The Structure of Desire and Recognition:  
Self-Consciousness and Self-Constition  
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I.  The Historicity of Essentially Self-Conscious Creatures  
1. Definition: A creature is “essentially self-conscious” iff what it is for itself is an essential element of what it is in itself.  
2. Essentially self-conscious creatures are capable of a distinctive kind of self-transformation: making themselves be different by taking themselves to be different.  
3. Essentially self-conscious beings don’t have natures, they have histories.  

II.  Identification, Risk, and Sacrifice  
4. For some features of one’s self-conception to be essential is for one to take or treat them as essential. Doing that is identifying with those aspects of what one is for oneself.  
5. One identifies with those elements of what one is for oneself for which one is willing to risk and sacrifice elements of what one is in oneself.  
6. “It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as vanishing moments, that it is only pure being-for-self.” [PG §187]  
7. Hegelian Erfahrung, the process of experience, ought to be understood as having this same general shape of identification and sacrifice. Each acknowledged error or failure calls for an act of self-identification: the endorsement of some of the mutually incompatible commitments one has found oneself with, and the sacrifice of others.  

III.  Creatures Things Can Be Something For:  Desire and the Tripartite Structure of orectic Awareness  
8. orectic awareness has a tripartite structure, epitomized by the relations between hunger, eating, and food.  
9. The three elements are:  
   a) an attitude or desire, e.g. hunger,  
   b) a responsive activity, e.g. eating, and  
   c) a significance, e.g. food.  
The three principal relations are:  
   d) The attitude must motivate the activity, in the sense of activating a (more or less reliable, in a sense determined by the assessments in (f) below) disposition to respond differentially to objects.  
   e) Responding to an object by engaging in the activity is taking or treating it in practice as having a significance defined by the attitude that motivates the activity. This is the subjective significance of the object.  
   f) The desiring attitude assesses the object, implicitly attributing to it an objective significance, accordingly as responding to it by engaging in the activity the attitude motivates does or does not
satisfy the desire. If it does not, if what the object was subjectively or for the animal does not coincide with what it was objectively, or in itself, that is, if the activity was not successful in satisfying the motivating desire, then an error has been committed. In that case the desire motivates changing the reliable differential responsive disposition to engage in the associated activity when activated by the desire and stimulated by a range of objects.

**IV. From Desire to Recognition: Two Interpretive Challenges**

10. We should apply the answer we have in hand to the question “What is it for things to be something for a creature?” to the more specific case: “What is it for selves to be something things can be for a creature?” That is:

- What would be required for the orectic significance something had for a desiring animal to be not food or predator, but self or subject, in the sense of something things can be something for?
- Once we understand what it is to take or treat things as selves or subjects, what must one do to take oneself to be a thing of that kind, to take oneself to be a self?

11. Two challenges:

- The philosophical challenge is to see what sort of an account of self-consciousness one can produce by applying the tripartite account of orectic awareness to itself.
- The interpretive challenge is see to what extent one can by doing that explain the index features characteristic of Hegel’s distinctive claims about the nature of self-consciousness.

12. Two features of Hegel’s master-concept of recognition [Anerkennung]:

- Both self-conscious individual selves and the communities they inhabit (a kind of universal characterizing them) are synthesized by reciprocal recognition among particular participants in the practices of such a recognitive community. Self-consciousness is essentially, and not just accidentally, a social achievement.
- Recognition is a normative attitude. To recognize someone is to take her to be the subject of normative statuses, that is, of commitments and entitlements, as capable of undertaking responsibilities and exercising authority. This is what it means to say that as reciprocally recognized and recognizing, the creatures in question are geistig, spiritual, beings, and no longer merely natural ones.

13. Passages:

- “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged….The detailed exposition of the Notion of this spiritual unity in its duplication will present us with the process of Recognition.” [PG §178].
- “A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it. The 'I' which is the object of its Notion is in fact not 'object'; the object of Desire, however, is only independent, for it is the universal indestructible substance, the fluid self-identical essence. A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much 'I' as 'object'. With this, we already have before us the Notion of Spirit. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I’.” [PG §177].
- “But according to the Notion of recognition this [that a self-consciousness’ certainty of itself have truth] is possible only when each is for the other what the other is for it, only when each in its own self through its own action, and again through the action of the other, achieves this pure abstraction of being-for-self.” [PG §186].
14. Two issues that arise in understanding the discussion of recognition and self-consciousness:

- How are we to understand the transition from the discussion of the concept of desire to the discussion of the concept of recognition?
- Why should it be the case that reciprocal (that is, symmetric) recognition is a necessary condition of reflexive recognition (that is, self-consciousness, awareness of oneself as a self).

15. Fact:

- If a relation is both symmetric and transitive, then it is also reflexive, and hence is an equivalence relation.
- That is, if $\forall x, y [xRy \rightarrow yRx]$ and $\forall x, y, z [xRy \& yRz \rightarrow xRz]$, then $\forall x [xRx]$.
- For we can just apply the transitivity condition to the symmetry pairs $xRy$ and $yRx$ to yield $xRx$.
- So if recognition were (for some reason) de jure transitive—if it were part of the nature of recognition that one is committed to recognizing anyone recognized by someone one recognizes—then achieving de facto symmetry of recognition would suffice for achieving de facto reflexivity of recognition.

16. In what follows, we’ll see how the tripartite account of orectic awareness can be used in a natural way to build a notion of recognition that satisfies these twin philosophical constraints on the interpretation of Hegel’s notion of self-consciousness in terms of recognition. Doing so will both clarify the nature of the transition from desire to recognition and explain why reciprocal recognition is the key to self-consciousness.

V. Simple Recognition: Being something things can be something for being something things can be for one

17. To understand recognition, the tripartite structure of orectic awareness must be applied twice:

- It is the structure of the whole thing: “Self-consciousness is desire.” [§174]; recognition is a form of orectic awareness.
- The significance attributed to an object, what it is for the organism exhibiting the orectic awareness in question, is to be orectically aware: to be something things can be something for. That is, the significance attributed by engaging in a responsive activity and assessed by the motivating attitude must itself exhibit the tripartite structure of orectic awareness.

18. The tripartite structure of orectic awareness (TSEA) tells us that the two big questions that must be answered are these:

- What activity is it that institutes this significance (namely, having the TSEA)? That is, what is it that one must do, how must one respond to something, to count thereby as taking or treating it as exhibiting the TSEA? What is to the TSEA as eating is to food?
- What desire or other attitude is it that motivates that activity and assesses the success of taking something as having the orectic significance of being a TSEA, i.e. being something things can be something for? What is to the TSEA as hunger is to food?

19. Two suggestions:

- We may call what I must do, the activity that I must engage in, in order thereby to be taking or treating something in practice as something things can be something for, “recognizing” that other creature. Recognizing others is attributing to them the practical significance of exhibiting the tripartite structure of orectic awareness: taking them to be takers, subjects for whom things can have a practical significance relative to a desire and mediated by an activity.
- The desire or attitude that is the third element completing the TSEA whose attitude is recognizing and whose significance is exhibiting the TSEA is a desire for recognition: the desire that others
take or treat one in practice as a taker, as something things can be something for, as one whose attitudes (orectic or normative) institute of significances.

20. If engaging in the instrumental activity of responding to others by recognizing them yields the result that the desire to be recognized is satisfied:

- Then according to the TSEA the subjective significance the recognized ones have for the recognition-desirer shows up as being correct, as what they objectively are in themselves: subjects of significance-instituting attitudes and activities.
- And what is required for that is just that one be recognized (for that is what it takes to satisfy the desire) by those one recognizes (for that, on the line of thought being considered, is what one must do in order, if all goes well, to satisfy the desire).
- So it follows from the claim that the desire that completes the higher-order TSEA whose activity is recognition and whose instituted significance is exhibiting the TSEA is a desire for recognition that the recognition-desire can be satisfied only by achieving reciprocal recognition.

21. In order to give a reading of these claims in terms of the tripartite structure of orectic awareness, the black-box notion of recognition must be filled in so as to answer the following three questions:

- Recognizing: What, exactly, is it that one must do in order to be recognizing someone? That is, what is the activity we have labeled ‘recognizing’? How is it that doing that is taking or treating someone as exhibiting the tripartite structure of orectic awareness? What is the differential responsive disposition that is to be licensed by the instituting attitude?
- Being recognized: Why should the desire to be taken or treated that way oneself, that is, to be recognized, be the one making appropriate that activity, namely, recognizing?
- Self-Consciousness: Why does the reciprocal recognition that results when that desire for recognition is satisfied by recognizing someone else amount to self-consciousness, in the sense of applying a (proto-)conception of selves to oneself?

The challenge is to give an answer to the first question that will entail plausible answers to the other two questions.

22. General vs. specific recognition:

a) Specifically recognizing another is attributing the capacity to accord things a specific significance, e.g. as a K. Generally recognizing another is specifically recognizing that one for some value of K or other.

b) Specifically recognizing another is acknowledging their K-responses as having a certain kind of authority:

c) My taking your K-response to have been authorized by a K-desire that serves as a standard for the success of your K-taking, and taking that K-response to have been correct or successful by that standard is my acknowledging the authority of your K-taking in the practical sense of being disposed myself to take the thing you took to be a K as a K. Taking it that the kind of fruit you ate really was food, in that it satisfied your hunger is being disposed to eat that kind of fruit myself when and if I am hungry, i.e. have a desire of the same kind. My acknowledging your K-desire as authoritative consists in my treating it as authorizing for my own K-takings, should I have a K-desire. So specific recognition involves acknowledging another as having some authority concerning how things are (what things are Ks).

d) Doing that is treating you as one of us, in a primitive normative sense of ‘us’ instituted by just such specific recognitive attitudes.
VI: Robust Recognition: Specific Recognition of Another as a Recognizer

23. In treating the attitudes of the recognized other as having authority for those who do not feel them, the simple recognizer implicitly accords them a significance beyond that of mere desires: as normatively and not merely immediately significant attitudes.

24. What is it to take another not just to be orectically aware, but to be aware of others as orectically aware? What is it to recognize another as a simple recognizer, hence as itself the kind of thing for which things can have a specifically normative significance? Call that practical attitude robust recognition. Robust recognition is a kind of simple recognition: simple recognition of someone things can have a specific kind of orectic significance for, namely the significance of being something things can have orectic significances for.

25. What the robust recognizer must do to be taking someone as a simple recognizer is to acknowledge as authoritative whatever ground-level takings the one robustly recognized acknowledges as authoritative. And that is to say that the robust recognizer treats as transitive the inheritance of authority of ground-level takings that is what simple recognizing consists in.

26. Since robust recognition is the transitive closure of simple recognition, there is no difference between simple recognition of someone as a robust recognizer, and robust recognition (simple recognition of someone as a simple recognizer) of someone as a robust recognizer.

27. Transitivity: Recognizing as a recognizer is treating that one’s recognitions as authoritative for one’s own, so recognizing whoever he recognizes. So robust recognition is transitive: for what one is doing to be robust recognizing, it must include commitment to robustly recognize (simply recognize as a simple recognizer) whoever is robustly recognized by those one robustly recognizes.

28. We have now reached our explanatory-interpretive goal. For we wanted to know:
   1. how recognition should be understood to arise out of desire,
   2. how normativity should be understood as an aspect of recognition,
   3. how self-recognition, that is reflexive recognition relations, should be understood to require reciprocal recognition, that is to say symmetric recognition relations, and
   4. how self-consciousness should be understood to consist in the self-recognition achieved by reciprocal recognition.
   • The answer to the first question was supplied by seeing how the tripartite structure of orectic awareness could be applied to itself, so that what something was taken or treated in practice as was a desiring, significance-instituting creature.
   • The answer to the second was supplied by seeing how simple recognizing consists in the recognizer’s achieving a mediated, distanced, relation to the immediate felt impulse of the recognized one’s desire, in the form of its significance, conditional upon the recognizer’s own desires, for the recognizer’s own practical awareness. In this way the other’s desire is practically acknowledged as authoritative, and the other’s desire shows up for the recognizer in the shape of the recognizer’s commitment or responsibility.
   • The answer to the third question was supplied by showing how (because of the idempotence of transitive closure operations) the social authority structure constitutive of robust recognition is essentially and in principle, hence unavoidably, transitive. For it is a basic algebraic fact that wherever a transitive relation happens to hold symmetrically, it is also reflexive.
   • It remains only to put these answers together to supply a response to the fourth and final question.
VII: Self-Consciousness

29. The connection between robust recognition and self-consciousness is as immediate as that between the tripartite structure of orectic awareness and consciousness.

30. To be a self, a subject, a consciousness—for Hegel as for Kant—is to be the subject of normative statuses: not just of desires, but of commitments. It is to be able to take a normative stand on things, to commit oneself, undertake responsibilities, exercise authority, assess correctness.

31. Recognition of any kind is taking or treating something as such a self or subject of normative statuses and attitudes.

32. Self-consciousness then consists in applying this practical proto-conception of a self to oneself: recognizing not just others, but oneself. This is self-consciousness, or having a self-conception, in a double sense. First, it is a matter of consciousness of something as a self: treating it as having that practical significance. Second, it is an application of that conception to oneself.

33. The lowest grade of self-conception that exhibits these two dimensions would be simple recognition of oneself: being orectically aware of oneself as orectically aware of things. We might call this 'simple self-consciousness'. But the two dimensions are much more tightly bound up with one another if one is aware of oneself as able simply to recognize recognizers. In that case, the conception of selves that one applies to oneself is as something that has a conception of selves. We might call this 'robust self-consciousness'.

34. Argument:
   a) Suppose a robustly recognizes b:
   b) Robust recognition is a kind of simple recognition: simple recognition as able to take others to be simple recognizers.
   c) If b robustly recognizes someone, then that recognition is successful just in case it satisfies b’s desire for robust recognition.
   d) If b’s robust recognition of someone is successful in this sense, then in virtue of robustly recognizing b, a must acknowledge b’s robust recognitions as authoritative.
   e) But since by hypothesis a does robustly recognize b, b’s desire for robust recognition is satisfied, so all b’s robust recognitions are successful (in a’s eyes).
   f) Thus if it should happen that b does robustly recognize a, then since a robustly recognizes b, we have a symmetry of robust recognition.
   g) Since, as we have seen, robust recognition is transitive, this means that a will acknowledge the authority of b’s robust recognition of a.
   h) So a counts as robustly recognizing himself.
   i) Thus reciprocal robust recognition is what robust self-consciousness consists in.

35. Because it persists as part of the necessary background against which any other commitments are adopted and relinquished, being for oneself a recognizer is an essential element of one’s self-conception. One’s identification with it consists practically in the structural impossibility of relinquishing that commitment in favor of others. To be self-conscious is to be essentially self-conscious: to be for oneself, and identify oneself with oneself as something that is for oneself, a recognized and recognizing being.