of a person as defined here are what Isaiah Berlin (1958) called "negative rights." The well-known downside of a society in which persons enjoy only the negative rights of being protected from the negative effects of living in proximity with others, is that people receive none of the positive benefits. For this to be possible people must act beyond what is demanded by respect for the rights of others and take actions for mutual benefit. However, they must do so by reference to their own conscience. Thus, the second section of the *Philosophy of Right* is Morality.

Hegel calls the actors in this section "subjects." A subject differs from a person in that they take responsibility for their actions beyond the simple mandate to respect the rights of others.

The defect in Morality is that a person must take responsibility for the unforeseeable consequences of their actions. However, this is clearly beyond the cognitive scope of a subject, and it is for this reason that there must be a State.

Note that Hegel does *not* argue for the State on the basis that subjects must be *forced* to act in this or that way. It is self-evident that States do in fact do this, but it is not due to the finite goodness of people but rather because of their finite *intelligence*. A subject should know that their own welfare depends on living in a good state.

Over the generations, the state accumulates what we nowadays call "corporate memory," and on this basis make laws which regulate subjects' behaviour within bounds which ensure that they will not violate the rights of others inadvertently. The duty of the subject, as Hegel sees it, is then to pursue their own welfare within bounds set by the state. The subject will come to know that their own welfare is furthered by promotion of the common good. In this Hegel agrees with Rousseau, but it is not a question of forcing the subject to act for the common good, but rather of educating the Will to pursue the common good as its own end.

The *person* who bears Rights and the *subject* of Morality, becomes the *citizen* of a state. Whereas all human beings are persons, and subjects are only those persons who are capable of acting according to their own conscience (i.e., excluding children and insane people), the duties and responsibilities of the citizen depend, as Hegel saw it, according to their social position. A citizen's social position was not, as in ancient Rome, something you were born into, but

largely a position which people enter into voluntarily or are appointed to according to merit. So within the institutions of the state and civil society, not everyone is equal. This is the same today; an ordinary citizen does not have the same rights and duties as a CEO or MP.

Unlike Rousseau, Hegel did not advocate a direct relation between the individual citizen and the State, but as *mediated* by their membership of (a) a family, (b) a voluntary organisation, such as a professional association or estate, or (c) the State. In the next chapter, I will consider the implication for our study of the Will below in connection with Hegel's analysis of civil society and the State, including his rejection of universal suffrage.

See my book, *Hegel for Social Movements* for a more detailed commentary on the *Philosophy of Right*. In the meantime I shall review Hegel's unsurpassed theory of action – the manifestation of the Will in the activity of individual actors.

The Will 'for itself'

The key to Hegel's method in developing the outline of a science is what I will call the "germ cell" method. I have outlined this method in the first chapter of my recent book, *Marx's Capital. Hegelian sources* (2025) and elsewhere.

The method begins by finding in a phenomenon the simplest individual unit which at the same time represents the essence of the whole phenomenon. This unit is then taken as the logical germ cell from which the whole phenomenon can be logically unfolded. For example, I have already mentioned that property was the germ cell from which Hegel unfolded his *Philosophy of Right*, on the basis that private property was the simplest possible Right, and at the same time a precondition for other rights, from which the entirety of civil law could be unfolded. But not yet the State itself.

Marx used the same method, taking the commodity as the simplest relation of bourgeois society and a precondition for capital. However, while bourgeois society is the logical and historical pre-condition for capitalism, Marx did not claim that the commodity was the germ cell for *capitalism*. Bourgeois society existed, albeit marginally, for millennia before being subsumed under capital. The germ cell of capitalism was the person who purchased commodities in order to sell them at a profit. The whole of industrial capitalism grew from *this* germ cell once certain conditions were extant.

Likewise, civil society was a precondition for the development of a modern state, but cannot develop directly on the basis of private property and civil law. In the phase of abstract Right, Hegel says that the Will is merely implicit. In the phase of Morality, the Will is not merely in itself but *for itself*. The rights-bearing person becomes an active *subject*.

Rousseau had observed that while he did not understand the nature of the Will, the Will was manifested in an *action*. Hegel had already determined a great deal about the nature of action in his *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (albeit speculatively), but in Morality Hegel developed his "Theory of Action." Being responsible for their action, the person becomes a *subject*.[*]

What follows is Hegel's analysis of actions, the Will for itself.

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[*] "Subject" has a different meaning in the *Logic* and in the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*. The meaning referred to hear is specific to the *Philosophy of Right*.

Purpose, Intention and the Good

The Will is for social theory what causality is for natural science. In social theory we have to understand actions in terms of their motives and the concept a subject has of the context of their action. Before proceeding to elaborate how Hegel analyses an action, there are some difficulties of translation to which I should first draw attention.

The German word usually translated as 'action' is *Handlung*, in contrast to *Tat* (deed) from which we have *Tätigkeit* (activity). This contrasts with Marx's usage in which *Tätigkeit* means activity in the sense of purposive activity or practice, and *Tat* means a deed or purposive act. But for Hegel, *Tat* is the impact of the action on the world, irrespective of the consciousness with which it is done. I will translate *Handlung* as 'activity', referring to an aggregate of purposive actions in the context of which an actor's purposes make sense. I will use the 'an action' to mean a 'purposive act', and not the aggregate of such acts ('activity') or the 'deed' which I will reserve for Hegel's *Tat*. I will *never* use 'action' or 'activity' to refer to generalised goings-on.

The German word translated as 'purpose' is *Vorsatz*. Purpose is linked with *Zweck*: what is aimed at (*Zweck* originally meant the bull's eye in a target), for which I will use 'goal' or 'aim'. The *Mittel* (means) is the external thing or activity used by the subject to act upon the object (*Gegenstand*), transforming it into the realised purpose. (I shall *never* use the word 'object' in the sense of 'goal' or 'aim'). Intention (*Absicht*) differs from purpose (*Vorsatz*) in that purpose refers to the *immediate* intended outcome of my action, while intention refers to the more remote outcome of my action along with other foreseeable actions by myself and others, which provides the motivation for my action. I will not refer to the German words hereafter, but for those who read Hegel in German, the above notes on translation will be helpful.

Actions

My actions are what I do and what *I* am responsible for. An action is a *unit* of activity (social practice), a primitive concept. The relevant purpose, knowledge, intention, responsibility, goal, motivation, etc., arise from an analysis of and/or are manifested in the development of the action itself, which at the beginning may lack all of these characteristics.

'Actions' here refers only to *purposive human* actions, rather than preconscious behaviour characteristic of non-human forms of life or the autonomous functions of the human organism, such as hiccups, goose bumps or withdrawing the hand from fire. 'Actions' include, however, those actions which are first done with conscious awareness and control, but with mastery, and come to be carried out without conscious awareness, such as tying shoelaces or stepping over the kerb. Although not done with conscious awareness, these operations are consciously acquired and if something unexpected happens, they are called back into conscious control.

Purpose, Intention and Welfare

Purpose, Goal and Means

Every action, even an action carried out without conscious awareness, has a Purpose – what the subject set out to do (irrespective of the benefit the agent saw in doing it, and of the particular goal by which this purpose was fulfilled). There may be more than one way of realising a purpose, and the subject must

select a goal to suit their purpose. For example, with the intention of getting a view of the countryside, their purpose will be a vantage point, so the subject will have to *select* their goal from a number of nearby hilltops. (This still does not touch on why the subject wanted a view of the countryside).

The action must use some Means to act upon an Object. The Means may be *used up*, but the subject's Purpose is to *change* the Object. These are the immediate elements of an action. The Purpose is the universal concept of the action (e.g. 'break a window'), the particular content (e.g., that window there) and the *judgment* to do it.

The Means is the external object (a cobble stone), my activity to make it my means (ripping it up from the road) and my activity in using the properties of the Means against the object (throwing it at the window).

The Object (a shopfront) is transformed into the Realised Purpose (its window is broken), the changed object is meaningful (a protest perhaps) and my purpose is preserved in the realised purpose. The cobbled street which provided my Means has been partially 'worn out', but even if it persists, it was not my object. Note that each of the concepts making up Hegel's concept of an action is itself *concrete*, and the examination of each leads to further insight.

But "action *presupposes* an external object with a complex environment" (op. cit. §115) and so has consequences which are deemed to be *part of* the action as the purpose unfolds and is realised. So the action is not complete when the subject stops acting. If I throw a stone, the action is not complete until the stone hits the window and the last shard of glass has landed. My intention – my reason for doing it – is so far irrelevant.

The purpose goes through a development in the course of the action as my subjective Will interacts with the complex and infinitely interconnected external world. Initially the purpose is a *subjective purpose* – a universal concept of the goal embedded in the external world. The discrepancy the subject perceives between the subjective purpose and its object (*Gegenstand*) stimulates an action to resolve the discrepancy. The subjective purpose is transformed by the action into the *realised* purpose. The realised purpose inevitably differs from the goal, but the purpose is nonetheless preserved in the realised purpose because as a result of the action, the object bears the impression of my subjective purpose. Even if the window fails to break, the stone lying nearby remain evidence of my purpose. The realised purpose unites the subjective purpose with the objectivity of the external world, and becomes part of the changing conditions for further action. "The End achieved consequently is only an object, which again becomes a Means or material for other Ends, and so on for ever" (*Enc. Logic* §211).

The Means, the "middle term" between subjective purpose and realised purpose "is broken up into two elements external to each other, (a) the subject's action and (b) the object which serves as Means" (*Enc. Logic* §208). This object is an external object brought under the power of the subject as a means for the subject's purpose, and directed against other objects, and using its mechanical and chemical properties to shape the object to the subject's own purpose. The distinction between the activity of the subject in using the means, and the means itself is important and the two should not be conflated. The subject's action itself is subjective and manifests the subject's Will. The means is external and as such interacts with the whole, interconnected, external world – the complex objective environment beyond the subject's control. For example, if I am in the habit of burning off my garden waste, but do this same action on a hot, dry day, my action may prove to be dramatically different, even though my

subjective purpose is the same as usual. This external world is a material culture which is objective, independent of the subject's Will, the product of the activity of past generations. Likewise, the norms which I acquire and which shape my intentions. It is from this material culture, in which all human action is embedded, that the 'implicit teleology' which Hegel calls 'Spirit' arises, apparently acting 'behind the backs' of the actors themselves.

The 'action' and 'purpose' of an individual person, entails an external object which is not something general like the weather or knowledge of English or a situation – it is a *material object*, even if that material object is a part of the subject's own or someone else's body. The was made clear in the Syllogism of Action. The subject's Will cannot be made objective without the use of a material object as means. If I want to go to Sydney, I can use a car, a plane or my feet, but I cannot fulfil my purpose without using *some* external object.

The same logic applies when the subject of action is not an individual person but a corporate actor, institution or social movement of some kind. Here, 'external' means 'Object' in the sense of the Logic, activities whose active centre is not the subject itself but another. In this wider sense, the "mechanical and chemical properties," include *social* properties, such as the social significance of the objects in the relevant cultural environment. A party or social movement cannot achieve an external aim solely by means of its own internal resources. To achieve anything it has to use the people and institutions beyond its own ranks as a Means.

By acting in the external world, the subject subordinates itself to processes immanent in the wider world, including both the object and the means, and "I must be aware of the universal character of any isolated deed" (op. cit., §118 Addition). So the NGO worker who intervenes in a community with the purpose of helping stigmatised individuals cannot ignore the likely reaction of other members of the community which could lead to everyone being worse off. Such as a worker who has enjoyed fair wages at a foreign social enterprise and may never be given work again in their own town.

Further, by taking a particular action and thereby changing the object, alternative actions that may have been available may be subsequently *excluded*. So giving food to the starving also has the effect of undermining the viability of local farms. The subject is responsible for all these foreseeable consequences.

Responsibility

Most of the discussion about Hegel's theory of action is concerned with the interconnection of the subject's purpose with the whole external environment to determine the agent's Responsibility for the changes that take place as a consequence of the deed – where does *my* action and *my* responsibility begin and end?

Commentators on Hegel's theory of action usually follow Hegel in using the lighting of a fire to illustrate his idea, and I will use this example as well as it very graphically exhibits the main features of Hegel's idea. Interventions into social problems sometimes trigger 'runaway' responses not unlike a bushfire. Morality is concerned with assigning *responsibility* for a change in the world. But it can equally well be read as a practical *social theory* for anyone who takes on responsibility to make the world a better place.

So, consider the position of someone, say Guy, who sets fire to the dry grass in his back yard. The first thing is that Guy is responsible for that immediate deed, irrespective of his intention. If it was a day of total fire ban, it is no good Guy

telling the police "But Mrs. Fawkes told me to do it" or "I'd forgotten it was a fire ban day" – he is responsible.

Further, the action does not end with Guy throwing the burning match into the grass, the immediate deed. If the fire spreads to the neighbouring property and burns down the neighbour's house, that is part of Guy's action for which he is responsible, too.

Guy's purpose in lighting the fire – whether just to burn off his own land or to create a firebreak – are immaterial. But:

> The Will's right, however, is to recognise as its action, and to accept responsibility for, only those presuppositions of the deed of which it was conscious in its aim and those aspects of the deed which were contained in its purpose … – this is the right to know.
>
> op. cit., §117

When Guy sets fire to the grass he has the responsibility to know that the fire *could* get out of control and *could* spread to his neighbour's property. But what if Mrs. Fawkes had secretly hidden her savings in a box in the back yard and the money was destroyed by the fire? Since Guy had no reason to believe that something of value could be hidden there, he is not responsible for the destruction of what his wife hid in the grass – it was not part of his purpose. Hegel contrasts this with the early Greek and Roman law where the actor's knowledge was not to be taken into account in assigning responsibility – Oedipus was condemned for killing his father, even though he could not have known at the time that King Laius was his father.

Formally, the agent is not responsible for unintended consequences of their action which were not implicit in his purpose:

> the moral Will has the right to refuse to recognise in the resulting state of affairs what was not present inwardly as purpose.
>
> op. cit, §115 Addition

The agent's purpose is realised in the action and the consequences of the action belong to the action, so the subject is responsible for all the consequences of their immediate action. What frees Guy from responsibility for the destruction of the money his wife hid in the grass is that *the actions of another subject* with another purpose intervened and their actions combined with Guy's action so as to bring about the unfortunate consequence.

> The action, as the aim posited in the external world, has become the prey of external forces which attach to it something totally different from what it is explicitly and drive it on into alien and distant consequences. Thus [in this case] the Will has the right to repudiate the imputation of all consequences except the first, since it alone was purposed.
>
> op. cit. §118

So the subject is free of blame for "something interposed from without and introduced by chance, … quite unrelated to the nature of the action itself" (op. cit. §118 n.), and conversely cannot take credit for it.

But what of "moral luck," that is, when a wrong action may or may not lead to serious consequences? Hegel takes a 'hard line' on this:

> It happens of course that circumstances may make an action miscarry to a greater or lesser degree. In a case of arson, for instance, the fire may not catch or alternatively it may take hold further than the incendiary intended. In spite of this, however, we

> must not make this a distinction between good and bad luck, since in acting a man must lay his account with externality. The old Proverb is correct: 'A flung stone is the devil's.' To act is to expose oneself to bad luck. Thus bad luck has a right over me and is an embodiment of my own willing.
>
> op. cit. §119 Addition

Hegel's idea here is that the State has made laws which are designed to avoid harm caused by unintended as well as intended consequences, and the subject who steps outside of the law, if they are a rational agent, must take responsibility for consequences which they, lacking the historical wisdom of the State, did not foresee. On the other hand, if a subject acts in a way which is consistent with law and custom, then they cannot be blamed for *unintended* consequences of their action. If serious unintended consequences transpire, this may be an occasion to make a new law.

What if Guy didn't light the fire, but a youngster he hired to tidy up the garden did? In this case, Guy is responsible even though the lighting of the fire cannot be imputed to him – his action was in failure to supervise the youngster's work.

Since an action unites both purpose and deed, the action extends temporally and spatially beyond the immediate deed, as consequences unfold. It also extends back in time, such as when I plan my day at work while commuting in the morning. The quality of my planning is manifested in the deed which it has prepared. Indeed, all the imaginary voices, dreams of glory and other fantasies I have exist only in the actions which express them in the external world. People are unreliable reporters of their own thoughts, which are to be judged only by the series of their actions. As Hegel puts it in the Remark to the very first paragraph of *The Philosophy of Right*:

> Philosophy has to do with ideas or *realised thoughts*, and hence not with what we have been accustomed to call mere conceptions.
>
> op. cit. §1

If the subject's purpose is exhausted in the immediate goal then the action is not a rational action at all, it is just a deed. All forms of life manifest purposes of this kind, in which the Intention is identical to the Purpose and the subject's desire is satisfied immediately in consumption of the object, and not mediated through a conscious intention.

A rational action implies a purpose which differs from the intention.

Intention

As a rational being, the subject is aware of the complexity, interconnectedness and contingency of the world they act in before they act. Among the consequences which flow from the completion of my purpose is my Intention:

> The consequences … represent the universal implicit within that state of affairs. Of course I cannot foresee the consequences – they might be preventable – but I must be aware of the universal character of any isolated deed. The important point here is not the isolated thing but the whole, and that depends not on the differentia of the particular action, but on its universal nature. Now the transition from purpose to intention lies in the fact that I ought to be aware not simply of my single action but also of the universal which is conjoined with it. The universal which comes on the scene

here in this way is what I have willed, my intention.
op. cit. §118 Addition

A rational action (and it is only such actions which are the substance of Hegel's social philosophy) is done *for a reason*, a reason different to the purpose, which may be worthless in itself. The intention may be realised only by a *series* of such actions, each of which is a means to some more remote end, and each of the series of actions may be done by a different subject. That is, when a subject takes a rational action, they may rely on the actions of others to complete their intention which is universal in nature. All actions are irreducibly social in nature.

The opening up of a difference between purpose and intention marks the beginning of action proper: doing something for a reason. When Hegel talks of a "series of actions," actions united by a common intention, it is the contradiction between purpose and intention which marks off each unit in this series, continued in the consequences of and reactions to the deed.

But where the intention is identical to the purpose, that is, the action is a simple reflex, the subject is probably not a rational actor (a child perhaps) who cannot be blamed for their action.

As a rational human being, I am a free being capable of forming intentions which are contrary to my immediate desire and inclination or the Will of others. The worth (*Wert*) of the action, the reason I think it good to do it is my Intention.

If my intentions are rational, this worth must be a universal. For example, my intention in handing out food may be to alleviate a famine, to raise my country's humanitarian credentials, or increase business at my restaurant; in each case, the purpose is a step towards the Intention which is the ultimate motivation, but is not fulfilled by the deed alone. We judge an action by the universal the Intention falls under. Analysis of rational action means taking into account the Intention with which the action was taken, related to the benefit (Welfare, *das Wohl*) sought and the concept the subject had of their action – their intention in doing it, not just the immediate purpose of the action.

A person always has responsibility (*Schuld*) for their deed, without qualification, and for the immediate purpose they pursue. If the deed was in contradiction to the purpose (the brakes failed), then I may disown that action, but good intentions cannot justify a wrong act. Hegel takes a very "hard line" on this question. Even a slave or servant who is obliged to carry out a wrong action under duress is still responsible for their action, and in fact, according to Hegel, a slave is responsible for being a slave even if rebellion is punished by death. A person's will cannot be forced, even if the consequence of a person's refusal of an action is their own death.

Yet if a man is a slave, his own Will is responsible for his slavery,
just as it is its Will, which is responsible if a people is subjugated.
Hence the wrong of slavery lies at the door, not simply of enslavers
or conquerors, but of the slaves and the conquered themselves.
op. cit, §58 Addition

Nowadays we are more forgiving, and "blaming the victim" is condemned.

On the other hand, Hegel supports the "right of distress," under which a person in imminent danger may steal or trespass or whatever blamelessly, and a debtor should never forfeit the tools of their trade which would render them unable to earn a living. Here, modern law is less forgiving.

The truth of intentions

The purpose undergoes a transformation through the action which transforms subjective purpose into the realised purpose; what was implicit becomes explicit. The intention is the reason for the actor's action, so while the purpose is exhausted in the realised purpose, the universal content of the action (its meaning for everyone else – a crime? a heroic rescue?), the intention, remains.

> The universal quality of the action is the manifold content of the action as such, reduced to the simple form of universality. But the subject, an entity reflected into himself and so particular in correlation with the particularity of his object (*Zweck*), has in his end his own particular content, and this content is the soul of the action and determines its character.
>
> op. cit. §121

Thus, a series of actions is bound together by a shared content, the intention, what happens in consequence of the original deed, and each individual deed expresses a particular purpose subsumed under a universal concept of the intention. the intention is not merely implicit, but is known to the actor and is what provides the motivation for the action, even if others see it differently.

Two things follow from this. Firstly, the subsequent actions are generally done by other actors, each continuing or contributing to the intention with their own particular purpose, each a means to each others' ends. Secondly, the intention is not limited to the immediate context of the goal, but is realised in the development of the concrete whole. The logic of this process is the subject-object process described in Hegel's *Logic* – the subject (an intention) interacts with other projects and is manifested concretely in the development of the whole community. Things do not generally work out just as anyone originally intended, but the outcome is not that of the subject alone, since other actors will contribute to the unfolding of the intention. Nonetheless, as the intention unfolds and concretizes itself the subject sees the *truth* of their intention. Throughout, the subject is guided by pursuit of their own welfare as they see it, which is *implicitly* the Good of the whole community.

What is most important is that the action is not completed with the original deed. The actions of others acting to fulfil the intention of the subject's action is *part of the action*. If I post a letter, all the actions of postal employees which act to complete my intention with the delivery of the letter are part of my action.

Welfare

The content of the intention is the Welfare of the subject. Welfare is a unity of Happiness and Right. This contrasts with Worth. When Hegel says that: "A person is the series of their actions" (op. cit. §124), he means that the personal motives someone may have had in participating in some project – the pleasure gained from collective action, the honour and praise awarded for their achievement or even less laudable pleasures such as the exhilaration of command – are irrelevant estimating the *worth* of a person's work. A subject's intention may be to further the welfare of all, but equally well it may personal glory.

Whether my intention is my own welfare, the welfare of others like myself, or the welfare of all cannot justify an action which is Wrong, that is, an action which violates abstract Right. So for example, to sacrifice the rights of another person for what the subject takes to be the greater good, is Wrong.

An action is not to be judged wrong and therefore inadmissible just according to whether it furthers the general Good. The idea of the "general Good" does not, for Hegel, belong to the sphere of Morality, but rather to Ethical Life and the State. The general Good is worked out by citizens in their professional associations and legislative bodies, and belongs to a different sphere. The moral subject is not responsible for determining what serves the "general Good" according to their remit. The moral subject *is* responsible for interpreting and understanding the *law*, but is not deemed to be in a position to make judgments about the "general good."

The Good and Conscience

> The Good is the Idea as the unity of the concept of the Will with the particular Will. In this unity, abstract right, welfare, the subjectivity of knowing and the contingency of external fact have their independent self-subsistence superseded. …
>
> op. cit. §129

Subjects come to know enough about their own situation that in seeking their own welfare and respecting the rights of other persons, they contribute to the realisation of Freedom, as Hegel sees it. It turns out that the welfare and right of the particular is essentially universal welfare. The Good can only be realised by means of the subjective Will, so the subjective Will has to be "caught up in" the Idea of the Good, which can only be the outcome of a long drawn out process of development of rational laws and the education of the people.

A subject's *own* apprehension of the Good and their acceptance of this as obligatory for themselves is Conscience.

The subject cannot be counted on look to religion or the law to be told what is Good, but rather their own insight is what is decisive. However, their "insight is capable equally of being true and of being mere opinion and error" (op. cit. §143n.) and potentially Evil. "The road to hell is paved in good intentions," it is said. Acting solely according to one's conscience can just as well end in Evil. The subject's well-meaning potential to do evil can only be overcome by citizens acting in the family, civil society and the State.

According to Hegel, subjects cannot achieve either their own Welfare or the general Good alone through the exercise of their Conscience. Free Will can only be realised through the activity of citizens in the various associations of civil society and the State. Outside of this the Will is more likely to achieve Evil.

Conclusion

The problem Hegel addressed is: how can the Will become free? People are born with a natural will, but if they live side-by-side with each other under the "law of the jungle," people will be enslaved to the struggle to survive. To become free presupposes that everyone recognises each other's right to personal autonomy and all act together to further the good of all.

As Hegel sees it, the Will is not Free where an action violates the rights of others. Such an act is not as it ought to be. Any seeming immediate benefit will be obliterated by the wrongful nature of the act. The Will cannot be coerced or determined by cause-and-effect. The Will is free only when, as a result of reflection, the subject acts as it should. But what *should* a person do? Kant's moral philosophy could not answer this question concretely, only that a person must obey a law they drafted or could have drafted themself.

The principle problem of the Will has turned out not to be how thought moves matter, but rather how the Will resolves the conflict between opposing impulses.

But left to its own devices Conscience cannot determine what is Good. For that people must have on-going forms of association through which they can construct a collective Will through deliberation and making their own laws.

But how is that really possible in a large state?

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