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## ANIMAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF SUBJECTIVE SPIRIT

### I

What exactly are the subjective features or capacities that distinguish humans from animals on Hegel's account in the *Encyclopaedia*? Hegel demarcates sharply between animals and humans in a quite traditional way by saying that humans, in contrast to animals, are *thinking* beings.<sup>1</sup> Also, according to what I take to be Hegel's »official account« only humans have *consciousness* (*Bewusstsein*). My topic in this article is a serious problem that the latter thought involves. Given what Hegel means by ›consciousness‹, the idea that animals wholly lack consciousness is incomprehensible. For if it were true, distinctively animal life would be impossible.

In brief, ›consciousness‹ for Hegel stands for what philosophers nowadays call ›intentionality‹. Whereas sensations (*Empfindung*) are a way in which the outer world (in the case of the »outer sensations«) and the inner states or processes of the organism (in the case of the »inner sensations«),<sup>2</sup> appear to the organism without it thereby experiencing the world in terms of *objects* facing it, consciousness is an intentional way of relating to the world that involves a subject-object-relation. Consciousness is *about* objects *for* a subject. The section ›Phenomenology‹ is the place where Hegel discusses various – both theoretical and practical – forms of intentionality, as well as the ›I‹ that is the intentional subject.<sup>3</sup> The sub-section that Hegel titles ›Consciousness as such‹ (*Bewusstsein als solches*) discusses different types, modifications or moments of theoretical intentionality, whereas the sub-section ›Self-consciousness‹ (*Selbstbewusstsein*) discusses types, modifications or moments of practical intentionality.<sup>4</sup>

The problem is at its clearest in the case of the first chapter of the sub-section ›Self-consciousness‹ titled ›Desire‹ (*Begierde*). Being a modification of consciousness in the generic sense, i. e. a form of intentionality, desire is something that animals, on Hegel's official account in the *Encyclopedia*, cannot have. Indeed, Hegel does not use the word ›desire‹ at all in his discussion of the animal's relation to its environment in the main text of the *Encyclopedia* philosophy of nature.<sup>5</sup> But this is puzzling: Isn't it clear that (at least higher) animals are able to grasp things in their environment *as desirable objects*? How else could an animal ever satisfy its needs in the specifically animal way – by searching, and in the case of carnivores hunting, suitable entities to devour them?

1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, Volume 8, Frankfurt/M. 1968, 41–43.

2 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 95–117 (§ 399–401); G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes* (1827–1828), Hamburg 1996, 68–87.

3 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 199–202.

4 Hegel, *Werke* (note 1), vol. 4, 117.

5 The word only appears in the lecture material, see Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 9, 468, 472, 494 and 495, and Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, (note 2), 61 and 164.



Note that having things in view as desirable objects and satisfying needs with them is closely related to, or requires, another capacity: the capacity for having things in view *as objects in space and time*, or in particular locations in relation to oneself. Again, how else could an animal locate an entity, move itself towards it and devour it? This means more trouble for Hegel's official account: The organization of the givens of the outer senses into distinct objects with spatio-temporal identity is something that Hegel discusses in Psychology, in the first chapter of the sub-section ›Theoretical spirit‹ titled ›Intuition‹ (*Anschauung*). As a moment of the functions of spirit as theoretical, discussed in Psychology, it seems that Hegel means intuition, too, to be an exclusively human phenomenon.

The problem is thus the following: if animals lack the capacity for grasping the world in terms of spatiotemporally determinate desirable objects then they seem incapable of animal life. Something has gone wrong and I believe the reason is that on Hegel's official account consciousness requires thinking, and since animals do not think, they cannot have consciousness either.<sup>6</sup> The only solution, it seems, is to find a consistent way to attribute to animals the necessary form of intentionality that they need to live distinctively animal lives. This requires either accepting that there is a form of consciousness that does not require thinking, or accepting that there is a form of thinking that animals are capable of.

What I want to do next is to show that – inbuilt in the *Encyclopedia* – Hegel in fact already has the conceptual means to get his conception of the animal form of life right. That is, the text also includes an »unofficial account« that solves the above problem. I argue that the four chapters marked with  $\alpha$ . of the sections ›Phenomenology‹ and ›Psychology‹ in Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, combined with what Hegel actually says about the animal's relation to its environment in Philosophy of Nature, can be seen as outlining a primitive form of intentionality that animals need in order to be what they are, one that works in some sense *without thinking*.<sup>7</sup> This primitive form of intentionality is something that animals share with uncultivated humans such as young infants.<sup>8</sup>

## II

I have argued elsewhere that the sub-sections ›Consciousness as such‹, ›Self-consciousness‹, ›Theoretical spirit‹ and ›Practical spirit‹ are *parallel* with each other in that the chapters marked with  $\alpha$ . of each of these four sub-sections discuss internally interconnected aspects of the finite subject's epistemic and volitional life: ›Sensuous consciousness‹ (B.a. $\alpha$ ) and ›Desire‹ (B.b. $\alpha$ .) internally interconnected theoretical and practical aspects of intentionality, and ›Intuition‹ (C.a. $\alpha$ .) and ›Practical feeling‹ (C.b. $\alpha$ .) internally interconnected theoretical and practical aspects of mental activity necessary for these forms of intentional relatedness to objects. The  $\beta$ .-chapters are parallel with each other in the same general way, and so are the  $\gamma$ .-chapters.<sup>9</sup> Here our topic is only the  $\alpha$ .-chapters.

In each of the  $\alpha$ .-chapters mentioned we witness Hegel discussing different aspects of the primordial unfolding (*Urteil*) of the subject-object-relation, or intentionality, out of the non-inten-

6 On the theoretical dimension not perception (*Wahrnehmung*) (see Hegel, *Vorlesungen* (note 2), 155), nor even sensuous consciousness (see note 11).

7 See, however, the very end of this article.

8 According to Hegel, in being born, the child progresses from a »vegetative state« to »an animal way of life (*Weise des Lebens*)« Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 78.

9 See H. Ikäheimo, »On the Role of Intersubjectivity in Hegel's Encyclopaedic Phenomenology and Psychology«, in: *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 49/50 (2004), 73–95.



tional mode of givenness of the outer world and the bodily processes in sensations. The »I« (*Ich*) discussed in »Phenomenology« stands as an intentional subject against objectivity. It is *both* (intentionally) *receptive* of the world in that its *outer sensations* are synthesized into *sensuous consciousness* about objects, and *transformative* of them in that its *inner sensations* are transformed into *desire* for some of them. *Intuition* and *practical feeling* (*Praktische Gefühl*) discussed in the corresponding  $\alpha$ -chapters of *Psychology* are the mental activities that bring about this synthesis or translation of sensations into intentions.

Let us take a closer look at this by starting from »Sensuous Consciousness«. According to Hegel, the object of sensuous consciousness is determined, for the subject, as »a being and reflected in itself, further as an immediately *singular*«. <sup>10</sup> Later in the same chapter Hegel characterizes the object of sensuous consciousness as »being, something, existing thing, singular and so on«. <sup>11</sup> These are very abstract characterizations, but we get a preliminary grasp of the structure of the object of sensuous consciousness when we compare it with what it is not – that of the object of perception (*Wahrnehmung*). In perception the subject experiences the world as consisting of objects *with distinct properties*. <sup>12</sup> But if this is what distinguishes perception from sensuous consciousness, how are we then to understand the structure of the object of sensuous consciousness – a singular object which is *not*, for the subject, differentiated in terms of distinct properties? We can figure this out by taking a look at the *practical* dimension of the  $\alpha$ -level.

An essential element of the inner sensations whereby the organism feels its immediate bodily needs is their hedonic value: the agreeable and the disagreeable (*das Angenehme und Unangenehme*). <sup>13</sup> In the chapter »Practical feeling« Hegel thematizes the transformation of the disagreeable sensations of need or lack into an intentional object-relation. Such disagreeable sensations stemming from the tension between the inner determinations of the organism and its actual state – centrally between its need for particular kind of nutriment and current malnutrition – are an immediately felt »ought« (*Sollen*) that »develops«, according to Hegel, »in consciousness«, into a »relationship towards outer objects«. <sup>14</sup> This, on my reading, is the coming about of the most primitive form of practical intentionality or consciousness: *desire*. The primitive subject feels a bodily need and this gets transformed into desire for objects that would abolish the disagreeable sensation by satisfying the need.

In Erdmann's notes from Hegel's 1827-1828 lectures on Philosophy of Subjective Spirit the result of this transformation of felt need into an object-relation is put bluntly: »[t]he lack in me appears as an external object«. <sup>15</sup> This accords exactly with what Hegel says about the object of desire in chapter »Desire: »Self-consciousness knows [...] of itself *an sich* in [an] object, which in this relationship corresponds to the drive.« <sup>16</sup> What Hegel is talking about here is a subjective viewpoint to the world in which nothing else counts other than features that make objects functional for abolishing the disagreeable sensation of lack or need that the subject has. <sup>17</sup> In this sense

10 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 205–6.

11 On the official view »[f]or the animal there is no something, thing, singular« (Hegel, *Vorlesungen* (note 2), 153).

12 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 208–10.

13 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 100–117.

14 *Ibid.*, 290.

15 Hegel, *Vorlesungen* (note 2), 164. See also Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 217: »The [subject] intuits in the [object] its own lack [...]«. On my reading Hegel discusses the same phenomenon at length in § 359 of philosophy of nature, yet without using the intentional vocabulary of »desire« (Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 9, 468–9).

16 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 216.

17 See P. Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, Ithaca and London 1996, 104–110.



the subject »knows itself« (*an sich*, i. e. without realizing this to be the case) in its object, that is, has the object in view only from the point of view of, or signified by, the subject's own organic processes.

But, assuming that we are talking about a primitive subject that cannot think, *how* does the transformation or »development« (*Entwicklung*) of felt need into desire for objects happen? This we can answer by combining the discussions of the  $\alpha$ -chapters of ›Phenomenology‹ and ›Psychology‹ with the discussion of the animal's relation to its environment in the Philosophy of Nature. The answer is: by *instinct*.<sup>18</sup> According to Hegel every animal species relates to a particular selection of features or objects in the world.<sup>19</sup> In his words, each animal has a »non-organic nature« determined by the particularities of its needs as a member of a particular species. The *Zusatz* to § 361 explains this further: »each animal has only a restricted sphere for its non-organic nature [...] which it has to find by *instinct*. [...] [W]hat is present to the animal is this *specific determination* of the grass, moreover of *this* grass, this corn etc. – and *nothing else* [emphasis H. I].«<sup>20</sup>

In other words, an animal subject has in view – or to use the term that Hegel avoids in the Philosophy of Nature, *conscious of* – only what its instinct points out as desirable in its environment. The object *if* »present to« the subject in light of one »*specific determination*«: a particular quality (smell, sound, colour etc.) that makes the object instinctively desirable to it. This, I claim, is exactly what Hegel is talking about in chapter ›Desire‹ of the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, only in other words. The primitive subject does *not subsume* the object under a universal and thereby have a sense of a plurality of objects sharing a property. Rather, what is present for it is always only *this* singular desirable something. This, I claim, is exactly what Hegel is talking about in chapter ›Sensuous consciousness‹, again only with other words. Even if Hegel's official account does not allow it, *in fact* Hegel is talking about the primitive  $\alpha$ -level of consciousness as something that animals are capable of.

Let us now return to the theoretical dimension of the  $\alpha$ -level of consciousness. The question posed above can now be answered: »how are we to understand the structure of the object of sensuous consciousness, which is a singular object but which is not, for the primitive subject, differentiated in terms of distinct properties?« The answer is: it is a singular object that, for the subject, has no other determination than the quality that makes it instinctively desirable to it. As to its logical structure – in being for the subject *identical with one quality* – the object is *being-logically (seinslogisch) determined*.<sup>21</sup>

But Hegel has more to say about the synthesis of such being-logical desirable singular something out of the manifold of sensational material. To see this we need to combine the parallel discussions of the  $\alpha$ -chapters ›Sensuous Consciousness‹ and ›Intuition‹.<sup>22</sup> I noted above that in order for the primitive subject to have in its view a singular object – which we now know is something identical with its desirable quality – and actively to follow it, it needs to be able to grasp it as an object with spatio-temporal identity. This active synthesis that has the deliverances of the five senses as its material is what Hegel calls attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*).

That attention is central for the spatio-temporal synthesis of objects in ›Intuition‹ is not immediately apparent in the text and Hegel seems to hesitate on the issue. Yet, on a rational reconstruc-

18 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 9, 472–5.

19 Ibid., 473–4.

20 Ibid., 475.

21 See P. Redding, *The Logic of Affect*, Ithaca and London 1999, 141, 143.

22 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, § 418 and § 448 speak against this interpretation. Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 252 (§ 448 *Zusatz*) speaks for it: it is »intuition« that makes »the shifting away of sensation from us, a transformation of the sensed into an object which is given outside us.«



tion it makes good sense to think that synthesizing the sensational material of the different outer senses into singular objects with spatio-temporal identity requires focusing attention on and thereby grasping order in the cluster of sensations that an objectively spatio-temporally subsistent thing produces in the subject.<sup>23</sup> Or, as Hegel puts it, one needs »attention, the abstract identical direction of spirit in feelings [...] without which nothing has being for it.«<sup>24</sup> As this formulation suggests, anything has being *for* a subject only as a result of the synthesis of sensations (or »feelings«) that attention brings about. That something is *for* a subject, means that the subject is *conscious of it*.<sup>25</sup>

Note that all of the activities of spirit as *theoretical* really are *activities* (*Tätigkeitsweisen*) and that as such they are interconnected with the subject's *practical* or volitional life in general – with what motivates and directs the subject. What motivates the object-synthesizing attention of the primitive subject is the felt physiological need, and what gives it direction is instinct. It is something in the sight, sound, or smell of an object that instinctively draws the attention of the primitive subject into one »identical direction«, focuses and synthesizes the deliverances of all its relevant senses – and so it grasps a desirable object as a singular unit in some specific location in space and enduring in time. Now it can satisfy its needs like animals do.

### III

Obviously, a *cultivated* human being is capable of much more than the primitive desiring intentionality of the  $\alpha$ -level. In the  $\beta$ -chapters of ›Phenomenology‹ and ›Psychology‹ Hegel discusses *intersubjectively mediated and propositional* aspects of intentionality and the corresponding cognitive-volitional mental activities. Assuming that these are exclusively human capacities, it is thus first here that an exclusively human form of consciousness is at issue. On Hegel's holistic principles, once more elaborate levels of consciousness are at place, they will mediate the  $\alpha$ -level too. Hence the level of primitive object-constitution that in animals and young human infants takes place instinctively is in cultivated humans infused with »thinking«.<sup>26</sup>

Does the distinction between instinctual and thinking mental activities then provide a clear-cut demarcation between humans and animals, or to be more exact, between animals and uncultivated humans on the one hand, and cultivated humans on the other? Hardly. All of the more elaborate cognitive activities discussed in ›Psychology‹, as well as the corresponding aspects of intentionality discussed in ›Phenomenology‹, take learning and habituation.<sup>27</sup> Simply put: cultivation (*Bildung*) is a gradual process. When fully explicated, the demarcation of humans from animals

23 Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, § 448 speaks against this interpretation. Hegel, *Vorlesungen* (note 4), 194–195 speaks for it: »Space and time are the forms of the sensible, forms of intuition. [...] They are [...] ideal forms that do not belong to determinations of feeling as such. This is the activity of intelligence, *attention* to self, the act that posits this content outside of itself in order to make itself free. [emphasis H.I.]«

24 *Ibid.*, 249.

25 In contrast, sensations are *identical with* the subject, not *something for it*.

26 The same happens to sensations.

27 »The form of habit covers all kinds and levels of the activity of spirit« (Hegel, *Werke*, (note 1), vol. 10, 186). In the most general sense »thinking« covers not only what Hegel discusses at the end of ›Theoretical spirit‹ in chapter ›Thinking‹ (C.a.γ.), but is a general name for all of the cognitive activities discussed in ›Psychology‹. On the theoretical ones, see C. Halbig, *Objektives Denken: Erkenntnistheorie und Philosophy of Mind in Hegels System*. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 2002.



in terms of thinking will not turn out to be any simpler a matter than the demarcation in terms of consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

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28 Hegel explicitly acknowledges, on the one hand, that the *I* comes about in children »in an empirically graded way« (Hegel, *Vorlesungen* (note 2), 160), and, on the other hand, that *instinct* allows for degrees, so that it is at its strongest in simple animals and weaker in more developed animals (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, (ed. M.J. Petry), Volume III, London and New York 1970, 167). One is reminded of Hegel's notorious remarks about Africans, the gist of which is that both their subjective capacities and their objective form of life are somewhere between the animal and the fully human. We may ignore Hegel's empirical views about Africans but take in the philosophical implication: the distinction between the animal and the human is not only individually, but also collectively, a matter of degree.

