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Hegelian Practical Freedom and Nature

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue that, despite his remarks to the effect that freedom consists in the 'movement' away from nature, Hegel conceives of the will as a natural power or capacity of sorts. I articulate and defend this thesis in two steps. In section I of the paper, I sketch a reading of Hegel's account of practical freedom in the Introduction to the Philosophy of Right as a capacity to respond to ethical requirements or duties. In section II, I argue that the will, on that account, qualifies for Hegel as natural in the following two respects: First, in the good or virtuous case, our responsiveness to ethical requirements exhibits features similar to the lawlike behavior of subhuman denizens of the natural world and other law-governed natural processes. Second, our capacity for practical freedom emerges through processes of habituation from the exercises of capacities that we share with other animals. Although the second thesis is the more important of the two for the purposes of naturalizing Hegel's account of the will, I believe it has not yet been the focus of satisfactory scholarly attention. I thus hope to help remedy what I take to be a gap in the recent literature.

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My main objective in this paper is to articulate and defend the thesis that, for Hegel, the will is a natural capacity or power of sorts. My motivation for defending this thesis is to contribute to the reading of Hegel as an ethical naturalist. Here, however, I do not argue for the attractions of naturalism in metaethics, nor do I offer a general account of Hegel's views as a form of ethical naturalism. What follows is one part of that broader interpretive project. That the task of defending my thesis about Hegelian practical freedom or the will is nonetheless exegetically challenging, and so worthwhile, can readily be appreciated if we recall the 'antithetical' way in which Hegel often characterizes the relation between freedom, which he tells us is the 'essence' of spirit, and nature (*VPG*, 30/20).[1] In an unpublished fragment on the philosophy of spirit, Hegel describes spirit as the 'movement of liberation' from nature (*F*, 92–93). Similarly, in the 1827–28 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*, he claims that the 'essence' of spirit consists in 'freedom from and within the natural' (*VPG1827/28*, 19/71). If we underscore the claim that Hegelian freedom remains *within* nature, then the phrase I have just quoted may be given some naturalistic interpretation after all. Nonetheless, Hegel's frequent remarks to the effect that spirit consists in the 'movement of liberation' from nature should give us pause. How exactly should we read Hegel's programmatic claim that freedom, understood as the 'movement of liberation' *from* nature, nonetheless remains *within* nature?[2]

The challenge that Hegel's conception of freedom appears to pose for a naturalist interpretation is exacerbated by the similarity between Kant and Hegel's views of freedom. As we shall see, for Hegel, as for Kant, practical freedom turns out to involve a capacity to bind oneself by principles that are in some sense one's own. For Kant, this capacity further presupposes a dualism of inclination and reason (or of our natural and purely rational selves). In the light of the similarity between Kant and Hegel's notions of freedom, the question arises: How might Hegel's conception of practical freedom be spelled out naturalistically, in a way that does not commit him to the Kantian view that our capacity for practical freedom is cut off from our place in the natural or phenomenal world? At a minimum, a defense of my thesis about the naturalness of Hegelian practical freedom will require that I address the exegetical difficulties I have sketched in this and the preceding paragraph.

As an initial approximation, we might characterize Hegelian practical freedom, the freedom that belongs to the will or what Hegel also calls 'practical spirit,' by reference to the following two features.[3] First, freedom generally (practical or otherwise) consists in the absence of external domination or constraint by anything 'other.' In Hegelian jargon, freedom is a matter of 'being-with-oneself' or 'being-at-home-with-oneself [*Beisichselbstsein*].' As Hegel elaborates: An entity is free just in case it is 'completely with itself [*bei sich*] because it has reference to nothing other than itself, so that every relationship of dependence on something *other* than itself is thereby eliminated' (*PR*, §23). Despite what the quote just given (taken by itself) suggests, freedom qua lack of external constraint does not imply a complete independence or absence of a relation to anything 'other.' To put the point quite abstractly for now: Freedom consists, rather, in relating to that 'other' in such a way that it no longer appears as something foreign or alien but as a part or extension of oneself, in a sense to be spelled out below.

The second of the two features I have just mentioned, by reference to which we can give an initial definition of practical freedom, allows us to characterize freedom as specifically practical. Practical freedom is practical in that it involves a translation of something 'inner' into something 'outer.' Exercises of practical freedom involve the pursuit of various purposes ('inner') whose attainment results in modifications of the external world ('outer'). The will—Hegel writes—'is the process of

1 For the list of abbreviations of the works of Hegel and Kant, as well as the method of citation of those works, see the bibliography at the end of the paper.

2 In identifying freedom as the 'essence' of spirit, and contrasting it with nature, Hegel seems to have in mind both practical and theoretical freedom. I here focus on his conception of practical freedom, or freedom of the will, and its relation to nature—I bracket, in other words, his conception of theoretical or 'speculative' freedom, the kind of freedom achieved by reconciling ourselves with the world through philosophical inquiry.

3 On the two points that follow, see Neuhouser (2000: 18–24).

translating the *subjective end* into *objectivity*' (*PR*, §8).[4] More simply stated, practical freedom, unlike theoretical or 'speculative' freedom, concerns action.

With this general characterization of practical freedom in place, we can now divide the general task of this paper into two questions. The first question is: What does Hegel's conception of practical freedom, as a form of *Beisichselbstsein*, more concretely amount to? If I am to argue that the will is a natural capacity, for Hegel, we will first of all need some account of the phenomenon to be naturalized. Having supplied that account, I then ask: How exactly might that conception of practical freedom or the will be naturalized (thereby assuaging the worries that the 'antithesis' of freedom and nature might appear to generate for a naturalist interpretation of Hegel)? My answer to this second question is, succinctly, that the will counts for Hegel as natural in the following two respects: (1) In the good or virtuous case, our responsiveness to ethical requirements exhibits features similar to the lawlike behavior of subhuman denizens of the natural world and other law-governed natural processes. And (2) our capacity for practical freedom emerges through processes of habituation from the exercises of capacities that we share with other animals. I take up the two questions I have just posed in sections I and II respectively. Section I follows closely Hegel's own discussion of the will in §§5–29 of the *Philosophy of Right* and §§469–82 of the *Encyclopedia*.[5] Section II is more reconstructive in character and exploits his scattered remarks about ethical habit in the *Philosophy of Right* and especially his account of habit in the "Anthropology" in ways that Hegel himself does not.

As I shall understand it, nature encompasses non-human animals and other organisms, the sub-organic world, and those features or capacities within us that we share with lower animals. On the proposal I have just outlined, the will qualifies as a natural capacity of sorts, for Hegel, inasmuch as (1) its exercises exhibit features similar to the lawlike behavior of members of the sub-human and sub-organic world and (2) that capacity emerges from the exercises of capacities that we share with lower animals. Some of the points I make in articulating and defending (1) have in effect been made in a different context by other commentators.[6] Although (2) is the more important of the two theses I defend for the purposes of showing that the will is a natural capacity by Hegel's lights, it has not yet been the focus of satisfactory scholarly attention. Before getting underway, it is worth substantiating this latter claim about the existing literature by briefly considering the main recent naturalist approaches to Hegel and situating my own reading with respect to them. I believe the principal points that other commentators have made in interpreting Hegelian spirit and its relation to nature are for the most part well taken. Nonetheless, their views on the relation between spirit and nature seem to leave open a question, which I address in part by articulating and defending (2). I thereby hope to help fill what I take to be a gap in the recent literature.

One of the main claims of Pinkard's naturalist interpretation of Hegel is that '[t]here is a strong continuity between animal experience and human experience' (Pinkard 2012: 27), in Hegel's view.[7] If I understand Pinkard correctly, animal life and human spirit are 'continuous,' on his reading,

4 In his treatment of the will in the *Encyclopedia* "Philosophy of Spirit," Hegel writes along similar lines: 'The will heads … towards the *objectification* of its inwardness that is still burdened with the form of subjectivity' (*Enz*, §469Z).

5 Despite some differences, both texts cover roughly the same material. I place greater emphasis on Hegel's treatment of that material in the *Philosophy of Right* only because it strikes me as comparatively clearer and more expansive than his discussion in the *Encyclopedia*.

6 See for example Wood (1990: chap. 12), Novakovic (2017: chap. 1), and Lumsden (2012: §2). I introduce the qualification 'in a different context' because these other commentators have not weaved the points in question into an account of the sense or senses in which the will, by Hegel's lights, might count as a natural capacity.

7 Elsewhere he elaborates:

> [O]ur continuity with the natural world (specifically, with animals) is at the center of Hegel's Aristotelian conception of mindful agency more than it could possibly be for either Augustine or Kant. … In Hegel's terms, animals [like humans] also have the capacity to be 'at one with themselves' and even to have both 'selves' and ≡ 'subjectivity'. (18)

The idea of continuity figures prominently in Alison Stone's naturalist interpretation of Hegel as well. See Stone (2013). The issue on which Stone focuses, however, is the continuity between the empirical (in particular natural) sciences, on the one hand, and philosophy (in particular the philosophy of nature), on the other, and not the question of the continuity between (animal) nature and (practical) spirit or the will. I thus set her reading to the side.

in that both non-human and human animals 'register' their environment and behave in end-directed ways in response to that environmental input. Moreover, in so behaving, both non-human and human animals are in effect drawing some distinction between the 'inner' and the 'outer' and are thus 'self-related,' he writes. But Pinkard also insists that, on this sense of 'continuity,' there is a 'sharp break' between humans and lower animals in that we (but not they) are able to grasp the features of our environment as reasons for belief and action, as opposed to those features simply triggering an instinctive behavioral response. More pressingly perhaps, despite the continuity that Pinkard identifies between 'human experience' and 'animal experience,' the capacities that distinguish us humans could, for all his continuity claim says, be completely cut off from any capacities that we share with lower animals. By articulating and defending my thesis (2), I go beyond Pinkard's interpretation by arguing that spirit is 'continuous' with (animal) nature in a further, stronger sense than the one I have just flagged on his behalf, namely: Human spirit, and more specifically practical spirit or the will, emerges through habituation out of the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals, in a sense to be precisified below.[8]

Contra Pinkard, Julia Peters maintains that nature and spirit are not only 'continuous' but form a 'unity.'[9] According to Hegel as she interprets him, the unity formed by nature and spirit is best understood in teleological terms or as the unity exhibited by an instrument, on the one hand, and the purposive activity that is carried out through or by means of that instrument, on the other.[10] That our bodies qua part of nature serve as instruments in the service of our spiritual ends is certainly part of Hegel's view of the relation between spirit and nature.[11] Nonetheless, even if we are careful to distinguish between the unity formed by an instrument and its corresponding purposive activity, on the one hand, and that formed by a craftsman's ends and the instrument or raw materials upon which she operates in realizing those ends, on the other, Peters's account seems to leave open the question: How do distinctively human, spiritual capacities (like our capacity for practical freedom) emerge or arise out of nature?[12] It would seem that, in order for our bodies to serve as an instrument or tool for the ends of spirit, those spiritual capacities that distinguish us from all other living creatures would require some prior, independent account as to their arising out of nature. Absent such an account, there would be no spiritual ends or activities for our bodies to realize in the first place.

Finally, Karen Ng claims to take a different tack with respect to the continuity and unity approaches proposed by Pinkard and Peters, respectively, and maintains that Hegel's naturalism is of a 'formal' sort. Very briefly, the main point of Ng's 'formal naturalism' seems to be that spirit exhibits in some higher (because self-conscious) way the same structure that is exhibited by living things

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8 Pinkard notes that

> Hegel's account of the actual soul is ≡ a nondualist account that stresses the element of inwardness in subjectivity by seeing it as emerging in animal life as having to sustain itself by directing itself to the achievement of goals. Human subjectivity emerges as a kind of reflexive complication of this kind of organic, animal self-relation, not as something radically other than animal life. (Pinkard 2012: 30)

He does not, however, elaborate the point any further. I take Peters (2016), on which I touch immediately below, to be formulating the same sort of worry against Pinkard to the one I have just raised in the body of the paper. See especially Peters (2016: 118–19).

9 See for example Peters (2016: 119).

10 For her discussion of this 'unity of a principled-guided, teleological activity and her instrument,' see Peters (2016: 127ff.).

11 On this point, see *Enz*, §§370Z and 410Z.

12 Matthias Haase accuses Peters of interpreting Hegel in a way that renders his view dualistic. See Haase (2017: 401–2). I suspect she would reply to the accusation by pointing to the distinction I have just drawn between purposive activity and its instrument, on the one hand, and a craftsman or artist and her instrument, on the other. As she puts it:

> [T]he [unity] claim should be understood as analogous to a claim of the form 'A flute is an instrument of flute-playing' (rather than to a claim of the form 'A flute is the instrument of a flutist'). That is to say, the claim states that the instrument in question has a certain structure which makes it apt to serve as an instrument for a certain activity. (Peters 2016: 126)

generally.[13] But the comparison that Ng spells out between life and spirit seems to raise the question again: Beyond the structural similarities between life (and so nature) and spirit, in what way (if at all) are organic processes or features that we share with lower forms of life responsible for self-consciousness as well as the other spiritual capacities that we bear? In fairness to Ng, she introduces her view as a supplement to other naturalist interpretations, among which she cites Pinkard's 'continuity' reading. But as I suggested above, the question I have just posed is one that Pinkard's interpretation appears to leave open as well.[14]

In spelling out my emergence claim (2) above, as I propose to do in Section II, I take myself to be supplementing the interpretive views of Pinkard, Peters, and Ng among others by answering a question that their accounts seem to leave open. My own efforts in this paper, however, shall be restricted to the will or practical spirit. That is to say, I shall not consider the question of the connection between nature and spirit generally. By narrowing my focus in this way, I hope to articulate the connection between Hegelian practical freedom and nature more clearly, precisely, and exhaustively than has hitherto been the case in the literature on the topic.

SECTION I: THE WILL AND THE RATIONAL WILL

I.1 'MOMENTS' OF THE CONCEPT OF THE WILL

In opposing nature and (practical) freedom as he often does, Hegel appears to be contrasting the former specifically with what he calls the 'first moment' (*PR*, §5) of the will, namely, with a capacity for a certain kind of abstraction. In the context of the discussion of nature and spirit at the outset of his "Philosophy of Spirit," Hegel writes: '[F]ormally the essence of spirit is freedom. … In accordance with this formal determination spirit *can* abstract from everything external. … This possibility is its intrinsic abstract universality' (Enz, §382). The passage just quoted indeed echoes Hegel's characterization of the 'first moment,' or the 'moment of universality,' in his discussion of the will in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*. Here is that characterization:

> The will contains … the element of *pure indeterminacy* … in which every limitation, every content, whether presently immediately through nature, through needs, desires, and drives, or given and determined in some other way, is dissolved; this is the limitless infinity of *absolute abstraction* or *universality* … (*PR*, §5)

Although the first passage speaks of freedom in general whereas the second passage speaks of practical freedom or the will in particular, the similarity between the two should be evident. According to the first passage, freedom in general involves a capacity to 'abstract from everything external' or natural. According to the second passage, the first moment of the will is the moment of '*absolute abstraction* or *universality*.' Our first task in getting to grips with Hegel's account of practical freedom, and its relation to nature, then, is to answer the following pair of questions: What are the other 'moments' of the will, in addition to the 'moment of universality'? And how does that first moment of universality or abstraction fit together with the other 'moments' or marks of the concept of the will? Having addressed these questions, we will then be in a position to turn to the further questions: What are the different 'shapes [*Gestaltungen*]' (*PR*, §10A) or species of the general concept of the will, according to Hegel? And why does Hegel think that the 'shape'

13 Ng initially summarizes Hegel's alleged naturalism as follows: '[F]ar from attempting to reduce mind to something natural, Hegel's primary interest is in understanding the formal characteristics of living activity in general, which provides a framework for understanding the basic shape of minded, human activity' (Ng 2018: 24). She later elaborates her interpretive view in more technical terms: Having noted that life is the 'immediate actuality of the logical idea,' Ng explains that '[t]o say that mind is the actualization of the logical idea is … to suggest … that the self-developing activity of *Geist* is a self-conscious actualization of life-form activity' (2018: 26).

14 Robert Stern and Allen Wood are yet two other commentators that characterize Hegel's view as naturalistic. See Wood (1990) and Stern (2015) and especially (2016a) and (2016b). Both of these forms of Hegelian naturalism are concerned with the question of the source of our moral obligations and not with the question on which I focus in this paper, namely, that of the connection between the capacities that we share with lower animals and other features of the sub-human natural world, on the one hand, and the distinctively human features and capacities that make up our essence or nature as free beings, on the other.

he calls the 'rational will' (*Enz*, §482 and *PR*, §29A) is the 'true' shape of the will (*PR*, §10A)? I tackle the first set of questions in this subsection. I turn to the second set of questions in I.2.

In addition to the moment of universality, Hegel characterizes the will in terms of two further moments, which he associates with the categories of particularity and individuality respectively. According to the first moment, as we have just seen in the passage above, the capacity to abstract from or 'dissolve' our desires, urges and impulses is necessary for freedom. Lacking that capacity, our desires or wants would dictate our conduct. In such a situation, our conduct would be merely instinctive, as Hegel says of animal behavior (*PR*, §4Z), and not an exercise of a free will at all. As instinctive, our conduct would be determined by something 'other,' namely, our wants or impulses, and thus unfree according to our initial characterization of practical freedom above.

This first moment of the concept of the will is insufficient to account for our capacity for practical freedom, however. For the bare exercise of the capacity to step back or abstract from our desires by itself yields no determinate course of action. In Hegel's words: 'A will which … wills only the abstract universal wills *nothing* and therefore is not a will at all' (*PR*, §6Z). In addition to stepping back and reflecting on its wants, then, a creature with a will *acts* only insofar as she settles on and pursues some particular desire or sets some specific end for herself. The requirement that the will set some specific end for itself or, as Hegel puts it, the will's 'positing of a determinacy' (*PR*, §6) constitutes the 'second moment' of the will or the moment of particularity.

Finally, Hegel claims that the capacities described in the first two moments are not discrete or independent of one another but rather form a unity, and that this unity represents the third moment of the concept of the will, the moment of individuality. The moments of universality and particularity form a unity in the following sense: In acting on some particular desire, or in setting some specific end, the will does not thereby become identical to that desire and so surrender its capacity for abstraction or reflection. Again, our wills are not just bundles of desires or urges that dictate our conduct. Any ends that the will sets for itself are its own product and so expressive or reflective of the will—but the will itself 'stands above' (*PR*, §§11Z, 14), or retains a capacity to step back from, its 'determinacy,' its desires or ends. I take Hegel to be claiming that the will sees its ends or 'determinacy' as expressive of itself all the while 'standing above' that 'determinacy' when he writes: '[The will] knows [its determinacy] as its own and … as a mere *possibility* by which it is not restricted but in which it finds itself merely because it posits itself in it' (*PR*, §7).

Hegel maintains, as we have just seen, that the third moment of the will (moment of individuality) represents the unity of the previous two. In the light of the 'unity' captured by this third moment, we can now summarily characterize the will as a capacity to 'posit' some specific end or act on some particular desire (moment of particularity) while remaining *bei sich*, not 'restricted' to, or determined by, its desires or urges (moment of universality).

I.2 THE RATIONAL WILL AS THE 'TRUE' SHAPE OF THE WILL

Both in the *Philosophy of Right* and in the *Encyclopedia* Hegel describes various 'shapes' (*PR*, §10A) or species of the general concept of the will. The question to which I now turn is: Out of the various shapes of the will that Hegel considers, why does he privilege what he calls the 'rational will' (*PR*, §29A and *Enz*, §482), or the 'will which has being in and for itself' (*PR*, §21A), over other species of practical freedom, such as freedom as arbitrariness or the mere capacity 'to do as one pleases' (*PR*, §15A)? In what sense, that is, is the 'rational will' the 'true' shape of the will, as he puts it?

Before we can answer this question, we need to understand what makes a shape of the will the 'true' shape of the will, for Hegel. A shape of the will qualifies as the 'true' shape, he tells us, only if 'it has freedom as its object and *is* freedom' (*PR*, §10Z). In other words, the true shape of the will 'wills the free will' (*PR*, §27). Of course, this characterization of the 'true' shape of the will, as one that 'wills the free will,' just prompts the further question: How, exactly, should we understand this requirement from §§10Z and 27 of the *Philosophy of Right*, and in what sense is it fulfilled by the rational will but not by what he calls the 'arbitrary will [*Willkür*]' (*PR*, §§12–19 and *Enz*, §§477–79)? I begin by providing a negative answer to this question. The requirement to have 'freedom as its

object' should *not* be taken to mean that the rational will sets no specific ends for itself but rather has only freedom in general as its object, whatever we more precisely take that to mean. For if that were our interpretation of §§10Z and 27, then the true shape of the will would not satisfy the second moment of the concept of the will (that is, it would not 'posit' any specific ends) and so would not qualify as a shape of the will at all, let alone its 'true' shape.

In order to provide a positive answer to the question of how the rational will fulfills the requirement expressed in §§10Z and 27, and what that requirement more precisely amounts to, it helps to take a closer look at the contrast between the rational will and one of the other shapes of the will that Hegel considers, namely, the 'arbitrary will' or 'resolving will [*der beschließende Wille*].'[15] The arbitrary will can step back and reflect on its desires and decide on which among those desires to act. By thus stepping back, the arbitrary will satisfies the first moment of the concept of the will. More specifically, the freedom of the arbitrary will consists in selecting some 'determinacy' from among the wants, desires or urges that it finds within itself. The behavior of the arbitrary will, then, is not determined by any particular one of its desires. But the choices of the arbitrary will *are* determined or fixed by its given set of desires. It is in this sense, we read, that the arbitrary will is both free from and yet 'dependent on [its] content' (*PR*, §15Z). Moreover, for that shape of the will, it does not matter what desires it chooses; in acting on some desire, the arbitrary will need not be following any criterion other than its own fancy. Having an arbitrary will indeed just 'consists in being able to do as one pleases' (*PR*, §15A).[16]

Unlike the arbitrary will, the rational will does not act on the basis of its fancy in the way I have just claimed that the arbitrary will does. To be sure, like the arbitrary will, the rational will seeks to satisfy some particular desire or pursues some specific end or other. This much we know from Hegel's threefold discussion of the concept of the will. But the rational will acts on some particular desire only insofar as it takes the satisfaction of that desire to conform to the conditions or requirements of freedom. To give just one example: The rational will makes claims over some part of the external world (that is, it exercises what Hegel calls the 'freedom of personhood') only under the condition that those claims be compatible with everyone else also expressing their freedom in a similar way. Thus, the rational will endorses, or affirms as its own, principles such as 'respect others as persons' (*PR*, §36).

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15 In addition to the arbitrary and rational wills, Hegel in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* considers what he calls the 'natural will.' This shape of the will—Hegel writes—'finds itself naturally determined' by 'drives, desires and inclinations' (*PR*, §11). Given this characterization of the natural will, it is unclear whether and in what sense its exercises count as free and not merely instinctive behavior. In short, how is the natural will a shape of the will at all? Alznauer provides a solution to this puzzle by noting that the natural will is (as mere animals are not) minimally free in at least the following sense:

> [The natural will] has a self-conception and knows what it is doing: as Hegel puts it, it knows its ends as ends. If you ask why it is reaching for that apple, it can tell you, for it knows that the reason it is reaching for the apple is because it is hungry. … The natural will should be understood, then, as a human will that conceives itself as a mere desire-satisfying animal, one that tacitly identifies its will, or its reasons to act, with its desires. (2015: 46)

This line of interpretation seems to be supported by Hegel's own claim that for the natural will its 'content is … entirely [its own]' (*PR*, §11), as well as by his previous assertion that 'an animal has no will, because it does not represent to itself what it desires' (*PR*, §4Z). (On this issue, see also Peperzak 2001: 201.) Whatever the verdict on the question whether the natural will already really constitutes a shape of the will proper, for our purposes what matters more about Hegel's treatment of what he calls the 'natural will' is the following. The natural will counts as natural, according to Hegel's description, in that it amounts to a form of instinctive, or quasi-instinctive, behavior. But the identification of 'natural' with 'instinctive' that that description presupposes, leaves open the possibility of construing the rational will as a natural power under a different reading of 'natural,' according to which it is not synonymous with 'instinctive.' I attempt to provide such a construal in section II.

16 Alznauer nicely puts the points I have just tried to highlight in my gloss on the arbitrary will as follows:

> [I]ts desires appear not as the immediate content of its will but as potential reasons to act, as a kind of menu of options that it can choose from. The arbitrary will does not identify its will with its immediate desires but rather takes any determination of its ends to be up to it. … Though it depends on the givenness of its desires to provide *possible* reasons, it takes itself to be unconstrained in which of these it will take as its *actual* end. (2015: 57)

For a similar characterization of the arbitrary will, see Patten (1999: 50).

How does the distinction between the two forms of the will, namely, the arbitrary and the rational will, help us answer the question above about the rational will 'willing the free will'? The rational will, I have said, acts in the light of the requirements of freedom, in the sense I have just illustrated. Like the arbitrary will, this shape of the will pursues specific ends and seeks to satisfy particular desires. In contrast to the arbitrary will, however, the rational will does so only insofar as it takes those ends and desires to conform to the requirements of freedom. Over and above any specific objects or ends it might have, then, the rational will 'has freedom as its object,' it embodies or 'is' freedom (*PR*, §10Z). In this way, Hegel manages to square the claim that the rational will is 'the free will which wills the free will' with the assumption that, as a shape of the will, it involves the 'positing of a determinacy' (*PR*, §6).

Precisely because it 'wills the free will' or 'has freedom as its object,' the rational will is freer or 'truer' than the arbitrary will, understood as a capacity 'to do as one pleases' (*PR*, §15A). Recall our initial characterization of freedom as absence of external domination. The rational will is freer than the arbitrary will in that it is not determined by anything alien or merely given—it is, in Hegelian jargon, 'completely with itself [*bei sich*]' (*PR*, §23). In particular, and contrary to the arbitrary will, as we have seen, the ends of the rational will are not fixed or determined by its given set of desires. Additionally, although the rational will is constrained by certain requirements (for example, the duty to respect others as persons), it endorses or affirms this and other duties as its own, as a necessary condition of itself and others exercising their freedom. For the rational will, 'its object is itself [namely, freedom] and therefore not something that it sees as *other* or as a *limitation*' (*PR*, §22). Thus, for a will that is truly free, ethical requirements, understood as requirements of freedom, do not represent an external constraint on the will. As Hegel later sums up the point: '[The ethical laws and powers] are not something *alien* to the subject. On the contrary, the subject bears *spiritual witness* to them as to its *own essence*, in which it … lives as in its element which is not distinct from itself' (*PR*, §147).[17]

The claim that the rational will relates to ethical laws as to 'its own essence' means that the arbitrary will is, in fact, doubly unfree (or less than fully free) in the sense that it is determined by an external 'other.' First, the arbitrary will is less than fully free, as we have seen, in that its ends are fixed or determined by its given set of desires. Second, because it does not recognize, or does not affirm as its own, the requirements of freedom, the arbitrary will is further unfree in that it is subject to those requirements as to an external or alien force.[18]

SECTION II: THE RATIONAL WILL AS A NATURAL POWER

II.1 THE RATIONAL WILL AS NATURALLY LAWLIKE

In section I, I reviewed Hegel's most general, threefold characterization of the will and attempted to elucidate his thesis that the 'true' shape of the will consists in a capacity to respond to and affirm as one's own the ethical requirements by which it is bound. In getting to grips with this thesis, I relied on Hegel's distinction between the arbitrary and rational wills. The contrast between these two shapes of the will allows us to frame the task of naturalizing Hegel's account of the rational will in this section in terms of his relation to Kant. For, like Hegel, Kant distinguishes between the mere freedom 'to do as one pleases' (*PR*, §15) and 'true' freedom, or between the freedom of mere *Willkür* and *Wille*. Moreover, like Hegel, Kant also characterizes freedom proper as the capacity to subject oneself to, and affirm, requirements that are in some sense one's own—or, in his preferred term, 'autonomous.' So the question arises: Other than details of presentation or terminology, what distinguishes Hegel's general conception of practical freedom and the will from

17 The 'subject' of which Hegel speaks in this quote is the denizen of the modern social world, and the 'ethical powers' include the social institutions (the family, civil society and the state) that he examines in the third and final part of the *Philosophy of Right*.

18 See *PR*, §149. I take Patten to be describing the first form of unfreedom when he claims that the arbitrary will is less than fully *bei sich* or 'self-determining, because the material of [its] reflection and deliberation, the menu from which it chooses, is given by nature' (1999: 50).

Kant's? One crucial difference is that Kant takes the task of explaining our capacity to heed ethical requirements to involve an appeal to some 'supernatural' or 'noumenal' capacity. Contrary to Kant, Hegel makes no such appeal and instead construes the rational will as a natural capacity of sorts. I attempt to spell out and defend this claim on Hegel's behalf in the remainder of the paper.

I propose that the rational will, understood as a capacity to respond to ethical requirements or duties, counts for Hegel as natural in the following two respects: (1) Our responsiveness to ethical requirements exhibits features similar to the lawlike behavior of subhuman denizens of the natural world and other law-governed natural processes. And (2) our capacity for practical freedom arises out of, or emerges from, the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals. I noted at the outset how some of the points I make in articulating (1) have already been made by other commentators. Although these points illustrate the ways in which the behavior of the rational will resembles that of other natural phenomena, I believe they do not suffice on their own to establish that the will, for Hegel, is a natural capacity. Thus, the more novel (and the more important for the purposes of this paper) of the two theses I have just stated is (2). I turn my efforts to (2) in section II.2. My focus in the present subsection, however, is on (1).

I submit that (1) captures at least part of the sense in which our capacity for practical freedom counts as a natural capacity, in Hegel's view. More specifically, for Hegel, there are—I propose—two respects in which practical freedom qualifies as naturally lawlike: (i) In the good or virtuous case, our responsiveness to ethical requirements manifests a psychological harmony or lack of inner conflict similar to the behavior of subhuman denizens of the natural world, and (ii) that responsiveness exhibits a regularity like that of other natural processes. I take up each of these two more specific points, (i) and (ii), in turn.[19]

(i) In the "Ethical Life [*Sittlichkeit*]" section of his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel tells us that, for the virtuous individual, acting as one ought to is a matter of habit or second nature. He writes:

> [T]he ethical [*das Sittliche*], as [the individuals'] general mode of behavior, appears as *custom* [*Sitte*]; and the *habit* of the ethical appears as a *second nature* which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence [*Dasein*]. (*PR*, §151)[20]

One point that Hegel means to make with this characterization of virtue as a second nature is that the virtuous agent does not experience the kind of struggle or inner conflict to which the Kantian agent is by definition condemned, according to his estimation. The Hegelian virtuous agent, that is, exhibits a psychological harmony that is unavailable to her Kantian counterpart. Writing of 'rational *natural* beings' like us, Kant claims that 'even when they do obey the [moral] law, they do it *reluctantly* (in the face of opposition from their inclinations)' (*MS*, 6:379) or, as we might say,

19 It bears underscoring that my first thesis is that the behavior of the rational will is *naturally* lawlike, that is, that it exhibits certain features similar to the lawlike behavior of non-human animals and other law-governed natural processes. Thus, claiming that, for Kant, for example, ethical requirements are lawlike (by which he means universally and necessarily binding) without issuing from nature would not seem to spoil the connection between freedom and nature that I am aiming to articulate on Hegel's behalf in this subsection. More to the point is the claim that the behavior of the Kantian holy will is (or would be) both unconflicted and regular—a holy will, Kant tells us, would always and infallibly follow the moral law. In other words, such a holy will would exhibit features like those I highlight in the behavior of non-human animals and other natural phenomena. As we will see, however, the behavior of the holy will would be decidedly non-natural according to the second, and more important, of the two theses I have announced. Our capacity for practical freedom, I argue in II.2, arises through processes of habituation out of the exercise of capacities that we share with other animals. However we are to understand the freedom of the holy will, it presumably does not arise in this way.

20 In the previous paragraph, Hegel explicitly connects 'the ethical' and virtue: 'The ethical, in so far as it is reflected in the naturally determined character of the individual as such, is *virtue*' (§150). Along lines broadly similar to those of his remarks in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel tells us in the *Encyclopedia* that, within 'Ethical Life,' practical freedom or the rational will 'has its operation and immediate universal *actuality* [*Wirklichkeit*] as *custom*—self-conscious *freedom* become *nature*' (§513).

with some degree of pain or displeasure.[21] Contrast Aristotle's characterization of ethical virtue, to which Hegel is indebted in describing virtuous behavior as second nature.[22] Taking temperance to stand in for virtue generally,[23] Aristotle writes: '[T]he temperate person is the sort to feel no pleasure contrary to reason, while the self-controlled [continent] person is the sort to feel such pleasure but not to be led by it' (*NE*, 1152a). In other words, the continent person is the sort to follow the requirements of morality reluctantly or with a certain amount of displeasure. Kant's notion of ethical virtue thus falls short of its Aristotelian (and Hegelian) counterpart, and is closer to continence, understood as a capacity to reluctantly or begrudgingly follow moral requirements, than it is to virtue proper.[24]

Of course, Kantians will straightaway rejoin that the unfavorable comparison I have just made is based upon a misinterpretation. It is no part of Kant's considered view, they will argue, that a dutiful action must be done reluctantly or with displeasure if it is to have moral worth. As long as an action is done from the motive of duty, it can be accompanied by feelings of pleasure, and so be performed happily or absent any inner struggle, without the action's moral worth being diminished in any way. Crucially for our purposes here, however, on the Kantian picture, that lack of inner struggle in the performance of a dutiful action does not increase its moral worth. But at least part of Hegel's (and Aristotle's) point in describing virtuous action as second natural seems to be that the harmony or absence of inner conflict in the performance of an action that conforms to the requirements of morality does positively affect the action's moral worth.

Moreover, even granting that the Kantian agent might on occasion act from duty without experiencing inner struggle or psychological conflict, Kant's own texts suggest that he does not (indeed cannot) regard psychological harmony as a stable or enduring state of the moral agent. For one thing, given the imperatival character with which moral requirements appear to us humans, as well as the dualism of sensibility and reason on which such a character is based, it would appear that Kant is indeed committed to a view of the self whereby one part of the self is continuously monitoring or ruling over the other part.[25] And an agent that is split in this way, with one, higher part keeping in check another, lower part, would after all seem to be at best capable of continence, as I have described it above. For another thing, and more importantly, inborn or instinctive behaviors aside, a bit of behavior can reveal a lack of inner conflict or psychological harmony on the part of the agent only as a result of repetition or habituation. This is a point on which Aristotle insists in his practical philosophy. But the claim that repetition makes a bit of behavior come more easily to us is a point with which we are —I take it—familiar from our own experience, more or less uncontroversial and presumably accepted by both sides (Aristotle and Hegel, on the one hand, Kant, on the other) of our dispute. Kant, however, is adamant that dutiful action can never become habitual without losing all moral worth. Therefore, by modus tollens, the

21 The Kantian passage reads in full:

> Rational *natural* beings … are unholy enough that pleasure can induce them to break the moral law, even though they recognize its authority; and even when they do obey the law, they do it *reluctantly* (in the face of opposition from their inclinations). (*MS*, 6:379)

In a similar vein, Kant explicitly characterizes virtue as follows: '[T]he capacity and considered resolve to withstand a strong but unjust opponent is *fortitude* (*fortitudo*) and, with respect to what opposes the moral disposition *within us*, virtue (*virtus, fortitudo moralis*)' (*MS*, 6:380).

22 Hegel explicitly mentions Aristotle in the context of his remarks about ethical habit as a second nature at §150Z. In a similar vein, Hegel's treatment of Aristotle's ethics in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* begins by approvingly noting: 'The manner of treatment is almost invariably speculative, and sound understanding is displayed throughout' (*VPGII*, 198/180).

23 Given Aristotle's so-called thesis of the unity of the virtues, a person cannot be temperate without possessing the rest of the virtues of character anyway. See *NE*, Book VI, Chapter 13.

24 For a discussion of continence and virtue in Kant and Hegel, and of the claim that the Hegelian virtuous agent exhibits a kind of psychological harmony or lack of inner struggle, see for example Novakovic (2017: 49–50), Wood (1990: 209–10 and 214–15), and Lumsden (2012: 232–34).

25 For evidence of the claim that moral requirements *always* appear in imperatival form for us humans, and so that that feature is not one that can ever be dropped or somehow overcome, see for example *KpV*, 5:32–33.

Kantian virtuous agent cannot exhibit psychological harmony or be unconflicted, at least not in a way that is stable or long-lasting.[26]

So far in this subsection, I have tried to show that the behavior of the Hegelian virtuous agent is harmonious in a way that Hegel believes the behavior of her Kantian counterpart is not. In characterizing the behavior of the Hegelian virtuous agent in this manner, I am in effect making the case that that behavior is natural at least in the sense that it exhibits features analogous to those exhibited by the lawlike behavior of lower animals. Consider, for example, a predator chasing its prey. The predator acts on instinct and so automatically; in chasing its prey, the predator exhibits no inner struggle resulting from the weighing up of different courses of action. To be sure, virtuous agents are unlike lower animals in that they act rationally or reflectively and not instinctively. But the point of the comparison does not concern the sources (reason, on the one hand, instinct, on the other) of virtuous and merely animal behavior, respectively. The point of the comparison is rather to signal a similarity on account of which both behaviors might be characterized as natural, namely, a lack of inner struggle or conflict.[27]

(ii) I now turn to the second of the two points I mentioned above, namely, that virtuous behavior qualifies as natural in that it exhibits a regularity similar to that of law-governed natural processes (for example, the rotation of the earth around the sun). Although Hegel does not dwell on this point about the regularity of virtuous action, it is at the very least implicit in the connection he draws in the "Anthropology" between habit in general, including therefore ethical habit, and mechanism.[28] Moreover, the point is explicit in Aristotle, from whom Hegel takes the idea of ethical habit as a second nature.[29]

In what sense is behavior virtuous only if regular? In order to get a better grip on the idea that virtuous action must be performed regularly if it is to count as virtuous at all, it helps to contrast

26 The argument I have just sketched turns on the claim that habitual and morally worthy actions are incompatible. If an action is to have any moral worth for Kant, then it cannot be the result of the agent's habitually carrying on as she has in the past; rather, Kant holds that the virtuous agent must act from scratch or afresh every time, so to speak. Kant articulates the claim that habitual and morally worthy action are incompatible as unequivocally as one could hope in his *Anthropology*:

> *Habit* … is a physical inner necessitation to proceed in the same manner as one has proceeded until now. It deprives even good actions of their moral worth because it impairs the freedom of the mind and, moreover, leads to thoughtless repetition of the very same act (*monotony*) … (*A*, 7:149)

Earlier in that same section of the *Anthropology*, Kant writes in similar spirit: 'Virtue is *moral strength* in adherence to one's duty, which should never become habit but should always emerge entirely new and original from one's way of thinking' (*A*, 7:147). Both these passages make it clear that Kant takes habit and moral worth to be incompatible. In addition, and more interestingly, the first passage gives us a better idea as to *why* Kant has that view of habit. The assumption that underlies Kant's condemnation of habit is that habitual behavior is incompatible with freedom. In acting habitually, Kant tells us, we 'impair the freedom of the mind.' Since freedom is a necessary condition of an action's having any moral worth, habitual behavior is devoid of any such worth. For a helpful discussion of Kant's views on habit in the *Anthropology* and how they differ from Hegel's, see Novakovic (2017: 27–29). See also McCumber (1990).

27 It might be objected that in claiming that the virtuous person is free from inner conflict or psychological struggle, Hegel (or I on Hegel's behalf) must be mischaracterizing virtuous behavior. For that characterization suggests that heeding ethical requirements is easy and hence takes little to no effort. But experience tells us that acting as morality demands is often quite hard and does at times require considerable effort. Therefore, it should be no surprise that becoming ethical is experienced first personally as a struggle. In reply to this objection, we can begin by noting that Hegel does not (or at least need not) deny that becoming ethical might require considerable effort. This commonsensical observation notwithstanding, Hegel can insist that someone's psychology is conflicted in a way that reveals a moral failure only if she is still less than fully virtuous (or only if acting as she ought to has not yet become second nature to her). A fully virtuous agent might be confronted with a pressing, even tragic situation, to which the appropriate psychological reaction is some degree of displeasure or inner struggle in acting as she nevertheless deems she ought to. The psychological struggle experienced by the agent in such cases, however, is a function of some rare, tragic circumstance in which she finds herself and is not symptomatic of a defect of character on her part. Moreover, although the process of becoming virtuous will presumably involve struggles and conflicts, these should not be overestimated. Those struggles will be infrequent, Hegel appears to believe, when the agent is brought up within a rational, well-ordered social world, where teachers, parents and others around her serve as moral exemplars. See *PR*, §§150A, 153A.

28 Hegel tells us that, through habit, the soul 'giv[es its expressions] the shape of something *mechanical*' (*Enz*, §410Z). And earlier in his treatment of habit in the "Anthropology," he writes: '[H]abit is the determinacy of self-feeling … made into something that is natural, mechanical' (§410).

29 See especially Aristotle, *NE*, Book II, Chapters 1–4.

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a virtuous (for example, courageous) action with a morally neutral one like washing the dishes. An instance of dishwashing counts as a case of washing the dishes whether or not it is done regularly (in particular, habitually). I am in the habit of washing the dishes after every meal. Now imagine someone who lets the dishes pile up and washes some of those dishes only very rarely and randomly, approximately once every one or two weeks, say. This person can hardly be said to be in the habit of washing the dishes. Both this person's next (non-habitual) washing of the dishes and my (habitual) washing of the dishes later this evening, however, count as instances of dishwashing. This does not appear to be so if we switch from morally neutral to virtuous action. Indeed, an allegedly one-off instance of courage, temperance or justice, Aristotle tells us, does not exemplify the corresponding virtue (and so does not represent an instance of temperance or justice at all). A seemingly just or temperate action is only really such, and so a case of virtue, if it is done 'as the just and temperate person would' (*NE*, 1105b), where part of what this phrase involves is that the action in question fits into a habitual or regular pattern of behavior.

But why hold fast to this connection between virtue and regularity, anyway? The answer, I take it, is that we expect the actions of a virtuous person to be reliable. A person does not count as virtuous, and her actions do not manifest virtue, unless she can be counted or relied upon to perform those same actions whenever the situation calls for it. And the best guarantee that a person *can* be so relied upon, so the thought goes, is that she performs such actions habitually or regularly. The answer to the foregoing question just prompts the further issue: How are the two points discussed so far in this section, (i) and (ii), virtue as inner harmony, on the one hand, and virtue as regularity, on the other, connected? Take courage, again, to stand in for virtuous action generally. To emphasize a point I made above: In most (or perhaps even all) cases, the inner harmony required for truly courageous action, (i), can be attained only by regularly and hence reliably performing actions like those that the virtuous person performs, (ii). In other words, only by regularly or habitually performing actions like those of the courageous person are our desires so molded as to eliminate any source of inner interference.[30]

II.2 THE RATIONAL WILL AS EMERGING OUT OF NATURE

My discussion in this section has so far aimed to show that our responsiveness to ethical requirements is natural for Hegel in that (in the good or virtuous cases) its exercises manifest features *like*, or *similar* to, features exhibited by the behavior of subhuman members of the animal world and other natural processes. This claim sets virtuous action apart from other human behavior, most obviously, from continent and incontinent action, that is, action that is the result of psychological conflict and so unreliable. For an agent might have managed to overcome her reluctance on some occasion. But in the light of that inner struggle or reluctance, it seems we have no reason to believe that she will continue to act similarly in the future.

The analogy or comparison I have exploited in the previous subsection, however, cannot be all that there is to the characterization of practical freedom as a natural capacity. Despite that analogy between virtuous action and natural phenomena, for all we have said, our will might be cut off from nature in that its origin owes nothing to the capacities we share with other animals. In the light of the broad similarities between the Kantian and Hegelian views of practical freedom I noted at the start of II.1, on the one hand, and Hegel's rejection of the Kantian dualism of pure reason

30 In addition to the two points I have made in this subsection, (i) and (ii), Italo Testa has argued that there is a further analogy between the realms of nature, on the one hand, and that of practical freedom or 'objective spirit,' on the other. Testa tells us that the institutions that help realize practical freedom 'present themselves to the individual as having a form of natural immediacy … insofar as they manifest an objectivity and a blind necessity … analogous to that presented by the first-natural domain of physical nature' (Testa 2013: 32). On account of this 'blind necessity,' the institutions of objective spirit appear to their members as an 'extraneous mechanism.' But although Hegel does maintain that there is a sense in which these institutions render its participants free regardless of what the participants' subjective attitude towards them might be (acceptance, rejection or indifference), Testa's further claim that these institutions make up an 'extraneous mechanism' governed by 'blind necessity' seems to be in tension with Hegel's view that the ethical 'laws and powers' are not 'something alien to the subject' (*PR*, §147) or an external 'other' that would render the subject unfree.

and sensibility,[31] on the other, we are left with the task of piecing together Hegel's alternative, naturalist story about our capacity for practical freedom. In addressing this issue in the remainder of the paper, I exploit part of Hegel's discussion of habit towards the end of the "Anthropology" in ways that he himself does not.

I now turn, then, to (2), the second and more important of the two theses I stated above. The interpretive hypothesis I seek to articulate and defend in this subsection is that our capacity for practical freedom is the result for Hegel of a process of habitual liberation from what he refers to as our 'natural determinations,' for example, our urges, desires or impulses. Because Hegel, as I understand him, thus grounds our capacity for practical freedom in habit, his story is one whereby the will emerges from, or arises out of, nature.[32] To render my hypothesis somewhat more concrete, and to begin to appreciate the sense in which freedom qua habitual liberation qualifies as a natural process, it might be useful to mention an example of habit that Hegel classifies under the heading of 'habits of hardening,' namely, the habit of hardening against the sensation of cold. In becoming habituated to cold temperatures, a living or ensouled creature is liberated in that it is no longer completely 'absorbed' by the sensation of cold and, consequently, is 'free' to direct its attention elsewhere (*Enz*, §410). Such a process counts as natural in that it requires only the exercise of capacities that we share with lower animals, in particular, the ability to take in our environment through our senses and react behaviorally to those sensory promptings. And even more elaborate, voluntary habits, like 'habits of skill' consisting in the mastery of a musical instrument, for instance, involve primarily the exercise of the capacities that we share with other animals that I have mentioned. For the cognitive abilities like consciousness or self-consciousness, whose exercise is involved in skills like playing the violin, say, are themselves supposed to emerge from processes of habituation, according to Hegel's discussion of habit in the "Anthropology."[33]

In Hegel's own words, the principal function of his treatment of habit in the "Anthropology" is to account for 'the soul's liberation' and 'its attainment of objective consciousness' (*Enz*, §410Z). Briefly, that account is supposed to go as follows: As a result of the repeated exposure to similar stimuli, ensouled creatures acquire a capacity to 'withdraw' or 'liberate' themselves from such stimuli, from their sensations, urges, desires or other 'natural determinations.' Otherwise put: On account of its repeated exposure to these 'natural determinations,' the soul is no longer 'absorbed in them' or even 'interested in or occupied with them,' Hegel writes (*Enz*, §410). By thus 'liberating' itself, the soul achieves a separation from its affections or determinations that is required for the

31 I take this rejection to be one of the upshots of Hegel's criticisms of Kant's practical philosophy. But I shall not argue for that interpretive claim here.

32 One might object that the thesis that the capacity for practical freedom arises out of nature does not obviously set Hegel apart from Kant in the way that I am claiming, however exactly I spell out that thesis on Hegel's behalf. For in some of his history essays and other lectures, Kant might be taken to be offering an account analogous to the naturalistic position I am claiming to find in Hegel. Kant's account will have to be different from Hegel's, since Hegel's own account relies crucially on habituation whereas Kant takes habitual action and freedom to be incompatible, as we have seen. But Kant might have some naturalistic story nonetheless. Specifically, in his "Conjectural Beginning of Human History" (*MA*), Kant purports to trace 'the first development of freedom from its original predisposition in the nature of the human being' (*MA*, 8:109). Having provided an account of this 'first development,' Kant recapitulates:

> [T]he departure of the human being from the paradise which reason represents to him as the first abode of his species was nothing other than the transition from the crudity of a merely animal nature into humanity, from the go-cart [*Gängelwagen*] of instinct to the guidance of reason, in a word, from the guardianship of nature to the condition of freedom. (*MA*, 8:115)

Despite these programmatic remarks, I do not think that Kant's essay is best read as providing an account of the naturalistic sort I claim to find in Hegel. Kant does lay out a series of enabling conditions for the exercise of our capacity for freedom, as well as a set of consequences of that exercise (for example, that human beings come to regard themselves as the 'end of nature' [*MA*, 8:114]). However, it is hard to see how Kant's account could by his own lights amount to an account of our capacity for freedom (where it comes from and how it works) on the basis of a series of natural or physical phenomena. Kant himself announces towards the beginning of the essay that he will consider the human being 'only after it has already taken a mighty step in the skill of making use of its powers' (*MA*, 8:110). Among the powers whose mastery Kant takes for granted in his account are the capacity to stand and walk upright, to speak and, most importantly, reason or the capacity to think, that is, precisely the capacity that by guiding our behavior in place of instinct makes us free. Kant thus seems to presuppose, rather than explain, human freedom. More generally, and aside from this textual point, it is unclear how Kant *could* provide some sort of naturalistic account of freedom anyway, given his characterization of freedom as a capacity to initiate series of events from outside space and time.

33 On the 'attainment of objective consciousness' out of processes of habituation, see Forman (2010).

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kind of awareness that Hegel associates with objective consciousness. The soul no longer identifies itself with its sensations or other affections but sees itself rather as their bearer, and so as related to, yet distinct from, those affections. With the onset of objective consciousness and other higher forms of spirit, humans in turn become capable of acquiring further habits that are unavailable to lower, non-rational animals, for example, habits of skill like playing the violin.

Admittedly, the kind of 'liberation' achieved by habits of hardening, to which I have alluded, is very different from the distinctively human capacity for practical freedom. So different do the two appear to be, in fact, that it might be difficult to see how one can hope to provide an account of the latter in terms of some kind of habitual liberation, as I propose to do on Hegel's behalf. One way to bring out the difficulty is to note that mechanism, which as we have already seen Hegel associates with habit, is a form of organization that belongs to the inorganic natural realm. And that realm, one might object, certainly seems like an unlikely place to search for and find the materials for an account of practical freedom.

Despite this kind of hesitation, I believe Hegel provides several hints that his account of practical freedom does indeed rely on some story about habitual liberation like the one I am recommending. First, Hegel employs very similar language in discussing the result of habituation, one the one hand, and our capacity for practical freedom, on the other. He describes the first moment of the concept of the will, let us recall, as:

> [T]he element of *pure indeterminacy* … in which every limitation, every content, whether present immediately through nature, through needs, desires, and drives, or given and determined in some other way, is dissolved; this is the limitless infinity of *absolute abstraction* or *universality* … (*PR*, §5)

He describes habituation, for its part, as a process whereby 'the soul makes itself into abstract universal being' (*Enz*, §410), and adds that 'through habit' one achieves a 'liberation from sensations' (§410A). Second, and perhaps more to the point, although we do read that habit has 'the shape of something *mechanical*' (§410Z), Hegel's use of 'mechanical' in this context is arguably synonymous with 'automatic,' roughly, and not a reference to his discussion of mechanism in the "Philosophy of Nature" (or the "Logic," for that matter). This interpretive suggestion finds support in the systematic placement of Hegel's discussion of habit: That discussion is found in the "Anthropology" and not in the "Mechanism" chapter of the "Philosophy of Nature." Moreover, even assuming that 'mechanism' and 'mechanical' are not employed in the loose way I have just suggested, and instead do refer to Hegel's discussion of mechanism in the "Philosophy of Nature," the connection between habit and practical freedom would not thereby be wrecked. For Hegel is adamant that habit (and so mechanism, *ex hypothesi*) 'embraces all kinds and stages of spirit's activity' (§410A), including therefore practical spirit or the will.

Before making good on the hints I have just mentioned, I should explicitly address a further, related objection to the connection between habit and practical freedom that I am attempting to draw. One might worry that the universality and freedom attained through habitual liberation is deficient in that it is 'merely anthropological' (*Enz*, §410Z) and so, the objection goes, cannot provide the model by which to understand the freedom that belongs to the higher stage of objective spirit. The universality and freedom of habit remain 'merely anthropological,' Hegel explains, in that 'although, on the one hand, by habit a man becomes free, … on the other hand, habit makes him its slave' (§410Z).[34]

What should we make of Hegel's remark to the effect that the freedom gained through habit is 'merely anthropological' and so enslaving? Does this remark ruin the connection between habit

34 The passage, from which I am pulling the quotations in this paragraph, reads in full:

> [A]lthough, on the one hand, by habit a man becomes free, yet, on the other hand, habit makes him its slave. Habit is not an immediate, first nature, dominated by the individuality of sensations. It is rather a second nature posited by soul. But all the same it is still a nature, something posited that assumes the shape of immediacy, an ideality of beings that is itself still burdened with the form of being, consequently something not corresponding to free spirit, something merely anthropological. (§410Z)

and practical freedom that I have begun to draw in the preceding paragraphs? To be sure, as I have already noted, the sort of freedom or *Beisichselbstsein* attained by affirming as one's own our ethical requirements and duties is more complex than the freedom that ensouled creatures in general attain in ceasing to be 'absorbed' by their sensations, desires or impulses. Unlike the liberation gained in becoming accustomed to cold temperatures, say, the freedom that belongs to objective spirit requires various social institutions and involves processes of habituation that are more sophisticated (typically voluntary) than the mere exposure to environmental conditions.

However, it would be an overreaction to infer from Hegel's claim that habitual liberation remains 'merely anthropological' that the kind of freedom that belongs to objective spirit does not consist in a form of habitual liberation at all. For first, as we have just seen, Hegel explicitly tells us that habit 'embraces all kinds and stages of spirit's activity' (§410A), hence not only the soul but also objective spirit. Second, and perhaps more importantly, although habit may lead to enslavement or unfreedom, it need not do so. As we will see more clearly below, habitual behavior becomes enslaving only if performed in a manner that is entirely automatic and unreflective. Such automatic conduct is enslaving precisely in that, although it is not simply inborn or instinctive, I no longer regard it as my own free doing. This risk of enslavement notwithstanding, a bit of behavior can be habitual, and so come to me spontaneously or automatically, while still being such that I can back up that behavior rationally if prompted. To express the contrast somewhat more concretely: Someone might fulfill her social role as a teacher or parent, for example, routinely or unreflectively, in a way that renders her a slave to her station. This person would be dominated by some 'other' both in that she is passively subjected to the norms of her social role as to an external imposition, and in that her behavior appears to go on of its own accord, determined completely by her (second) natural impulses or desires. But someone might alternatively fulfill her social role spontaneously and decisively while reflectively endorsing that role (and fulfill the role spontaneously or decisively *precisely because* she reflectively endorses or affirms it). This second person is free or *bei sich* in that she acts in the light of norms that she affirms as her own, as opposed to being dragged into action by her (habitually acquired) desires or impulses. Thus, although enslavement or unfreedom is a risk inherent in habitual behavior, both in its higher objective forms and in its lower anthropological forms, enslavement is by no means an unavoidable outcome of habituation as such.[35]

Now that I have deflected what I take to be the two main sorts of objections to my proposed interpretive view, I go on to spell out the connection between habit and practical freedom. I do so in two steps: First, I pull out an abstract, threefold structure of habituation from cases more complex than the example of hardening against external sensations mentioned above, namely, what Hegel classifies under the heading of 'habits of dexterity' or skill like writing. Second, I apply that threefold structure of habituation to the case of practical freedom as a capacity to respond to ethical requirements.

I begin by providing Hegel's own description of the habit of writing at the end of the "Anthropology" and then identify the general structure of habituation that underlies that description:

> [S]ince the individual activities of man acquire by repeated practice the character of *habit*, the form of something received into … the *universality* of the spiritual interior, the soul brings into its expressions a *universal* mode of acting. … This universal is internally so concentrated to *simplicity* that in it I am no longer conscious of the *particular* differences between my individual activities. That this is so we see, for example, in writing. When we are learning how to write we must direct our attention on every individual detail, on a vast number of mediations. By contrast, once the activity of writing has become a habit with us, then our self has so completely mastered all the

35 The fact that Hegel summarizes the warning that habits can become enslaving with the claim that habitual liberation is 'merely anthropological' suggests that he regards some of the habits he considers in the "Anthropology" (for example, habits of hardening against external sensations) as particularly prone to yield entirely mechanical, unfree behavior. But, as my foregoing discussion is meant to indicate, the risk of enslavement or unfreedom affects all forms of habit, not just the lower, anthropological forms. Indeed, Hegel reminds us of the dangers of habituation not only in the "Anthropology" but also in the context of his remarks about ethical habit in the *Philosophy of Right*. He there writes: 'Human beings even die as a result of habit—that is, if they have become totally habituated to life and spiritually and physically blunted …' (§151A).

> relevant individual details, has so infected them with its universality, that they are no longer present to us as *individual* details and we keep in view only their *universal* aspect (§410Z)

Let us briefly gloss Hegel's account of writing in the preceding passage. In his own words: 'When we are learning how to write we must direct our attention on every individual detail,' every line, trace, movement of the hand and fingers. Once writing has become habitual in us, however, we cease to focus on these 'particular differences' or 'individual details' and consequently, Hegel tells us, our production of strings of symbols takes 'the shape of something mechanical, of a mere natural effect.' In acquiring the skill of writing, that is, we progressively move from a focus on the 'individual details' of our behavior to a consideration of that behavior in its 'universal aspect' or as a mere instance of a general type. By thus abstracting from the 'individual details,' lines or traces of a string of symbols, we open ourselves qua skilled writers to 'other activity and occupations' (§410), including (most obviously) to an occupation with the content or meaning of those written symbols.

Taking this account of writing as an exemplar, we might characterize habituation generally in terms of the following three aspects or moments: (a) In undergoing a process of habituation, the subject ceases to be 'absorbed' by (and thereby liberates herself from) the particular. (b) As a consequence of this process, a mechanical or automatic pattern of behavior sets in. (c) This mechanical behavior in turn allows the subject to adopt the point of view of universality and thus direct her attention to 'other activity and occupations.'[36]

I now attempt to apply this abstract structure to practical freedom as a capacity to respond to, and affirm, ethical requirements. (a) As in the example of a habit of skill, so in the case of ethical habituation, various 'particularities,' that is, natural determinations such as sensible desires or urges, are molded or numbed. Indeed, in acquiring an ethical virtue, conflicting desires are often overcome. (b) However, if the result of this process of ethical habituation were in turn merely a bit of automatic or mechanical behavior, as the second moment mentioned above would have it, then that outcome by itself could hardly count as a case of virtue. As we have seen in II.1, Hegel's description of ethical habit as a second nature is meant to capture features (such as psychological harmony) that mechanical or automatic behaviors appear to paradigmatically instantiate. Nevertheless, virtuous action does not consist for Hegel merely in automatically acting according to duty, or in mechanically performing the same types of actions as the virtuous person, but in doing so for the right reasons or with the right frame of mind. And part of that state of mind involves being capable of reflecting upon and backing up one's action with reasons. (c) Luckily, the abstract structure of habituation extracted from Hegel's example of writing allows us to respect this latter thought in the following way: As in the case of skill, the insensitivity to immediate urges or desires makes room for the subject to step back from the particular and adopt the point of view of universality. In this case, it allows her to direct her view to the idea of freedom itself, and so come to appreciate the authoritativeness of ethical requirements, understood as requirements of freedom. Thus, I submit that habitual or mechanical behavior, for Hegel, is not only compatible with, but necessary for, a conception of ourselves as responsive to ethical requirements.

I end with one of the passages about freedom and nature with which I began. The 'essence' of spirit, let us recall, lies for Hegel in 'freedom from and within the natural' (*VPG1827/28*, 19/71). Our preceding discussion of habituation vindicates this characterization of specifically practical freedom. Indeed, practical freedom as a capacity to respond to ethical requirements involves a liberation *from* our first natural determinations, desires, impulses or urges. But that process of liberation from our immediate determinations occurs, and its result remains, *within* nature. Creatures with rational wills are for Hegel animals capable of undergoing complicated processes

36 Needless to say, the threefold division of habituation should not be confused with Hegel's threefold analysis of the concept of the will discussed in section I. More importantly, however, this threefold division is not intended to carry connotations of temporal succession. The three 'moments' are three sides or aspects of the process of habituation. Habituation no doubt takes time. But (a) the insensitivity towards the particular, (b) the onset of mechanical behavior and (c) the adoption of the point of view of universality do not (or at least need not) occur as separate, successive temporal stages.

of habituation. Having outlined the connection between habitual liberation and practical freedom as a capacity to respond to ethical requirements, I have completed my task in this paper of naturalizing the Hegelian rational will. I hope that, by undertaking this task, I have filled what I take to be a gap in the literature and made a contribution to the broader project of reading Hegel as an ethical naturalist.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Aristotle

NE *Nichomachean Ethics*. Translated by R. Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Kant

All references to the works of Kant are given according to the volume and page number of the *Akademie* edition.

A *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. In *Anthropology, History and Education*, translated by R. Louden and G. Zöller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

KpV *Critique of Practical Reason*. In *Practical Philosophy*, translated by M. J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

MA "Conjectural Beginning of Human History." In *Anthropology, History and Education*, translated by R. Louden and G. Zöller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

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Hegel

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F "Fragment on the Philosophy of Spirit." In *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit: Volume One*, translated by M. J. Petry. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978.

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