

## Part II. Hegel's Interdisciplinary Concept of the Will

### 2. The Subjective Spirit

It follows from the Syllogism of Action that a subject can form concepts of the world outside of human practice because it uses aspects of that external world to act on the external world. That *concept* of the external world which a subject forms by its activity is Nature.

It is beyond the scope of this enquiry to follow Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. Nature is Spirit in itself. That is to say, in Nature, the Will is "in itself." We came across this turn of phrase in Hegel's critique; in effect it means that there is no Will in Nature as such, but Nature has the potential for the Will to arise and this potential begins to show itself as soon as there is a nervous system. More specifically, as Hegel sees it, the Will only begins to be realised in animal organisms. In plants and minerals, the Will is still "in itself."

I have no interest in examining the Will in connection with non-human animals, who, in Hegel's terms, have a "natural will." I shall investigate, however, how Hegel understands the genesis of the Will in natural organisms culminating in the human being. For this we must turn to Hegel's *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*.

The *Subjective Spirit* can be read as a logical reconstruction of the individual human organism. But the work can also be read metaphorically as descriptive of forms of social organisation, but I am not going to go there. Hegel reconstructs the basis of the Will in the human organism through three phases: the Psyche, Consciousness and the Intellect.

#### The Psyche

First there is what Hegel calls the Soul (*die Seele*), but "the Psyche" is closer to modern usage. The Psyche is a moment of the mental life of a viable and self-contained organism. It encompasses the entire organism, registering the neurophysiological totality of the organism as its own given being.

Its determinations are *feelings*, but the Psyche does not register these feelings as intuitions of an object nor therefore does it take itself as a subject. Its mental life lacks both subject and object – it just *feels* afraid, content, anxious, angry, sleepy or whatever. The Psyche encompasses both the outward behaviour and the inward feelings of the organism, mediating between the two, and is an integral function of the whole organism.

The Psyche develops by means of *habits* and *habituation* so that the organism comes to distance itself from the immediacy of its own body. The distinction between itself and objects which belong to an external world thus begins to stand out in relief against this background when its feelings are disturbed. The most primitive organisms are not capable of habit-forming and habituation, but those which can form habits open the way to Consciousness.

#### Consciousness

Mind which is habituated to its own feelings and orients itself to stimuli evidently coming from outside is called Consciousness (*das Bewußtsein*). What distinguishes Consciousness is that it takes an object with which it interacts and is the source of stimuli to be something with an independent unity of its own – something *else*.

The out-of-the-ordinary feelings, feelings to which it is *not* habituated, are imputed to an objective world, and are called *sensations*.

While Consciousness directs the body in its activity in relation to given objects, the Psyche all the while continues its work of regulating the functioning of the body, now responding in addition to the stimuli of its own Consciousness. Indeed, Consciousness can only sense objects thanks to the feelings of the Psyche.

But Consciousness is not at first *self*-consciousness. In the earliest stages of Consciousness, even though Consciousness takes the object to have an independent unity, it is not *self*-aware. It comes to know its own subjectivity only mediately through interactions with other, objectively existing self-consciousnesses. Once it comes to see its own subjectivity reflected as something objective and objectivity as something which can be subjective, then it has reached the threshold of Spirit as such – Reason.

### The Intellect

This third grade of Mind, based on Reason, Hegel calls Psychology, but I will call it the Intellect, because for us ‘Psychology’ has taken on a much more broader meaning. The crucial stage in the development of the Intellect is *language*. However, there is also pre-linguistic Intelligence, which knows its object to be a meaningful thought determination, but has not yet acquired *universal* self-consciousness which is made possible by the acquisition of language. Intelligence is universal self-consciousness, an entire world of pure meanings.

Whereas the Psyche knows nothing of subject and object, and Consciousness takes its object to be objective, and the Intellect understands its objects to be both subjective and objective, to be both a thought determination and an object which exists in the world independently of its own activity. With Intelligence we have not only self-conscious activity, but *thinking* activity. Intelligence becomes *actual* when its Will becomes objective, and the subject recognises *itself* in objects and processes in the external world.

Each individual mind is a concrete whole, but differentiated according to the categorically different relations to the world characterising Psyche, Consciousness and Intelligence, in turn through feelings, sensations and concepts.

At the end of the *Subjective Spirit* we arrive in a sense just where we arrived at the end of the *Logic*. However, we are now dealing not just with the logical necessity governing the life of any subject, but the activity of the specifically human organism for whom objects in the external world are recognised not just as material objects in themselves, but as objects having a subjective sense, having meaning, that is, *signs*. Sign-meanings are the basic units of the intellect, the capacity to *think*.

This is the specific character of the human being which is a feature of its biological make-up: that objects in the world can be taken as meaningful. The human being is already a being capable of producing and using objects and processes in the material world, but the human being is also capable of producing and using objects and processes in the world as signs. This is called thinking. This opens up new ground for the Will.

Hegel’s philosophy is presaged on the idea that all beings *strive* to preserve themselves in the face of barriers and threats. This is, after all, the same

observation that Spinoza had made on a strictly materialist basis, without any reference to anthropomorphism, God, spiritualism or voluntarism. And Herder had confirmed this. Vegetable and mineral beings may exhibit only the appearance of Will; animal beings exhibit a natural will, but remain prisoners of their own natural drives. Striving is natural and exhibits the natural will.

Hegel's argument is that an organism which can make and use elements of the external world as *signs* has the capacity to free itself from the natural conditions of its life. But on its own, even the organism blessed with an intellect remains a part of Nature and a prisoner of the material situation in which it finds itself.

It should be noted that there is nothing in Hegel's Psychology which suggests a *faculty* of the Will. Hegel agreed with Rousseau, that Will is inseparable from thinking. The ability to think gives to the natural striving of all beings the potential for self-determination, for Freedom. It gives the subject the ability to not only act upon the material world according to its own desires, but to also to think about its own desires.

A free intelligence, capable of determining where its happiness lies must necessarily determine its activity in accordingly and thus strives to make its determination actual. This is the Will.

Nonetheless, on its own, a thinking being is no more capable of self-determination than any other natural being. The issue is *how the Will becomes free*? It is the impulse of the Will to make itself actual. Freedom is of course never absolute, but it can become more and more free.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is where he considers just how the Will *becomes free*, and it is here that we find Hegel's crucial contribution to the conception of the Free Will.

### References

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