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Special Issue

# Naturalism and Normativity in Hegel's Philosophy

Edited by  
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# Hegel's Jagged Understanding of Self-Conscious Life

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## 1. The State-of-Art of the Hegelian Studies

The Hegelian studies have been recently improved and widened by an approach of analysis aimed at investigating the nature of the human self-conscious dispositions, which represent the core of the Hegel's thought. In the past, analytical philosophy disregarded thinkers like Hegel and other German classical philosophers because of their frequent and very broad use of generalist notions like spirit, history, absolute knowledge and, obviously, absolute. From the point of view of the analytical methodology, resorting to those words prevents the philosophical investigation from being focused and rigorous in the clarification of the human subjective rationality and its faculties such as perception, thinking, using a language, being an agent and evaluating norms and values. In spite of this previous preclusion, the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel presents many characters of a rigorous and consistent investigation about human rationality and agency accounting for several philosophical issues also addressed by the analytical tradition. The present special issue of *Argumenta* on *Naturalism and Normativity in Hegel's Philosophy* aims at focusing on the analytical aspects connected to the Hegelian philosophy of mind and to his theory of self-conscious life in order to pinpoint his relevant contribution for the understanding of human intelligence and the cultural and political history of human kind.<sup>1</sup> His thought is indeed based on a rigorous analysis of the naturalistic requisites of cognitive and practical disposition and on a systematic criticism towards the transcendental philosophy, which does not link the conditions of knowledge to the empirical and natural constitution of subjectivity. This special issue intends to deal with the affinity of the Hegelian thought to some aspects of the tradition of the analytical and post-analytical philosophy and to focus its naturalistic approach to human cognition and practical self-conscious dispositions.

Actually, Hegel's philosophy has not been totally extraneous to the analytical interest, in fact, W. Sellars inaugurated the analytical reading of this thought by pointing out that the question concerning the empiricism and its fallacy had been already and successfully addressed almost two centuries before him by Ger-

<sup>1</sup> This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 704127.

man thinkers like Kant and Hegel. Particularly Hegel's strategy towards the empiricism does not only entail a robust revision of human knowledge, which he considered as originated from the spontaneous and speculative activity of the self-conscious subject. His criticism also implies a radical revision of rational subjectivity because it takes for granted the assumption that human eagerness to truth and knowledge does not derive from the correspondence of mental contents to external facts, but rather on the development of a frame of concepts and ideas under which reality is explainable and can be grasped. By underlining the spontaneous and inferential character of the conceptual, Hegel like Kant conceives of rationality as a faculty ruled by the internal and autonomous guideline of articulating and defending reasons and concepts, which results independent from the empirical given. Since humans know by means of concepts rather than by means of the information gained from the given and since the given is neither articulated or inferentially grasped, knowledge and cognition have to rely upon this self-ruling disposition of elaborating and evolving concepts and categories of thinking that we can apply onto the empirical data. In this point Hegel's thinking is very similar to the Kantian conclusion about the cooperation of sensitive intuition and intellectual logical deduction of categories for achieving a certain knowledge about reality. It is also very close to Sellars' idea about the logical space of reason as the space in which the normative domain of the ideas shapes our historical and practical dimension and our form of life as rational beings. However, Hegel's approach to the conceptual results to be much wider than those elaborated by Kant and Sellars because he stresses the fact that the conceptual is effective even out of the empirical domain of facts, having no internal border of application. In fact, whereas following Kant and Sellars categories and concepts are inferentially articulated even though their validity is conditioned and limited to the application to the empirical facts, for Hegel the conceptual has no external borders of application since the distinction between thinking and reality is considered by him as a moment of a dialectical development of knowledge (McDowell 1996). In other words, the subject-object opposition is for Hegel the necessary self-distinction of the subject investigating its own cognitive faculty as an autonomous disposition differing from the bare empirical fact. The entire modern philosophy from Descartes onwards gives an account of the different roles of reason and sensibility, i.e. concepts and empirical facts, in achieving knowledge. Following Hegel such distinction has to be conceived as formal and should not jeopardize the identity of thinking and reality when thinking is conceived as a matter of self-conscious life. McDowell (1996) is perfectly right in maintaining that the distinction of mind and world in the Hegelian philosophy is overcome by making recourse to a deployment of the conceptual that is not strictly bounded to the empirical application like in Kant. The conceptual is for Hegel the cognitive tool by which the historical and self-conscious subject grasps the formal and a-priori structure of reality, what makes the reality itself accessible and knowable. In his philosophy *Das Logische*, the substantive of the adjective "logical", is the fundamental normative element characterizing self-consciousness' disposition to understand reality under orders of concepts autonomously and inferentially deduced. The Science of Logic aims at demonstrating that a-priori knowledge is possible even when it is applied to unconditioned and non-empirical objects, what was precluded by the Critique of Pure Reason by I. Kant. In this way, Hegel supplies us with a compelling contribution about the nature of the normative and its elaboration by defining

its extension, role and relevance in comparison to mere empirical facts. His position against both empiricism and naive realism is supported by an analytically well defended conception of the inferential space of reasons in which the conceptual is conceived as the instrument for grasping the logical structure of the relations constituting reality. The *Science of Logic* should not be interpreted, hence, as a metaphysical text about the entire, but rather as a book about the fundamental categories of thinking, their application and validity. The question concerning the ontological status of these categories is just a default question that Hegel answers by underlining that in his system substance is also subject and consequently the truth of the substance is already held in the subjective cognitive stances. Beyond the idealist question concerning the subjective nature of the substance due to the fact that the truth of the substance is the thinking subject itself, the Hegelian philosophy provide a consistent theoretical apparatus by which we understand the nature of the normative, its inferential articulation and how it applies to reality by determining knowledge and the socio-historical dimension.

## 2. Hegel's Moderate Naturalism

Hegel's contribution does not only represent the epistemological defense of the deductive disposition of using and articulating concepts, it also deals with the question of their naturalistic status evolving an original version of naturalism. Since the normative character of the concept is tightly linked to a self-conscious living subject, one cannot understand the nature of the normativity without accounting for the living and biological dispositions connected to the use of the concepts. In this sense, any investigation upon the Hegelian naturalism represents the evolution of the inferential approach to his *Science of Logic* and theory of self-consciousness inaugurated by Sellars and carried on by scholars like B. Brandom and J. McDowell in the '90s.

Naturalism has been often regarded as a pure analytical outlook to the question related to the outset of the human cognitive stances since it accounts for the natural conditions of the mental and linguistic contents. The main question of naturalism is whether any mental content corresponds to a specific and identifiable natural circumstance that can be either an organic and biological property or a physical feature, which can also be investigated by empirical sciences. Some naturalists, often referred to as physicalists, go further and claim that for every mental stance there must be a correspondent physical state that can be exactly localized in the brain and that there would not be any thought without the fulfillment of distinctive and related chemical-physical conditions in the brain. This kind of radical naturalism disregards the importance of non-physical factors both fostering the acquisition and elaboration of linguistic and cognitive dispositions and also specifying the nature of the individual intelligence. Moreover, radical naturalism and physicalism are devoted to a sort of physical causation that enormously undermine the role of the autonomous learning and thinking, which are necessary for human cognition intended as a faculty borne by free and autonomous subjects. They, in fact, maintain a kind of physical determinism in knowledge without accounting for the process itself of cognitive competencies acquisition, which is the result of a progressive integration into a linguistic shared surrounding in which these competencies are fundamentally shared and socially transmitted. Therefore, the localization itself of any cognitive stance by the identification of the related physical status does not explain the constitution itself of

the rational subject able to bear it. This physicalist attitude has repercussions on several natural sciences, among them the human brain and cognitive ones, that are induced to conceive of the neurons activation they can observe with modern devices as the locus and cause of a specific cognitive content or disposition. However, this alters the logical sequence of thought production because it considers thinking as an activity caused by a natural phenomenon whereas it is rather the result of the autonomous elaboration of contents and ideas by a biological and rational subject. In other words, thinking cannot be triggered by something empirically observable because this would jeopardize the fundamental epistemological principle that thinking is the outcome of autonomous learning and elaboration of contents. The egregious mistake of some natural scientists and neuroscientists is indeed based on the idea that the possibility of observing the brain processing or when some neuron fires is equivalent to the possibility of discovering what produces the cognitive activity itself. However, since this activity is logically related to a process of autonomous learning it cannot be externally determined, namely triggered by factors independent from their bearer. The fact that the bearer of a cognitive stance is also the body in which brain processing occurs, does not solve the question of what produces cognition. Firstly because a subject is just not its own body, but rather a very composite entity with social, adaptive, evolutive and above linguistic dispositions. Secondly, cognition cannot be reduced to empirical and observable facts because these are the outcome of external causation, whereas any cognitive capacity is the result of autonomous elaboration, namely something that has to be explained by accounting for the inwardness of some subject. German classical philosophy represents an outstanding contribution to this issue because it is properly based on the investigation of subjectivity intended as the possibility to ground knowledge in a certain basis. As Paul Franks showed in a compelling book (Franks 2005), the entire epistemological struggle of modern philosophy aimed at founding knowledge on sure premises and ended when Kant highlighted that a foundation should start with the investigation addressing the transcendental conditions on which the activity of thinking the object relies. Hegel's crucial contribution to this issue is based on the idea that cognition is the outcome of natural requisites of the subject rather than of transcendental conditions. Relating thinking and true knowledge to the living and natural features of the individual means assuming a form of moderate naturalism that does not disregard the role of the social, cultural and historical surrounding in the development of self-conscious attitudes.

### 3. The Continuity of Life and Mind

Instead of taking for granted a natural causation on thinking, Hegel, in fact, claims that the biological conditions of the living organism render it different from phenomena deriving from external and mechanical causation, which we observe through the empirical sciences. In life there are, in fact, logical requisites of self-determination and inwardness that presume a teleological conceptuality and a vital force determining the living individual as an autonomous agent. Since biological functions cannot be accounted for by making recourse to the principle of cause-effect, they are not caused by some external and independent factor, but rather by means of an enactive principle explaining how any biological organism brings into effect rules and norms determining its form of life. How Hegel correctly describes, life changes the way a system interacts with the surroundings



because it brings into the scene the dimension of self-reference and self-determination. Whereas in a mechanism we always describe something as the effect of some external causation, accounting for life means investigating a system that is based on a self-referential network of living functions aimed at self-preservation. This means that external causation has a minor role in the description of the network itself, for which the external environment represents something useful for the maintaining of itself (oxygen, nutrients and, for evolved organisms, biological niches). The living organism establishes a surplus of significance over the external world because the latter does affect the former in terms of providing nutrients and biochemical substance and not in terms of mechanical causation. In other words, something is not intrinsically nutrient for an organism, but rather by virtue of relational features linked to the organism's characteristics. This means that life is a different kind of relational phenomenon than mechanism, because whereas in mechanism the effect is consequent to the cause, in life the effect is linked to the self-relational nature of the living organism. In fact, the assimilation of nutrients does not change the characteristics of the organism, but rather it is just for sake of the maintenance of its already given network of functions.

The *Science of Logic*, stressing the radical difference between life and mechanism, reminds us that also the cognitive disposition cannot be explained in terms of mechanical causation but rather in terms of attitudes of a living and self-conscious subject. Whereas other living species enact norms for sake of a biological homeostasis, i.e. the maintenance of the organic network of functions, the rational species brings into effect an universal principle of good life due to its self-conscious trait. In self-conscious life the normative does not barely depend on the organic functionality, but it is rather shaped by the inferential articulation and comparison of concepts, which are naturally linked to the self-aware attitude of the individual belonging to this species. Such articulation is socially sustained because the acknowledgement of ideas is a matter of self-conscious life and not simply of individual life, namely it determines our species and the course of the human civilization. Therefore, also having a cognitive stance is primarily a matter of self-consciousness because it is the result of having specific competencies and skills necessary for articulating and defending ideas in the different fields of knowledge. Such skills are socially acknowledged because also knowledge is evolved by means of shared practices, which are part of the history of the human civilization (Tomasello 2014). Self-conscious life is a variation of biological life, which already has elements of self-reference and self-determination in an unaware form. This is the core of what characterizes Hegel's moderate naturalism. In fact, self-conscious life is the form of life able to sustain a self-description, namely the definition of what is good and what is bad for itself by being aware of what it means being humans. This has many points in common with Philippa Foot's philosophy of action particularly when she claims that the good for the humans has to be found in the natural characteristic of their species rather than in transcendental and moral principles of action. Goodness for humans has to do with a specific practical intelligence, called by Aristotle *phronesis*, which defines what has to be called good for humans and what should not (Foot 2001). This means that self-conscious life establishes the nature of its own species by means of a general categorization of what is a good form life, deciding so on the course and development of human culture and civilization. This is possible because it determines the practical dimension by setting up universal principles of agency and thinking and

by evolving the concept of truth, which is independent by particular manifestations of the human intelligence. In other words, it creates a social space of reasons and concept in which ideas, values, virtues, information, knowledge, etc. are assessed and socially acknowledged by the guideline of the force of the better reason (Brandom 1994). Since Hegel's thought explains knowledge, self-consciousness and truth as originating in the naturalistic requisites of our biological species, it accounts for sociality, culture and history as the outcome of the self-conscious attitude of deciding what is good and what is bad for our own form of life. Every expression of human intelligence from the empirical sciences to social interaction, and to the constitution of advanced cooperative institutions like politics and states are explainable by making recourse of that kind of self-referentiality we observe in every living organism that Hegel often refers to as *self-referential absolute negative unity* (Hegel SL: 743). This definition describes the kind of relation a living subject brings into being with the environment: absolute negation of external conditioning by the reference to its own internal network of biological functions. When this self-referentiality is aware we have human intelligence as the premise of social space of reasons and the evolution of the world human history.

#### 4. Hegel's Theory of Self-Consciousness

This kind of naturalism does not conceive of the natural premises as what causes self-consciousness because this would jeopardize the fundamental truth that human consciousness is based on freedom, independence and self-determination. It rather maintains that the biological substratum is like inhabited by what we call consciousness, which is the result of a process of acculturation and acquisition of universal habits and believes that they are socially evaluated and acknowledged. In this sense, Hegel's philosophy of mind is also very close to the modern conception of embodied cognition. The process of formation of self-consciousness is the result of a dialectics of life and sociality in which consciousness faces the condition of being a subject with both material needs and the disposition to experience acculturation and integration within a social context. Self-consciousness is hence not independent from the broader conception of spirit [*Geist*], which is the frame of the social rules, rights, laws and historical identity holding together human cooperation and interaction. This sort of extended mind is what shapes individual self-consciousness in his process of achieving independence and freedom within the socio-historical dimension of its present time. As also P. Pettit (1996) claims, we could not have any human intentionality at all without acknowledging the effective impact this common mind exerts upon the individual one. Human cognitive dispositions are, hence, the result of a process of integration within a social surrounding that determines the brain process itself, namely what can be empirically observed by modern devices. This is consistent with what Hegel claims when he states that "mind has for its presupposition the nature, of which it is the truth and for that reason its absolute prius" (Hegel PM: 381). This passage points out that mind is neither a mere outcome of nature or emergent from the natural dimension, but rather it requires to be understood by investigating the reciprocal dependence and crossed stratification of natural and self-conscious life. In other words, cognitive dispositions are not to be explained as merely separated and caused by natural features of the brain, but rather as shaped by the relation they have with natural prerequisites. This approach is very close to the so called connectivism in the neurosciences that claims that brain's features are steadily being

changed by the cognitive and moral experiences the subject is exposed to because in the brain every change is the change of both the software and the hardware (Goldblum 2001). Mind and brain are not, hence, two different moments of a bottom-up development because this would undermine the possibility to understand their interdependence and permanent connection.

The fact that there cannot be a mind outside the body and that it needs to be embedded in order to have the functions it has, is one of the most important achievement of the Hegelian thinking in comparison to the previous modern philosophical tradition in which soul, mind and thinking are conceived as distinct from the body because of their divine origin. Following Hegel, it is through the relation with nature that spirit can both exist and be the truth of nature for it represents the living activity by which self-conscious beings think the practical achievement of the human life as something different from mere nature (Pinkard 2012: 98-102). Whereas nature is "permanence of the otherness" (Hegel PN: 247) [*Verharren des Andersseins*], spirit is a sort of normative and social substance shaped by the reflexive activity and yielding a "return from otherness" (Hegel PS: 105) of nature [*Rückkehr aus dem Anderssein*]. This coming back represents the characteristic of self-consciousness to reflexively refuse the independence of the external world and to understand it as a framework of normative relations whose focal centre is self-consciousness itself. This kind of reflexion cannot be exerted by pure nature in which otherness persists due to the externality and necessity of the natural law of causality (Hegel PN: 248). It must be exerted by a being having an internal self-regulative system of agency and thinking and a self-sustaining objectivity by which it reproduces autonomously itself. This self-sustaining system of agency and thinking is based on the dynamism of life because only the biological organism has the fundamental natural patterns for attaining this sort of self-related and autonomous characteristic.

Hegel's conception of human cognition originates from a jagged understanding of self-conscious life that is treated as the fundamental feature to understand human civilisation, knowledge, agency, ethics, politics, etc. The constitution of this subject out of natural requisites is the core of its relation to the environment and what explains the history of the human species and the diverse forms of socialization. When we address Hegel's naturalism we have, hence, to deal with several outcomes of his approach to self-consciousness spreading out from epistemological, to sociological, cognitive, moral and historical aspects. This happens because the simple explanation of the kind of natural relation the self-conscious sets up with the otherness entails a concatenation of behavioral results that clarify the nature of our species if they are unitarily grasped. The Hegelian project to derive human intelligence from a natural and empirical requisite such as the desire, rather than to analyze it transcendental and abstract conditions, brings him to deliver a consistent conception of human life with multiple repercussions.

## 5. The Contributions in this Special Issue

All contributions of the present special issue are devoted to investigate how Hegel deals with the relation between nature and normativity in order to understand the social, normative and historical dimension out of natural premises. Deligiorgi's article tackles the epistemological aspects linked to the Hegelian naturalism and particularly it deals with the question about the continuity of thought and nature. Already Kant highlights that the normative dimension of the concepts contributes

to knowledge by distinguishing itself from the natural domain of the given. However, Kant disunites the two domains of normativity and the given by stressing the impossibility of knowing the real substance of the *noumenon*. Following Deligiorgi, Hegel's effort to unify knowledge is centered on the notions of self-knowledge and self-consciousness, what changes the characteristics of the cognitive dispositions, rendering them more natural. Hegel's mindedness appears to be the mark of his project to unify norms and nature by keeping them together as an act of self-reference and self-determination. Elena Ficara's article deals with the question of the naturalness of the Hegelian logics and defends the idea that the validity of the conceptual is strictly connected to the natural character of the categories. The natural character of the logical concepts is a classical epistemological question spreading out from Plato to Russell and representing a crucial point for the foundation of logics and thinking. Hegel's novelty consists in connecting the categories to self-conscious life and to the constitution of a thinking subject out of natural and biological requisites. As also Deligiorgi maintains, the truth of the categories is based on the natural character of their own deduction by means of the synthetic and autonomous disposition of human rationality.

Ciavatta's contribution introduces the question about the relation/opposition between nature and spirit, which represents the core of the Hegelian naturalism. The author claims that Hegel overcomes this opposition by evolving a notion of "spiritualized nature", a domain with a distinctive ontological status that evolves historically and socially. Bird-Pollan's article interestingly deals with the opposing claims that mind (*Geist*) has to be understood out of natural requisites and that it is also self-legislating. The opposition is represented by the fact that whilst a natural element is externally determined, mind is expected to autonomously formulate the principles of its own agency. Bird-Pollan correctly accounts for the idea that the first person perspective should be the starting point for the examination of the relationship of nature and normativity. This can explain the self-unfolding characteristic of self-consciousness, which originates out of natural requisites but evolves normative frames of agency and thinking by means of a first person perspective. In fact, only this perspective can explain the negativity of self-conscious life that conceives of nature as otherness, negates it and sets up a self-referential order of concepts, norms and values.

Barba-Kay's article addresses the relationship self-conscious life establishes with the condition of being alienated from the historical dimensions of accepted and shared norms. Alienation is a distinctive Hegelian topic and this contribution interestingly deals with it from a naturalistic perspective delivering a novel interpretation derived from the transformative character of the theoretical methodology of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Dean Moyar's contribution deals with Hegel's conception of freedom as the result of what he calls "reversal of consciousness", namely the transformative and adaptive character of self-consciousness to evolve a distinctive shape within the historical contexts. This delivers a conception of freedom as the result of a developmental process, rather than as a brute fact like in the transcendental outlook by Kant. Moyar's merit is to highlight that the adaptive and living character of self-consciousness dramatically changes our understanding of what freedom is by organically connecting life and the normative. This entails that the notion itself of liberty is not what is transcendently deduced by reason, but rather something that is socially acknowledged and embodied by the historical becoming of consciousness and social interaction.

Finally, Andrew Werner's article raises objections to the very recent interest in organic life in the Hegelian studies by underlining the fact that the notion of organism requires to appeal to something external to the organism itself in order to understand its development. I personally do not agree with this criticism because it disregards the fact that the compelling aspects of Hegel's idea of organism are based on the assumption that life establishes a distinctive relationship with the external reality, which differs from the relation of cause and effect. The kind of "surplus of significance" (Varela 1979) of life over mechanical world is what makes organisms able to enact the normative principles of their own homeostasis, namely of their own wellness, making this effort the principle of every dialectical relation to the otherness. Therefore, it does not seem to me inappropriate to link the speculative character of reason to the features of the organic life at all because the former already has speculative elements of interaction with the surroundings even though in an unaware form. Nonetheless, Werner's contribution has the merit to point out that we can only understand the living organism if we account for its relational property, rather than if we conceive of it as an independent and isolated unity.

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# Science, Thought and Nature: Hegel's Completion of Kant's Idealism

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## *Abstract*

Focusing on Hegel's engagement with Kant's theoretical philosophy, the paper shows the merits of its characterisation as "completion". The broader aim is to offer a fresh perspective on familiar historical arguments and on contemporary discussions of philosophical naturalism by examining the distinctive combination of idealism and naturalism that motivates the priority both authors accord to the topics of testability of philosophical claims and of the nature of the relation between philosophy and the natural science. Linking these topics is a question about how the demands of unification—imposed internally, relative to conceptions of the proper conduct of philosophical enquiry—can accommodate realism, a key element in establishing disciplinary parity between philosophy and the natural sciences. The distance that ultimately marks Kant's and Hegel's answers to this question justifies the interpretative claim about completion, while the conceptual patterns exemplified in the posing of the question and in their shared assumptions about its philosophical importance justifies the reconstructive claim about "idealist naturalism".

*Keywords:* Naturalism, Unification, Realism, Actuality, Regulative and Constitutive ideas, System, Dialectic.

*I believe that everything that happens  
is natural even if we do not  
know the cause of it*

(Sophie to Leibniz, 20/30 October 1691)<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction: Idealist Naturalism

Characteristic of philosophical naturalism is the aspiration to bring philosophy close to the natural sciences. From a historical perspective, particularly interesting is a set of projects that seek to naturalise philosophy in order to

<sup>1</sup> Leibniz 2011: 101.

secure its traditional ambitions in synthetic theory construction. The aim is to establish continuity between philosophy and the natural sciences not through methodological convergence or reduction, but by assigning to the natural sciences the role of an external tribunal on substantive philosophical claims.<sup>2</sup> A well-discussed example, which illustrates how such a tribunal might function, uses STR, a scientific theory that does not privilege any frame of reference as giving the real or most fundamental answer. STR counts against the philosophical position of presentism, which states that only what is present exists; natural sciences can be called to adjudicate a philosophical dispute.<sup>3</sup>

The historical positions I want to discuss in this paper share the concern with testing substantive a priori claims—for Kant, left unchecked, pure reason risks stultification by antinomy, for Hegel, thought without proper bounds degenerates to mere abstraction and indeterminateness<sup>4</sup>—yet, instead of turning to natural science for help, they undertake to renew metaphysics, by showing that philosophy is capable of self-testing and has a legitimate claim to disciplinary autonomy.

Without ignoring the force of socio-historical reasons, such as the worldly success and academic prestige of the natural sciences, there is an important theoretical reason that explains the modern move towards science. Functioning as a hidden premise is the Humean thought that reason does not have its own domain. If this is accepted, then one can engage in any number of critical renewals of metaphysics, without seeing a point in defending the disciplinary autonomy of philosophy.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of the paper is to show what happens when this premise is not accepted in conjunction with acceptance of the need for testing philosophical claims and for proximity to the natural sciences. This conceptual space is occupied, I will argue, by Kant and Hegel. This claim does not amount to and does not aspire to be a novel interpretation of their work, it is rather an attempt to cast some familiar arguments in a different light, that cast by the discernibly similar concerns of a group of contemporary naturalists. The main advantage of this way of presenting matters is the broadening of the context of justification of certain idealist theses, beyond the historical one of their gestation and formulation. To emphasise this point I shall refer to “idealist naturalism” as a genus with two species.<sup>6</sup> I introduce below the salient features of the genus by

<sup>2</sup> For a representative range of views that explicitly link meta-philosophical issues, such as those outlined here, with a favoured version of the relation between philosophy and science characteristic of contemporary philosophical naturalism, see Hawley 2006, Maudlin 2007, Papineau 2011. I am not implying that the scientific tribunal is the only tool in the contemporary naturaliser’s critical arsenal, but it is prominent among metaphysical naturalisers.

<sup>3</sup> The rejection of presentism does not render the competing position, eternalism, true. For illuminating discussion of this example that highlights the complexities of what I call here, using Kant’s metaphor, a “tribunal” see Hawley 2006.

<sup>4</sup> The indeterminacy of bad metaphysics is vividly illustrated in the “Preface” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as “the night where all cows are black” (Hegel 2005: 94).

<sup>5</sup> The thought here is that criticism of metaphysics does not amount to its rejection; the point is nicely made in Callender 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise indicated by the context of the discussion and stated explicitly, e.g. footnote 16, I will not be using “naturalism” in any of its bewildering varieties; since I find I am in agreement with those who doubt the usefulness of general applications of the term in philosophy; see M. De Caro’s *Introduction* to Putnam 2016.

focusing on a small methodological difference with substantive implications about the nature of the task at hand. This difference marks out decisively the idealist from the contemporary naturalist; simply put, the nature of the continuity between philosophy and the natural sciences gives rise to a first order task, whereas the testing of philosophical claims, without cutting philosophy off from all other disciplines, with analogous claims to adding to our cognitive stock, is a second order task.

(i) “Continuity”, as I shall use the term from now on, describes a first order philosophical task; philosophy must offer *support* for the work of the natural sciences. Specifically, philosophy must make available to empirical science a realistic account of the relation of thought and nature that does not require supernatural appeal (to a divine epistemic guarantor for example). If philosophy succeeds in this task, the gain is twofold: science is explanatorily self-sufficient and it is informative about things, not about the ideas in the mind.

(ii) “Testing” describes a second order task: to ensure that the content of a priori reasoning is sound. The reason that testing is plausibly an internal matter is related to the first order task. On the one hand, the sort of realism sketched as desideratum for the first order task may be unobtainable. So that task may fail. It is, however, a *possible* task for philosophy. This not a historical concession. Rather philosophy can engage in the supportive task *because* the two disciplines belong to the same genus: rationally organised thought. Once this is foregrounded, it is not unreasonable to expect that philosophy will have something to say about the nature of this genus. Asking philosophy to say something about the nature of thought is not outrageous, but does assume a degree of faith in philosophy’s own critical tools and methods. Internal testing in turn presupposes a degree of disciplinary autonomy.

But now it should be obvious that the challenge consists in holding (i) and (ii) together; other things being equal, one has still to establish the downward transition from setting out what is philosophically achievable—the second order task about the nature of thought in general and its implications for sub-species of the genus—to the first order task. The challenge is to show how and why whatever is found to belong to the genus of rationally organised thought has anything to do with the world we found.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Kant: Unity and the World

A more prosaic way of saying that philosophical claims answer to a philosophical tribunal is to say that philosophy has its own method, specifically that it has a method that is distinct from those of the natural sciences. The question then arises how can the claims its tribunal vindicates have any bearing on the natural sciences? Kant’s answer is that internally tested claims about the fundamental character of rational thought, *whether* such thought is justified a priori or a posteriori, yield results that also have a role in sustaining realism about the relation between thought and nature. I will seek to show what counts in favour of this bold claim by reconstructing first Kant’s response to the second order problem about testing and in the following section his defence of realism that addresses continuity.

<sup>7</sup> I take the phrase, “the world we found”, from Sacks 1989.



## 2.1. Unification as a Goal of Science and of System

Kant solves the problem of testing of philosophical claims by providing a cognitive goal, which names a value that is sought across *all* domains of rationally organised thought that aims to yield cognitive gains. The assumption that there is one such goal is debatable.<sup>8</sup> Contextually, however, the idea that there is a single goal to enquiry that can also function as its guiding value, to which any other values are subordinate, makes sense in light of the goal articulated by Kant's rationalist predecessors, to map in a systematic way asymmetrical ground/grounded relations; attaining this goal enables the enquirer to realise the value of full rational transparency about all phenomena. One important formulation of this epistemic goal presented as a principle that directs enquiry is PSR, the principle of sufficient reason. In some of its stronger interpretations, in Leibniz, PSR motivates the search for a reason that is causally powerful as well as explanatorily complete and given the demandingness of the "why?" question only a supernatural reason that combines creative power and elective rationality can satisfy.<sup>9</sup> One of the results of Kant's testing of philosophical claims is that such reason is unavailable. From an external perspective, that Kant reaches this result is of minor interest, if reaching it requires other commitments that, other positions which consider themselves theoretically less burdened with such traditional expectations; I will consider some of these arguments, to see how Kant's position holds against them.

Kant's solution to the second order problem about testing is to accept the intuitive appeal of PSR but turn the principle on its head. PSR assumes that there is a systematic whole and sets the task of enquiry as tracing the connections that sustain the whole. Kant makes "unification" a goal for thought (*Einheit*).<sup>10</sup> Very generally put, the aim of rationally organised thought is the attainment of unity (see Ak 18:225). The basic function of unity is the identification of a domain of enquiry through general rules that characterise the objects belonging to the domain, concepts that are appropriate for these objects, in the sense that they yield claims that can be adjudicated within the domain and set the standard of epistemic expectations appropriate to the domain.<sup>11</sup> Compared to

<sup>8</sup> A good reference here is Thomas Kuhn (1977: 330-39), who in attempting to mitigate the impression of his influential theory of scientific revolution, sought to identify objective values, such as accuracy, consistency, simplicity, scope and fruitfulness, which have a good claim in fact to drive cognitive efforts in science, but more important can form a sort of scientific virtue ethics for choice theory. Though Kuhn does not use this terminology, his alertness to the development of each virtue, interpretative nuances and the difficulties of having maximal instances of all in each case suggest sympathy with a virtue-ethicist approach.

<sup>9</sup> By "explanatorily complete", I mean a thesis that connects truth and explanation: given some proposition the true reason that explains it belongs to a whole chain of reasons that even for contingent truths is ultimately a priori and dependent on the divine creative act and choice (see VE II 275-78; Gr 287-91 and GIV 427-63).

<sup>10</sup> *Einheit* of course is "unity". I use "unification" to describe the project of unifying, its conditions, rules and degrees of attainment, that allow the value to be variously realisable. The significance of this will emerge at the end of this section.

<sup>11</sup> To clarify: epistemic expectations are about the nature and strength of the criterion and/or process we use to assess beliefs in the domain (what some epistemologists call "warrant"). Although Kant deals with the more familiar topics in epistemology about opinion, knowledge and belief in the end of the *Critique*, in the third section of the "Can-

PSR, unification adds an extra step of reflection about the *sort* of reason we seek and the sort of object domain in which such a reason *can* explain.<sup>12</sup> Domain specification allows for specific claims to be tested in their appropriate domain, but also most importantly it allows kinds of claims about objects in a domain to be tested in light of the epistemic standard expected and achievable within the domain. This very general account leaves a lot of questions, such as how are unifiers for domains chosen, how are epistemic standards set, whether they are revisable, and so on. I will deal with these larger issues by engaging first with a much narrower application of unification in the domain of science, both to add some detail about the attractions of unification and create a foil for the distinctive features of the Kantian variety.

Kant famously describes science as a “a whole of cognition ordered according to principles” (Kant 2004: 14). This claim anticipates twentieth century arguments in favour of unification presented by Michael Friedman, and subsequently, in a more programmatic fashion, by Philip Kitcher.<sup>13</sup> Friedman sought to recover a non-psychological conception of understanding that tells us what is of value in scientific explanation, namely that it “reduces multiplicity of unexplained, independent phenomena to one” (Friedman 1974: 15). This unification “increases our understanding of the world by reducing the total number of phenomena that we have to accept as ultimate or given” (ibid.).<sup>14</sup> Kitcher (1989) argues that unification can replace available models of explanation, because it reduces fundamental incomprehensibilities and by showing how explanations are parts of sets, it allows connections to be made across regions of the set. So unification encompasses gains we ordinarily value in scientific enquiry: it is generative—“can be used in the derivation of a large numbers of sentences which we

on of Pure Reason” (A 820/B 848- A 831-B 859) and extensively in his *Lectures on Logic*. So throughout this section “epistemic” will be a reference to the set of issues just specified and not the relation of belief and knowledge or knowledge and truth, although limited mention of these latter topics will become relevant while treating the “epistemic” issues just specified. It is also the case that epistemic issues of that sort have a semantic dimension.

<sup>12</sup> The claim rests on the assumption, which I also attribute to Kant, is that explanation is not the only task reasons fulfill, they also justify, make plausible, make mandatory, make possible, make good until further notice and so on.

<sup>13</sup> Friedman (1974: 8) and Kitcher (1981: 508) trace antecedents in classical work on explanation; that they are also both extensively engaged in Kant scholarship is perhaps not unrelated to their sensitivity to the value of unification. But just a Kantian look at the classical nomological account of explanation would find the latter fatally incomplete. Briefly DN starts from the basic description of scientific tasks as finding answers for “why?” questions that arise about the “phenomena in the world of our experience” (Hempel and Oppenheim 1948: 136), these answers take the form of the discovery—or formulation—of law-like generalisations, which function as major premises in arguments that particular phenomena to count as instances of the law. What is perplexing, from a Kantian perspective, is the assumption that there is a link between major and minor premise. Absent support from a realist conception of a creative divine will, to which Kant’s rationalist predecessors were able to appeal, law-like generalisations are *mere* unification devices for a range of different phenomena.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the unifiers that permit this overall reduction of what we accept as brute, need not be intelligible, they render things familiar but may in themselves be “strange” or “unfamiliar”; since what matters are the relations of intelligibility they make possible within and across sets of phenomena.

accept" (1981: 514) and economical, because uses "few patterns of arguments" and hence minimizes "the number of types of premises we must take as underived" (1981: 529).<sup>15</sup>

Critics argue that unificationist accounts promulgate a long defunct ideal of systematicity. Nancy Cartwright, for example, argues that the expectation that our knowledge of the world can be held together in one unified whole is dubious; a more fruitful approach that is also truer to actual scientific practice is to embrace local unities (Cartwright 1983: 3-4, and 2000). Accepting the proposal, renders the use of "world" somewhat forced, since all we may speak of is the regions to which our concepts are addressed or perhaps temporal stretches during which our concepts hold. The challenge is explicitly anti-realist and anti-foundationalist. Shorn of the ambition to have non-discursive content as its object, unification continues to play a useful role directed to cognitive practices, by alerting us to look at what holds together the community of enquirers, such as, shared methodology, sets of interests and so on.<sup>16</sup>

Two important points emerge from this anti-unificationist challenge. First, and irrespective of how contemporary unificationists defend their positions, Kant seems vulnerable to the criticism that he is simply in the grip of an obsolete model.<sup>17</sup> However, as I will argue shortly, this picture is back to front: it is the need for testing that drives Kant's unificationist proposal, not some residual attachment to systematicity.

Second, the anti-unificationist arguments cast light in the incipient *antirealism* of contemporary unificationism. It is telling, for example, that, in another paper, Friedman (1997) vindicates a role of philosophy in science as mediator between Carnapian external questions; philosophy provides the concepts that enable communication among different linguistic frameworks, and while these concepts and the theories to which they belong may be transitory and herme-

<sup>15</sup> "Science uses the same patterns of derivation again and again for different phenomena and in doing so it shows us how to reduce the types of facts we accept as ultimate or brute" (Kitcher 1986: 504). There are both more recent versions of unificationism and some parallels I left unexplored between epistemic and metaphysical aspects of reduction: the ability to place a maximum number of diverse phenomena under a small number that are accepted as brute lends itself to questions about ontological basicness and hierarchy, which are important but not relevant to my argument.

<sup>16</sup> I run together here different projects: Catherine Elgin 1996 and Helen Longino 1998—though they are much closer in their focus on interest than Longino 2001 which emphasises shared method. Elgin develops a Goodmanian argument in favour of a sort of unity that is the system in reflective equilibrium, i.e. a system that is maximally tenable and this is a "worthy epistemic goal" (1996: 99) because it is rationally cohesive ("the elements are reasonable in light of one another", *ibid.*) and the whole is "reasonable in light of the objectives we originally espoused" (*ibid.*). Systems in reflective equilibrium "are tethered not to Things in themselves but to our antecedent understanding of and interest in the matters at hand" (1996: 107). Longino 1998 argues for theoretical pluralism and against monist unification, which aims at the resolution of dissension (1998: 197), the local unities she allows reflect dominant theoretical interests at particular times (1998: 230-31). Longino 2001 allows for unity of community of researchers with shared standards and methods of evaluation (2001:148) but remains agnostic about whether their findings form a whole or present as a plurality of non-congruent accounts (2001: 140).

<sup>17</sup> Kant often contrasts "system" and mere "aggregate" (A835/B863) and describes his thought as an architectonic whole, which he then defines this as "the art of systems", where "system" is "the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea" (A832/B860).

neutically mutable, they occupy that external space intelligibly.<sup>18</sup> Philosophy can treat belief revision in the same way as it can revolution in belief systems, by supplying the tools for classifying them as instances of conceptual transformation, rather than of mere reaction to facts (Friedman 1997: 19). Rational recovery of what can seem arbitrary or merely opaque is essential to securing philosophically another naturalist commitment, which we have not discussed so far, and which comes from Quine's conception of the totality of human knowledge as a vast interconnecting nexus of beliefs from which no belief is immune to revision (Friedman 1997: 7). By incipient antirealism I mean that the defense of the rationality of belief revision and theory choice, more generally, of scientific rationality depends on positing a convergence over time of the different unifying frameworks and so this is an *internal* process of adjustment not convergence to an "entirely independent reality"; all epistemic and semantic claims are framework relative (Friedman 2001: 118). If Kant's unificationism took this form, then it would not be suited to the first order continuity task, which is, programmatically at least, to defend realism.

Although Kant has his own versions of the advantages of unification, especially in passages where he defends the importance of a systematic unity in cognition (e.g. A 645/B673), and applications to other domains of rational thought, what he sees and its contemporary defenders do not, is its *testing* function; its promise as a solution to the second order problem of testing of philosophical claims.

Unification is achieved by a set of rules that set out the object domain for the proper conduct of the enquiry. The rules can be derived from concepts which function to unify the domain, e.g. "objects of experience". As the rules become clear through analysis and argument, the epistemic expectations appropriate to the domain settle. Unification is not a minimalist achievement, since no unifier is self-explanatory and most rules have contrastive applications in other object-domains. Nonetheless having the full theoretical goal in view is not needed for testing; since in most cases philosophical claims fall short because they ignore one or more of the rules that set out the object domain of the enquiry. Testing allows for the systematic demarcation of domains to which philosophical claims can be made and the epistemic force they can carry.

The testing procedure is more vividly illustrated in the negative part of the *Critique*. Rationalist metaphysics seek to provide secure foundation for natural sciences by way of unshakeable propositions about metaphysical facts. Kant's diagnosis in the antinomy is that such facts do not appear to constrain in any way the claims made about them (this is a general thesis following from the Copernican Revolution). The solution is to demarcate the kinds of things that can be said about the objects that belong to the domain. The reflective failure Kant calls "dogmatism" can be remedied through a systematic programme of reflection on what it takes to predicate anything *of* anything, ranging from the most ordinary objects of daily experience, to the most extraordinary ones (e.g. God). Different rules establish different sets of kinds of objects by establishing, through critical argument, the kinds of things that can be said about the objects. The de-

<sup>18</sup> The role of philosophy I attribute to Friedman here is highly reminiscent of the mediative role Longino 1998 envisages between concurrent localities that are not congruent but also the unification model defended by Gemes 1994 who champions a model of unification that aims at reconciling incompatible claims.

marcation rules or concepts set out the epistemic aims that are permissible within each domain but also the best in epistemic terms that is achievable, namely objective judgements about objects in the domain.<sup>19</sup>

The idea that different rules establish different domains of thought about objects needs further qualification if we are to avoid ending up with a Kantian mosaic. At the same time, if rational demarcation is *a priori* in the sense of un-revisable, the model is implausibly conservative. The full account, which also shows what is distinctive about Kantian unification requires the following three crucial qualifications:

- (1) The unification of the domain of possible objects of experience holds a special role in the project, since it offers us both conditions of objective judgements about such objects but also conditions of reference, and empirical cognition. Although it has all the general characteristics of unification as testing given above, it is also set apart. Terminologically, Kant marks it out by calling the unifying concepts that serve within the domain, *constitutive* of the domain. The special role of this unification is justified, because empirical cognition is of a certain standard, which other putative objects of thought lack. Although this lack has implications about what can be said about such objects, the positive task of reflection and boundary setting continues with the identification of domains in which these objects can have a role though what Kant calls *regulative* ideas.
- (2) Regulative concepts or ideas are fascinating because of the great diversity of unifying domains and epistemic tasks they help define. Some regulative concepts are functionally purposeful for the conduct of a specific enquiry; “fundamental power” (A 649/B677) is recommended as one such example. Such *abstracta* help unify specific scientific programmes, by making present—providing a focal point—an item such as “fundamental power” that helps relate empirical findings across the research domain. The fact that fundamental power is not subject to cognitive constraints, and so not a cognition, means that the domain it unifies, while it contains cognitions—claims about specific powers—comes with different epistemic expectations about the warrant of its claims; which is simply to say it is a complex theoretical domain not a set of individually verifiable empirical statements. Other regulative ideas have a wider unifying remit, “world” for example define a domain in which sets of laws apply securing uniformity in their application under the limited warrant of the set unified by “world”. The testing element consists in accepting that we have no justification—and none is plausibly forthcoming—for thinking that inductive rules apply.

<sup>19</sup> In the Anglo-American reception of Kant’s thought there is a strong tradition of interpretation focusing on his epistemology, possibly under the influence of interpretative choices by Kemp Smith (see Hanna 2006: 6) but most obviously in the so-called epistemic interpretation of appearances and things in themselves most influentially perhaps defended in Allison 2004 (a revision of the 1983 volume; but see Stang 2018 for a fuller account). What I aim to show is that epistemic concerns, such as the conditions of objectivity, epistemic warrant, and both *a priori* specified domains and *a posteriori* ones (which admittedly Kant does not explicitly tackle except perhaps in the *Anthropology*) are an important part of the critical theoretical project but they are sandwiched so to speak between a foundational layer that aims to establish realism and an upper layer that directs us through a kind of absolute objectivity that is not theoretically available.

Regulative ideas define domains of enquiry and “regulate” the epistemic expectations appropriate for the domain; they establish the degrees of objectivity appropriate for the claims made in the domain. Although Kant treats scientific enquiries briefly here, it seems that the more mature the enquiry, the more populated the domain, the more established the rules employed within it, and so the more “unified” it is. So the greater degree of unification within a domain goes with the collective achievement of objectivity within the domain (“collective” because it is not a matter of a single rule or insight; this view is very close to modern unificationism and even accommodates some of their critics). The testing role of unification with the use of regulative ideas comes from rejection, not just of specific metaphysical theses purporting to communicate facts, but also, an implication of this traditional and orthodox interpretation of the *Critique*’s destructive power is the rejection of rational or divine guarantees about the necessity of some domains and its contents, and, more positively and less widely recognized, the possibility of a renewal of metaphysics (across the board). What creates critical friction and tests the regulatively unified domains is that regulative ideas are modally fragile and so conceivably revisable, which means that some may be found to have exhaust their value, if, for example, a claim of a kind that is permissible within the domain creates impermissible conclusions down the line.<sup>20</sup>

(3) Testing by unification is a systematic process of critical reflection, that is suited to the task because it works by engaging with the philosophical claims about objects in order to identify what can be said about such objects. When we move from constitutive to regulative it is not clear how to understand Kant’s repeated claims that there is a need for unity emanating from reason itself (e.g. A302/B359). One way to look at this is that there must be a further conception of unification that can guide our efforts at organised rational thought and be testing of such efforts as a whole. So far, all unifiers, constitutive and regulative, come with conditions for their application and domain restrictions. The question is whether a unifier that is free of such limits is conceivable. Kant uses repeatedly a term that specifies what holds objectively without qualification, “the unconditioned” (see B xx-xxi, and esp. A 322-323)—or “absolute” (A 324-6)—but only to chastise reason for seeking to know it. So PSR, which would be the obvious candidate, is already rejected once we take the path of testing by domain demarcation. While Kant withdraws from us the prospect of a theory of all theories, he opens up the possibility of critical reflection about the aims of rationally organised thought and the goals we set in undertaking such thought

<sup>20</sup> I do not have the space to develop my account of regulative ideas and the unities they make possible in dialogue with existing commentary. With the possible exception of Paul Guyer who connects with unity with the idea of systematic happiness (Guyer 2001: 94), most interpreters give variations of the epistemic interpretation I offer here, though not all agree about the success of Kant’s argumentative strategy (Guyer 1997: 42). Philip Kitcher discusses the unificatory role of regulative ideas, as I do here, but also their function as meta-rules for the application of the categories, which implicates them in the constitution of experience, in ways that are deeply problematic as I explain below. Hannah Ginsborg (2017) incorporates regulative ideas and systematicity in an entirely original reading about the conditions of nature as an object of human judgement. My interpretative aim is to show the possibility of aligning narrow and broad cognitive aims (see Massimi 2017) while allowing a non-reductive architectonic between the resulting unities (see Gava 2014).

through what he calls a “cosmopolitan” idea, which relates “all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*)” (A838-39/B866-67). The rule that gives these ends is objective in the requisite sense, i.e. unconditional, because it is the ought contained in the moral law, which specifies the practical ends of reason (A832/B860).

What I tried to show in this section is (a) that unification is a procedure for testing theoretical claims in general and philosophical claims in particular; (b) that it allows for maximal reflection and reflexivity about a range of specific scientific enquiries, and as a result, it admits of degrees; (c) because the different regulative unifying projects can be more or less mature, the model fits the more theoretically developed contemporary unificationist projects; (d) unification incorporates reflection on the broader aims of the unifying project itself, which introduces topic-transcendent axiological concerns, about what enquirers should have in view as objective guiding standard, and ultimately about their moral practical identities and the nature of essential human ends; (e) finally, and this leads to the topic of the next section, although domain specification is key to unification and the task of testing, the whole edifice is anchored on a conception of experience that sustains empirical realism.

## 2.2. Realism and Unity

The concepts that unify the domain of possible objects of experience set a high standard of objectivity because of their modal force and scope.<sup>21</sup> They are testing because they function as rules determining a priori what is possible to say about such objects; so classes of claims that fall foul of these rules are ipso facto philosophically adrift. In addition, because they are constitutive, that is, they spell out all the necessary conditions of “one universal experience” (A 110), when they fail to obtain, there are no objects of experience (which is not to say there may not be perceptions).<sup>22</sup> By implication, if something meets these rules of unity (A302/B359), it cannot *fail* to be an object of experience, that is, no additional anti-sceptical arguments are needed to exclude putative simulacra (see A 493/B21). The epistemic status of constitutive concepts clearly surpasses that of regulative ones. Nonetheless, there is no hiding that qua unifiers constitutive and regulative concepts perform the same role: they define the appropriate epistemic expectations for a domain of objects, the domain that is appropriately unified by the said concepts. And they do so after careful critical argument, that is, as part of the process of philosophical thought’s self-testing. Crudely: they earn their status and have their role defined by pure reason.

If, as I claimed at the outset, continuity with science, on the idealist naturalist view, requires the defence of realism, it is not clear how the fruits of this essentially internal exercise in reflection and mapping can be of help. In what follows, I will identify a distinctive feature in the unification of the domain of objects of experience, which, allows for a very different style of thought to

<sup>21</sup> For excellent treatment of this topic see Ameriks 2017.

<sup>22</sup> The parenthetical remark aims to draw attention to the distinction between perceptions, which are subjective, objective perceptions, which are “cognitions” and so, given their conformity a priori to the constitutive rules of the domain for objects of experience, can become items of knowledge that is objective and of objects; this is the basic claim. For discussion of “cognition” see Willaschek and Watkins 2017.

emerge alongside its paradigmatic execution of the epistemic tasks of unificationism—indeed unification of the domain of objects of experience functions like the steel core in the construction of the theoretical system.

Let us start with considering how constitutive concepts fulfil their epistemic, i.e. domain-defining, functions and how they differ from regulative ones. Consider a regulative concept, “world”.<sup>23</sup> When Kant shows that the examination of deductive arguments purporting to state facts about the object thought through this concept, and so to enrich our concept, fails, the critical reader learns that the thought about the object does not constrain one way or another what can be said about it. This discovery affects the concept’s unifying function for the domain of natural laws, the expectation of uniformity is a *concessive* rule for scientific research. Consider now a constitutive concept, “substance”. When Kant sets out the conditions of its use, he does not examine what facts about the concept can help establish its credentials (this comes much later in his examination of common misuses of the concept). Constitutive concepts or categories are picked up from the table of the most general forms of thought, forms that have general organisational functions and no remit to regulate content (see B 166-67). In order to become constitutive of the domain of the objects of experience, their use must be constrained, and it must be constrained not ad hoc but in accordance with a rule; the constraint that applies as an unexceptional rule is the formal features of the *objects* of the relevant domain, in short, their spatial and temporal form.<sup>24</sup> Space and time are the necessary a priori conditions of all outer and inner experience, they are pure forms of sensibility (e.g. B 66, A 49). These forms set the basic epistemic rules for the domain by directing the use of the concepts that have a claim to constitute the domain (a claim that gets its main defence in the transcendental deduction). Forms of thought about objects of possible experience bear a special relation to the form of their possible objects before even the task of vindicating their applicability to such objects is undertaken. This distinctive feature of unification at this level allows Kant to pursue side by side an epistemic unifying project, which I will outline briefly below, and a project about reference that sustains empirical realism.

First though, some questions about method are in order. Kant has plenty to say about the conscious representation of objects of experience, or “objective perceptions” (A 320/ B 376-77). Why does he avoid talking about the objects of these representational states as intentional, referring and so on, and insists on their dependence on an internal relation of unification in a judgement (e.g. A 79, B 105)?<sup>25</sup> The unity of judgement is just the application of the basic unifying rule for the domain just spelt out, it is a unity of a priori sensible and discursive forms through which alone, as will be shown in the transcendental deduction, objects of experience can be thought. Note: there is no additional argument

<sup>23</sup> Throughout, I use “concept” to mean thought, concepts in the tradition I consider here are not the same as words, though the distinction is not systematically discussed. But the deep issue that is at stake and becomes especially urgent for Hegel is about thought and things and about the form of thought that is about things.

<sup>24</sup> Kant announces this already in B73, which constrains judgments to spatio-temporal objects, before even tackling transcendental logic.

<sup>25</sup> The question does not depend on an intentionalist interpretation of judgement, such as proposed by Aquila 1983, it raises a conceptual issue, the importance of which is recognised by Kant (see A 320/B376; A 491/B 519).



about what it takes for such thoughts to be about objects of experience; does Kant think there are no general conditions of reference? Or is this a secondary concern?

To understand his method, I think it is important to have in view Kant's possible interlocutors. The task of specifying the domain of objects of experience is undertaken in response to a piece of philosophical inheritance Kant considers a dead-end. To the untutored mind, the experience of objects in one's surrounding environment seems plausibly described as a relation the experiencing subject has with some of those objects; for Kant, the basic realism of this thought is something to be preserved. The philosophical inheritance he wants to undo describes this same relation as a self-relation, because what is given to the subject is, on reflection, some idea or impression, in short, mental content. The experiencing subject has direct access to its mental content; it has no direct access to the worldly objects the content is—presumably—about and is in weak epistemic position with respect to these objects. One of Kant's innovations is to separate epistemic objectivity from reference to real objects, yet address *both* topics with the same tools. Here is the problem he inherits: the experiencing subject can get a criterion for objectivity from the inside, by scanning mental contents to identify qualitative differences. Alighting on features such as clarity or luminosity, which only some mental items possess, proponents of this method claim success in identifying what is suitable for inclusion as basic components in a system of knowledge and candidates for sound premises in an inference that secures reference to extra-mental reality. In recognition of the fragility of their position, they grant a supernatural being the role of mediator or guarantor for the validity of such inferences.

If we see Kant as responding to this piece of philosophical inheritance, the first task is to show that some a priori concepts unify unexceptionally—and without need of further anti-sceptical argument—the domain of objects of experience. Domain specification is part of an argument that aims to show that an a priori and systematic distinction between “subjective” and “objective” is attainable.<sup>26</sup> This argument is given in the deduction: instead of the epistemic subject being engaged in the empirical task of scanning mental contents, it gets the a priori role of unifier of the domain of objects to which concepts apply, and so as the subject of the judgement we mentioned earlier, it is part of the solution to the epistemic problem.<sup>27</sup>

Still the problem of reference remains and is perhaps even more urgent given Kant's entirely a priori answer to the question of what is a possible object of experience. The deduction, and indeed the discussion that follows in subsequent sections about the validity of constitutive concepts, assumes the truth of the

<sup>26</sup> Note that at this stage, subjective is good enough to stand from what is mind-dependent, dreams, illusions, but also biases indoctrinations, epistemic egoism as Kant puts in it the Anthropology need additional analysis because they are more complex problems (“the idea of a public use of reason” is part of the response).

<sup>27</sup> Strawson folds objective validity and objective reference in stating that the requirement can be satisfied by distinguishing “awareness of objects [...] from experiences of them” (Strawson 1966: 24). The source of the problem is the strong anti-sceptical aims Strawson attributes to the argument, for which a thin notion of experience as mere sensory input is acceptable; this leads to a strong transcendental argument of the form [necessarily (a, b)]. Unfortunately the overall strategy leads to irrealism, which is incompatible with Kant's aims.

basic premise of the deduction, which is that a manifold is given to us through the senses.<sup>28</sup> But what is given through the senses is not transparently clear. If it is mental content, as per Kant's predecessors, then the problem of reference is how we can relate it in a principled and systematic way to the objects of experience that causally affect the subject.<sup>29</sup> The epistemic account gives us the form of thought for any putatively objectively referring representations, what is missing is an explanation of how such representations put us in contact with their objects; correct epistemic form needs supplementation with an account that captures even minimally genuine reference.

All we have is assurance of something given throughout senses (which the epistemic criteria presumably will allow us to distinguish from illusions or dream). The given are "representations of the senses" (A 2; see also B1), the contact that pre-philosophically secures reference is through the senses, and Kant give is a philosophical role as the purely sensible content of the representation (see B 129; also earlier B 127). The discussion can get side-tracked at this stage back to epistemic issues about primary and secondary qualities and relational or other knowledge we may have of objects given to us through our senses. But this is not the issue here: it is rather more generally "representation" itself, which while it has a priori form, Kant states, it does not "produce its object as far as its existence is concerned" (B 125, A 93). The question is what within the theory sustains this independence claim, while at the same time securing some contact with the object in terms of such existential independence (otherwise we can have a theory of reference that is too generous and includes even hallucinated objects). The answer, I will argue, is contained in the distinctive feature of unification of objects of experience.

The form of thought for any putatively objectively referring representations, and so judgements about objects of experience, comes down to a rule for correct use of the copula "is" (B 141) or a rule of the "is" of predication in the relevant domain: the use of a priori concepts is restricted through a priori forms of sensibility. Shadowing the "is" of predication is a rule for the "is" of existence for objects of experience: that they have spatial and temporal properties, necessarily. The contact we sought is thus established through the existential interpretation of the "is" of predication. This is to say simply that the spatially and temporally modulated "is" of existence captures the most basic features of empirical object awareness, namely that something is there, now, or that it was there for a period of time in the past, or that it is now further away, or that it was here and that now it is are no more. Note that the ideality of space and time does not affect their role as realist reference markers, since the reference we seek to secure is to

<sup>28</sup> We know this from the Aesthetic: "The capacity for receiving representation through the mode in which we are affected by objects is entitled sensibility. Objects are given to us by means of sensibility" (A 19, B 33). There is a causal account that describes the "how?" of this relation (see the quote above and A 86, B 118; B 125), but there is outstanding a philosophical account of the general nature of this relation. Ameriks's regressive approach helps highlight this and makes space for the realist interpretation I offer; Ameriks allows a thick notion of experience as truth-evaluable and transcendently examinable in the form of (a, necessarily b).

<sup>29</sup> The causal relation, while true (read A 19, B 33; A 86, B 118; B 125 and of course plays a role in the "Refutation of Idealism"), is not for Kant the way to deal with either the epistemic (which are ultimately *quid juris?*) or the metaphysical questions posed by objects of experience.

objects of experience which are objects of possible experience.<sup>30</sup> Time and space as realist reference markers align with the untutored belief that our senses put us in contact with objects of experience; that we do not infer them, we are in contact with them. The epistemic and referential “is” work together to give us the a priori conditions to sort out basic first-hand mistakes of experience, provided of course there is some empirical judgment made about the experience.

The advantage of this minimalist realism is that it does not commit to a discussion of the referential properties of empirical representations and what truth-conditions they have. This is a tricky question in any context, but especially in the Kantian in which any obvious option (e.g. isomorphism) would be beyond our capacity to know it (because of our ignorance of things as they are in themselves) and this limitation has traditionally thought to count against realism. Still, something more ought to be said about the content of empirical representations because if, as some quotes suggest, this is just the “raw material” awaiting conceptual form, then the objects we encounter will be just spatio-temporal cyphers.<sup>31</sup>

I will conclude by following a hint given in the claim that empirical representations are *cognitions*.<sup>32</sup> Cognitions are typically representations that are in the form of judgements, so they are conceptualised content. What is philosophically interesting, however, is that “cognition” stands also for the *availability* of sensory cognitive content. The topic of availability is of interest because it asks us to think how such content is about objects. The issue is delicate because the “about” lies between the causal story of our connection to the world (and the proper functioning of the causal channels that are our senses) and the general terms we use to refer to it when we do, that is, the words we use and which allow us to do this not because they are magically connected to the objects they name.

Here is a suggestion for filling that in between space: the senses are causally involved but it is for a task: they are our species-specific information reception

<sup>30</sup> “Possible experience” is the referential equivalent of the epistemic “possible objects of experience”. The role I give the existential copula is compatible with Kant’s denial that being is not a real predicate (A 598/ B 626); the existential “is” adds indeed nothing to the concept of the object.

<sup>31</sup> Regarding empirical content see: “the impressions of the senses supplying the first stimulus” (A 86, B 118), Kant also speaks of impressions in the A and B Introductions he talks about the “raw material of sensible impressions”. One strong motivation for recent non-conceptualist readings of Kant is the loss of the heterogeneity thesis that is at the heart of his theory; see Allais 2004. However, note that an unexpected advantage of formal referring criteria is that Kant can deal with exotic “experiences”, the temporal and measurable values called “observables” in modern physics which do not inhere on a substance as classical and indeed epistemically well-attributed Kantian properties do.

<sup>32</sup> By “beings like” us I mean to refer only to our kind of perceptive powers and functioning; it seems obvious that it is a general phenomenon of an animal’s sensory capacities putting it in touch with their surrounding environment. But beyond this natural phenomenon that is the province of science, as Gaskin 2006 argues, there is for human experience the problem of reference and the genuineness of their sensory input. Though I take a rather speculative path in developing this point, there is a line of commentary that aims at similar defenses of realism, which are both detailed and scholarly, see Allais 2004 and Westphal 2006. My own aim or rather hunch in following this path is that if *we allow particulars* in the Kantian account, these cannot be just spatio-temporally identifiable, and then if we make them instantiations of properties in judgements we have lost them as particulars.

system, more simply: they are how beings like us learn first-hand about their environment.<sup>33</sup> The looks, sounds, feels of things, the manifold of qualitatively varied sensory content is just information about our environment, which once received, needs classification, identification, retrieval and so on, in order to be recognizable as a “message”—in order to be learning—we pick from our environment; so this first hand awareness of information-rich world, or, more radically our being in information rich states just by virtue of being in information-rich environments, requires reduction into a manifold so that we can put sense to judgement, to epistemically evaluable units.<sup>34</sup> The point of this—admittedly sketchy—fuller realist picture is that we depend for information on receptivity and on the channels that convey it and this is the case for sensory content as it is for email content and so on; and of course the picture is realist while allowing that something counts as information if some receptor gets it.

Acceptance of this last speculative suggestion does not affect the overall argument that unification of the objects of experience can fulfil both testing and continuity tasks, all thanks to the dual role of the a priori forms of sensibility, which restrict the use of a priori concepts, while identifying the necessary properties that existing objects of experience possess, thereby securing reference for scientific empirical statements.

### 3. From Kant to Hegel

I hope that the previous two sections have done enough to show how the idealist naturalism I attributed to Kant has at its disposal sophisticated tools to address both the testing and the continuity tasks that it shares with some contemporary naturalist programmes in philosophy. Having Kant’s project in view is indispensable for understanding Hegel’s starting point about what is philosophically possible, his identification of what is necessary, the so-called “completion”, and his expectation of what is achievable.<sup>35</sup>

A contextual clarification is perhaps in order here. Already in my use of the term “idealist naturalist”, I distance myself from two prominent lines of inter-

<sup>33</sup> The novel term is “information”, which I borrow an early formal account of transmission/reception (Shannon [1993 [1943]: 7). Formalism is an advantage because it allows us to consider empirical content as having a role, a cognitive one in fact, without the need to enter into the conceptualism/non-conceptualism controversy. In information theory, it is acknowledged that the word is not context invariant, but rather it changes according to fields in which it proves useful (Shannon 1993:180). This too is attractive because it fits the dynamism and variety of our sensory systems. Generally, it is accepted that “information” can also have a number of physical or material realisations (see Drestke 1981 for an attempt to offer a semantic account). All this goes against the most famous perhaps philosophical appreciation of information theory by Daniel Dennett (2017) who sees it as supporting the exact reverse view of senses I presented here (Dennett 1988). The speculative piece with which I conclude this section is an invitation I read in Kant’s argument about empirical representations to let go another piece of philosophical inheritance in which the senses are just a maddening philosophical problem about qualia.

<sup>34</sup> I keep deliberately underdetermined these tasks because my proposal can co-exist with both non-conceptualist and some conceptualist interpretation; the issue being of course the nature of the manifold of these received contents (for passages suggesting its dependence on concepts see A 77, B 102-103; A 105; B129; for passages that do not see A 116).

<sup>35</sup> The original source of the term “completion” is Hegel’s letter to Schelling dated April 16, 1795 (Butler and Seiler 1984: 35).

pretation. One, now relatively obsolete, interprets Kant as honorary positivist, who asks that our knowledge claims be restricted to empirical facts. The other, still current, interprets the move from Kant to Hegel in terms of the progressive emancipation of philosophy from the vestiges of rationalist metaphysics, in favour of naturalism, understood now broadly, as a programme for re-orienting philosophy, by specifying a domain of philosophical enquiry and the type of answers that are acceptable. While seeds for each interpretation can be found in the relevant texts; they risk recreating, in historical garb, a vexatious twentieth century choice between the rock of a naturalistic vocabulary that can appear too restrictive and distorting (Stroud 1996: 48) and the hard place of “expansive” and “open-minded” naturalism, which reduces to mere attitude of “open-mindedness” (Stroud 1996: 54).<sup>36</sup>

On my reading, Hegel shares Kant’s concern with the autonomy of philosophy and its relation to the natural sciences. He seeks to justify its authority and its claim to autonomy, by showing how it can successfully perform the testing and continuity tasks, which he also sees as vital in properly conceptualising the relation of philosophy to the natural sciences. Despite the element of “completion”, which I shall soon explain, Hegel’s idealist naturalism is no more nor less “idealist” and no more nor “naturalist” than Kant’s.

Anticipating somewhat, I will argue that Hegel’s need for completion is presented first in terms of resolving a problem with unification and testing he identifies in Kant. At the same time, once this problem is resolved, it gives a different shape to the continuity task, the aim remains the philosophical provision of a realistic account of the relation of thought and nature that does not require supernatural appeal (to a divine epistemic guarantor for example). The term “realism” tends to be too broad, so to narrow down its Hegelian sense is the search for a position in which items do not admit of further interpretations, conceptual schemes or what have you, they acquire a certain stability, how this is achieved is through the idea that thought is capable of specifying particularity, perfectly and without any remainder. “Completion” then has both the sense of this positive claim about thought—thought itself accomplishes itself, so to speak—and the more traditional, relational sense of engagement in deep and critical dialogue with Kant.

### 3.1. Hegel: Unification as Self-Knowledge

Hegel’s commitment to the systematicity of thought is not only explained by the solution unification offers to the problem of testing philosophical claims. Testing remains, nonetheless, a central motivation both to expanded and systematically interlocked unification project he undertakes and to the dialectical logic that binds the whole together.<sup>37</sup> The sense of “completion” that is relevant to this section is the relational one, because the need for completion arises from the

<sup>36</sup> For a defence of resolute naturalism, see Rosenberg 2011; expansive naturalism is defended in McDowell 1994.

<sup>37</sup> For an excellent account of the commitment to systematicity see Sandkaulen 2017. On dialectic see Winfield 1990. At the same time there is considerable overlap in aims with the epistemic function of unification in Kant and the range of projects to which this is relevant. For an indication of the range of these projects, empirical and philosophical see EL §12: 16-18, and also the ideas of “unity” and “system” in EL §14 and §15. The points are repeated again in EN §250 and Remark.

identification of a problem with constitutive unification. Specifically, Hegel argues that at the constitutive level, unification fails, because the definition of the object domain is incomplete, the domain is disunified. The problem is that alongside the positive account of experience Kant gives, he allows for an “other world”—the “negative of every image”, the “Thing-in-itself” (EL §44: 72). The thesis about our ignorance of things as they are in themselves leads to suspicion of the credentials of the categories as objective forms; they are, Hegel says, “*merely our thoughts*, and separated from the thing as it is *in itself* by an insurmountable gulf” (EL §50: 83).<sup>38</sup> The problem, as Sally Sedgwick recently put it, is that “we have no grounds for supposing that [the subjective form of experience] reveals the reality of the given sense content itself” (Sedgwick 2012: 136).

To say that things as they are in themselves are a problem for testing and ultimately for philosophical autonomy sounds like an odd diagnosis of Hegel’s criticism, since, as Sedgwick puts it, it is the *reality* of the objects of empirical representations that is threatened by a competing thing with a claim to being real. Note that if we go down this path, it is easy to fold epistemic and referential issues, since if what we thought was real is merely what we count as real, it is the “counting” that matters. To put it differently, our ability to make fine epistemic distinctions is not affected (indeed, historically this problem has been taken as an opportunity to transform all questions into epistemic ones).<sup>39</sup> I take a different view of the criticism.

To make the problem Hegel identifies perspicuous let us start by drawing a parallel between what we may call the positive and the negative application of the criterion of conformity to the a priori conditions of human sensibility, space and time. Earlier we saw that the a priori forms of sensibility have an epistemic role in restraining the application of a priori concepts to possible object of experience, thereby securing their proper use; they also have a role in establishing minimal realist reference for empirical representations. When it comes to things in themselves, we have an epistemic thesis about ignorance, the negation of the same criterion: we do not know things as they are in themselves because they are not things that appear in space and time. The negative application of the criterion establishes a priori a case of ignorance but also, because this is the *only* known feature of the things in question, it yields an a priori criterion for ontological commitment to these unknowns, which states that some things are real just in case they are in *every respect* independent of our cognitive abilities. The problem, which creates a need for “completion”, is the threat of metaphysical realism, a position that defines a domain exclusively through its transcending our unifying abilities, yet qua *domain* of it is unifiable, albeit a unifier with other

<sup>38</sup> Sedgwick 2012 gives an exemplary analysis of the standard view of the Hegelian criticism; see Houlgate 2016 and Stern 1999. The reading I attribute to Hegel, which aims to minimise the ontological commitments of the thesis without entirely suppressing them is inspired by an early suggestion by Ameriks concerning Kant’s ongoing reflections on his relation to traditional ontology (2003: 133).

<sup>39</sup> The ontological version of the criticism can be found in Hegel (e.g. EL §45: “the things immediately known are mere appearances—in other words, the ground of their being is not in themselves but in something else”) but not in order to explain the subjectivism charge, rather Hegel here criticises Kant for not following through to the “step of defining what this something else is” (ibid.). I think the thesis I attribute to Hegel in the following section can make sense of this claim; for an alternative view see Kreines 2007.

abilities, e.g. a divine unifier.<sup>40</sup> Even as a possibility, metaphysical realism is a threat because it unpicks all the hard work of the constitutive unification and undermines its results, namely that a systematic a priori relation between objective and subjective is possible and within human reach. For this reason, Hegel complains that we are left with *merely* our thoughts.

It is worth noting that although Hegel's criticism fits more naturally the so-called two-world interpretation, it is applicable to the two-aspect interpretation, which states that we can only know things given certain conditions and that abstracting from such conditions in the hope of identifying features of mind-independent reality is a self-defeating enterprise. We may engage in such abstraction entirely legitimately, when we consider things not as putative objects of experience but as they are in themselves. From a Hegelian perspective, the claim that they are thinkable invites a question about the possibility of this thought. On the two-aspect interpretation, possibility is just the absence of contradiction in the thought of one thing under two different aspects. The truth of this possibility is put at risk by the unknowability of one of the two aspects and a way to stabilise the position is to grant these thinkables ontological weight and bring metaphysical realism back in the picture.

"Completion" is the removal of this threat through strengthening the epistemic gains of constitutive unification. In effect, Hegel's systematic writings can be viewed as a heroic project of constitutive unification, which aims to show for a whole range of concepts how their application is relative to object domains and how, conversely, object domains as unified through appropriate forms of thought. For Hegel unification has to be ambitious in order to account for the diversity and range of human experience, but also systematic in order to resist the centripetal force of such diversity and range. For each object domain, e.g. nature or mind, which are the two on which I focus mainly here, unification will be internally differentiated through appropriate concepts and by the same means formative of a system. The aim is to achieve a unified whole or a "totality", which, Hegel clearly acknowledges, is a philosophical demand: in "our ordinary thinking the world is grasped as an aggregate of finite experiences" (EN §247 *Zusatz*, 16) but philosophy requires conceptual order to be established out of this aggregate. So, for example, "nature is to be regarded as a *system of stages* one arising necessarily from the other", this is not "generated naturally", it is a matter of the "idea" (EN §249: 20). Given the ambition of Hegelian unification, it seems hard to maintain that this project can contribute to testing philosophical claims, or, looking ahead, that it will have anything to contribute to the realist requirements of the continuity task. I will focus on testing here and take up the continuity issue in the next section.

Testing is integral to the unifying process. The test is whether some candidate concept is cognitively up to the task. The testing is entrusted to dialectic, now upgraded from mere logic of illusion, to thought's own way of checking on

<sup>40</sup> The implied contrast between empirical and metaphysical realism can mislead in various ways. I attribute to Kant empirical realism, in the sense of realism about reference. I attribute to Hegel the view that metaphysical realism, as here defined, is problematic. Nothing follows from this about how Hegel deals with continuity, more precisely whether this requires commitment to some form of realism on his part. So, the position I present is sharply at odds with Tom Rockmore's diagnosis about Kant and Hegel's rejection of metaphysical realism in favour of epistemological constructivism (Rockmore 2005: 219).

its own claims. Hegel uses dialectic to show the limits of certain forms of thought, he then allows these forms to play out in full their limits, in the expectation that there is some further as yet indeterminate object or object domain that the concept, in failing its prior determining task, may yet adumbrate, thus opening up a new domain of philosophical enquiry.<sup>41</sup> The effect of this procedure is twofold: the proper limits of concepts are set, but because they are set in a dynamic fashion, by allowing over-extension of concepts, there is no absolute limit to conceptual reach and so no limit to the unifying process as a whole; ignorance is relativized to particular epistemic expectations attached to particular concepts, which they partly meet partly fail and so on.

Guiding Hegelian unification are three basic theses about cognition, which I reconstruct below and illustrate with reference to the “Philosophy of Nature” and the “Philosophy of Mind”.

(a) The first thesis concerns the cognitive insufficiency of concepts use that present as having too few links to other concepts or as inadequately differentiating between essential and nonessential characteristics of the object studied.

In the discussion of nature, Hegel describes these as giving us the “external” relations of nature. The cognitive problem arises thus: “in the sphere of nature contingency and determination from without has its right, [...] especially concrete individual forms, [...] the immediately concrete is a form of properties external to one another and more or less insufficiently related to one another” (EN §250: Remark 23). Given the task, which is to conceptualise the “infinite wealth and variety of form” (ibid.) of nature for the purpose of studying it, these external relations are a problem: “nature everywhere blurs the essential limits of species and genera by intermediate and defective forms, which continually furnish counter examples to every fixed distinction” (EN §250: 24). Parallel difficulties arise in the study of mind: if we stay in the context of ordinary “knowledge of men” which is limited to their “*particularities*, passions and weaknesses” (§377: E 9). Amassing such knowledge cannot give knowledge of the “universal”, of “mind itself” (ibid.).<sup>42</sup>

(b) The second thesis is that for each domain, a systematic set of hierarchically ordered concepts is discoverable that stands in ordered relations to other domains.

In the case of nature to grasp the idea of it we need to look at the detail of “its various specifications and then bring them together” (EN §244: 4). The

<sup>41</sup> In the “Philosophy of Nature”, for example, Hegel writes that it is through its own dialectic that nature “breaks through the limitation of this sphere” and attains the “higher stage”, which is “Mind”. This is a prime example of how Hegel uses dialectical over-extension of a concept to relate different object domains. From one point of view the claim is incredible, *mere* over-extension. From another point of view, notably the section on the soul in the “Philosophy of Mind”, it opens up for philosophical discussion a whole range of features such as age, physical location, affective state of being, which affect minds but are also of natural givens, and so help clarify concepts of selfhood and self-control.

<sup>42</sup> While Hegel’s way of putting the problem may sound old-fashioned, the problem he describes has been central to the philosophy of biology, even when pluralism is proposed as the best solution (see Dupré 2012); and philosophically, it is a legitimate question to ask after the essential possibilities of things. For a more robust defense of Hegel’s argument see Houlgate 1998.



“thinking consideration of Nature” (EN §246: 6) systematises and unifies through examination of the different “specifications”, that is, theoretical attempts to explain how different elements, features, relations, and so on relate to one another. The test is whether the concepts by which “progression and transition” in nature can “be made clearer” (EN §249: Remark 20).<sup>43</sup> So while the unificationist aims provide some criteria for testing, it is also the case that the project is bounded by the theoretical material available to philosophical scrutiny, namely the concepts in use by specific sciences. The idea is that by focusing more narrowly on the ways in which nature confronts us as an object of study, in mechanics, physics, organics, it will be possible to generate a dialectic sufficiently potent to identify concepts that have a legitimate claim to objectivity, which does not derive just from the currency of their use in the natural sciences. The “totality” (EN §244: 4) that unification ultimately seeks is not a mereological aggregate, nor yet artificially organised; it is a systematic unity that has not lost its contact to the multiform natural given.

In the study of mind, the dialectic is conducted through criticism of existing unifying projects, such as rational psychology, for example, the study of the soul and its attributes, which Hegel dismisses as “pneumatology”, “an abstract metaphysic of the understanding” (EM §378: 11). The problem is that it treats the mind—or soul—as an inert thing with properties, e.g. simplicity and immateriality. He is equally critical of empirical psychology, which makes the mind object of scientific study, but effectively dissolves it into a multitude of explanatory notions such as forces and faculties that correspond to the various things minds do (EM §381: 12). Again, we can characterise unity proleptically as a notion that makes space for the activities described in empirical psychology, but not as a “mere aggregate” (EM §381: 12), and makes sense of the properties identified in rational psychology, but not as belonging to an inert substance. While formally the process of unification parallels that of the “Philosophy of Nature”, the aim is no longer objectivity and scientificity—at least as these might be ordinarily understood—but the proper understanding of mind, which is subject and object of the study; accordingly, the vocabulary describing the success of unification is more demanding and task specific and, therefore, defies quick summary (see EM §386: 22-24).

The systematic expansion of object domains, such that include domains that are conceptually elusive (nature) or only abstrusely characterised (absolute spirit or mind), amounts to the expansion of the critical study of the range of conditions of cognition, that is, the relevant unifying concepts. Thesis (*b*) establishes that if these conditions don’t apply some others do; as a result, Hegel manages to relativise anything that would play the role of the negative epistemic criterion which, on his criticism of things in themselves, yields an ontological one with disastrous consequences. But it is thesis (*c*), below, that closes the door on the possibility of some a priori unknowables, by spelling out what exactly is at stake in unification.

(*c*) The third thesis is that unification can count as a cognitive gain, if the accomplishment of the unification task is not decided ad hoc, but rather obeys a

<sup>43</sup> In the fuller account given in the *Logic* Hegel describes how the new concept is also “higher and richer than the preceding—richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains it, and it contains even more than that, for it is the unity of itself and its opposite” (SL-dG 33; cf. SL-M 54).

criterion that is the same across the whole range of domains, yet also internal to each; the only criterion that fits, and is such that it does not allow for any remainder, is if the achievement is stated as form of self-relation.

Self-relation is not a mark of cognitive gain, if we consider it a trivial matter; nor is it a cognitive gain, of the type sought, if we consider it an eternal truth. Hegel describes a relation between thought and thought, e.g. the philosophical analysis of the organising concepts of the natural sciences, which aims at identifying the appropriate form of thought at every stage and with regard to every object domain of reflective thinking. The systematic and critical demands that shape this kind of self-relation—which continues, after a fashion, the project of the self-criticism of pure reason—sustain its cognitive ambitions and give some means by which to judge what is gained at different stages of unification.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.2. Open-Mindedness and Particularity

The Hegelian species of idealist naturalism, as presented so far, seems entirely taken by the tasks of unification and testing, leaving no obvious entry point for what we called at the start a realistic account of the relation between thought and nature that can sustain continuity. More generally, the very ambition of Hegelian unification can raise a question about the possibility of making a convincing case, within the system, about the reality of the source material that gives us the object of our “thinking study” (EL §1: 4). I will argue that continuity is served by a position that attempts to give more precise shape to the particulars identified in the Kantian defence of realism about reference. The Hegelian version resembles semantic realism, insofar as it is about the relation between meaning and meant for a range of value terms. The similarity can mislead though, because, on Hegel's account, the relation can be one of perfect match, which would leave the two *relata* only conceptually distinct. The basic argument, which does not easily fit contemporary philosophical categories and positions, is a defence of “actuality”.

By way of introduction, it is useful to consider a criticism Hegel addresses to Kant concerning the doctrine of things as they are in themselves, which does not target the epistemic damage incurred by its ontological commitments, but rather the limitations of Kant's metaphysical ambition. In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel writes: “the things immediately known are mere appearances—in other words, the ground of their being is not in themselves but in something else” then takes Kant to task for failing to take the “step of defining what this something else is” (EL §45).

One way to interpret this complaint is as if it came from a rationalist metaphysician: the request for ground is the request for what accounts for the things immediately known. Hegel would then be asking Kant to provide a sufficient reason why things known are as they are. The request presupposes belief that such reason exists (whether known to us or not). Such belief is justified on the basis of commitment to PSR. As we said earlier, PSR is regressive, leading to a necessary being that stops the regress. But PSR has a logical as well as epistemic

<sup>44</sup> The interpretation and indeed the formulation of thesis (c) depends on the unificationist topic of this section; other more familiar ways of stating (c) include subject-object identity, or the speculative closing of the gap between spontaneity and receptivity (see Sedgwick 2012); or the gap between ontology and epistemology (see Miolli 2018).

and metaphysical role, and as such it responds to explanatory demands of a particular subset of events, those that are the product of intelligent action. No mechanistic explanation provides sufficient reason for those, because mechanistic explanations do not have the requisite internal connection between intelligent choice and action; only reasons do this, and ultimately only reasons that are formed of valuations concerning what is best to do. This is Leibniz's deep insight into PSR: it is intimately connected with the doctrine that actions are undertaken under the guise of the good. If we look at the world as the result of divine choice and action, then PSR guides us to the idea of optimality as explanatory for the divine choice embodied in the creative act. It is for this reason that Kant himself in his pre-critical writings adopts a form of PSR he terms "determining reason", meaning a reason that explains the existence of contingent beings. Theodicy just falls out of this set of connections. I think this interpretation of Hegel's complaint is not the right one, but it is one that matters for understanding his positive claims.

Another way of interpreting Hegel's complaint about Kant's silence over grounds is that he identifies a weakness in Kant's defence of realism about reference, namely that it leaves something out that matters *for* realism.<sup>45</sup> The thought is this: a description of experience that *only* allows for spatio-temporally indexed instantiations of properties leaves *out* an essential part of that same experience, namely that it consists of encounters with particulars. If a way can be found to attend to this feature of experience philosophically, then that of which we make a thinking study will have been acknowledged and the continuity demand fulfilled. But how can we attend to this feature of experience? All we have at our disposal, besides spatio-temporal indices, which don't give us more than positions in a grid, are concepts and concepts are promiscuous. The sort of attention Hegel considers appropriate is the sort that explains how a particular is the way it is; the aim is not to show how it is for some subject, which is the phenomenological way of attending to the particularity of experience, but rather to show how the particular stands objectively as such in relations that uniquely identify it. This is what the theory of actuality, he sets it out in the *Science of Logic*, aims to achieve.

When Stroud recommends "open-mindedness" (Stroud 1996: 54) as general philosophical policy, he could not have in mind the *Science of Logic* despite the fact that it presents itself as an example of extreme open-mindedness, or in Hegelian terms "presuppositionlessness". There is a long and interesting debate, about the nature of "presuppositionlessness", or whether it is achievable, desirable, and to what extent Hegel achieves it.<sup>46</sup> This debate is not directly relevant to the problem at hand, though of course it does give an idea of the distinctiveness of the *Logic*, which is also a unificationist project: the object domain is forms of thought. But it seems odd to try to describe, in parallel with other unification

<sup>45</sup> I believe that what I am about to argue resonates, while differing in detail and material for the argument, with Paul Redding's diagnosis regarding the notion of the "singular" (Redding 2007) and its fate in the analytic reception of Hegel's philosophy esp. the diagnostic chaps 1 and 2. On a conciliatory interpretation of his work on the logical singular and my claims about actuality these are two ways of reaching the same goal; however, Redding has also championed actualist interpretations of Hegel that are at variance with mine.

<sup>46</sup> See e.g. Winfield 1990, Houlgate 2006.

projects, a relation between forms of thought and concepts. Furthermore, at this level of abstraction, it seems very difficult to show that the forms of thought are sufficiently constitutively independent to what it is they determine and so worthy of a dialectical examination to prove their claim to thought. This is where the rationalist metaphysical position outlined earlier is helpful in clarifying is going on in the *Logic*. Hegel's aim is to show that forms of thought can be determined and that their determinations can be shown to be right, without external rightness criteria.<sup>47</sup> How this comes to be a philosophical problem can be illuminated through PSR. If PSR is assumed and the divine mind and will are bracketed out of the account, what is left is a demand for a "determining" reason (Kant's adaptation of "sufficient"). Absent the regress-stopper, the demand translates as a philosophical examination of what sort of determining determining reason does. The logical object is the function of determination, which Hegel calls, determinateness or *Bestimmtheit*. So, unification aims at the perfect determination of *Bestimmtheit*.

The logical unifying project is carried out just like other unifying projects, through a priori reflection on candidate forms of thought that have a *prima facie* legitimate claim to persist in thought. Determinateness or *Bestimmtheit* is the achievement of determination. After consecutive partial successes and partial failures of determination, the *Logic* reaches, in the penultimate section, the topic of the good. The gradual transformation of the task of determination from logical to axiological corresponds to the Leibnizian insight that PSR and GG are connected or that there is an explanatory nexus between determining reason and goodness; goodness is the ultimate explanation. At the same time, in the context of the *Logic*, full determinateness is the achievement of the perfect particularisation of the form of thought it is about, so full determinateness is in itself the realisation of a value. That the value of determinateness is achieved in the topic "good" suggests that the solution to the particularity question is not topic neutral, in other words, that unique determination of particulars is a matter of their identification as good.

In "The Idea of the Good", one of the problems is trying to determine the good or whether something is good.<sup>48</sup> This in turn manifests as a problem of determinateness and presents us with the task of identifying what is genuine good and separating it from impositionist concepts that stamp "good" on a neutral value-free world—"realm of darkness" (SL 731). Impositionism is unsatisfactory, if we want our ideas to be true. But we are ex hypothesis not in position to recognise the true good, since we have no prior determination of it or a way of checking how a thought is to be compared with something real. The solution is to move away from this static model and think of the good in terms of a practical form thought. A practical form of thought is not an attempt to copy an idea onto reality, but rather to give weight to certain considerations in doing something, realising some end. With respect to values, or at least good, determination is not a theoretical matter of adding but a matter of doing something on the ba-

<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting that presuppositionlessness contains another important clue, a relation to the Kantian notion of "unconditioned". So in a way that parallels Kant, it can designate the search for a thought that can bring unity across different unifying formal systems of thought.

<sup>48</sup> The following is a simplified summary of arguments I have presented in detail in Deligiorgi (2020a, 2020b).

sis of the good, thus realising the good. But obviously not all such realisations are guaranteed to be good, people make mistakes, misread situations, misunderstand their own motives and trains of thought.

A basic way of understanding actuality, as Hegel uses it in this section, is as determination that is full, error-free and leaves no room to doubt. In earlier sections of the *Logic*, actuality is contrasted with empty possibility and with abstraction; so something would be actual if it is really possible, so instantiable, and also if it is actually instantiated, and has some content. But since our problem now is with the practical determination of the good, we need a different sense of actual that tells us more that it is instantiable and that it has some content. We want an “actual” that gives us the full good and nothing less than that. The notion of “actual” here is explicable in terms of determinateness that is maximal or “complete” (SL 731). This transformation of determinateness into an axiological term allows actuality to count as a value, because actuality just is maximal determinateness. But this is not just a cheaply earned terminological equivalence: if we say for some region *x* is actual we are saying that in that region *x* is maximally determined, there is no proposition that is true of that region that contradicts *x* and at the same time *x* is specified in that region fully, without any gaps.

The upshot of this discussion is that the value of “good” is fully realised, if the good becomes actual, that is, if reality is considered as the consistent set of *all* true value propositions.<sup>49</sup> A worry can arise here about how a unificationist project, which uses contradiction in the dialectical testing of claims, yields all of a sudden a characterisation of reality that has the virtue of actuality. Reality, as fully determinate, is the result of the progressive clarification through testing of the function of determinacy and what is tested is nothing other than the determining powers of forms of thought with a putative claim to capture reality (or, at the start “being” as such). The criterial role of consistency depends on the truth of value propositions and this, in turn, depends on the realisation of good, in a way that admits of no exceptions, no gaps or contradictions, or some unforeseen effect that diminishes the goodness and so on.

Still there are two puzzles about the actuality of the good, the first about how maximal determinateness is achieved, and the second about why it is achieved with a value term, namely the good? The first puzzle arises because Hegel seems to claim that “good”, a notion that is semantically rich, can have extensional relations of fit, of the sort that are possible only with logical or mathematical notions. One way to achieve full determinateness is to indefinitely enrich the meaning of “good” so that it includes exceptions, conditions and so on. But Hegel is not proposing this. Rather he argues that the good successfully determines reality if the familiar yet not fully determined notion is correctly attributed in all cases in which it is used. One condition for this is that the subject term of the evaluation is fully determined, so that there are no hidden, unknowable, or *in potentia* elements to it. This is just a description of a uniquely identifiable particular. The assignation of goodness as a predicate for such a subject is the identification of a constituent element of it as its form of goodness: the particular is not identified with the good, nor is yet an instance of the good, rather it

<sup>49</sup> I do not use this in a technical sense, “claims” or “sentences” would be just as good, the drawback being that they distract for introducing in the wrong place the thought of putative subjects making these claims and uttering those sentences.

is identifiable *as* good. This is what allows the goodness of each particular to be correctly acknowledged while the term remains stable across all its applications. Unique identification is the corollary of the maximal determination of reality: this is an abstract definition intended to acknowledge the particular, the missing “ground” of the things in themselves.<sup>50</sup>

The second puzzle about the value term is relatively easy to solve because from the start the enquiry is about the goodness of determinateness and seeks to achieve such goodness, which is finally actuality. The twist in the end is that such, shall we say intellectual virtues, are not insulated from, but rather form a part of a capacious conception of goodness, such that guides actions in practical syllogisms. And while actual working scientists may not find much that is directly supporting their research in such conclusion, the outline given here of Hegel’s argument about actuality in the *Logic* suffices, I think, to show the centrality of his concern with showing how thought about reality can be realistic, that is, answer properly to what is.

#### 4. Conclusion

By way of concluding remarks, I want to draw attention to one distinguishing characteristic of the genus idealist naturalist, I sought to describe in this paper, namely its commitment to philosophical autonomy. Autonomy is not just assumed; it is earned thought testing. The idealist conception of testing of philosophical claims borrows from rationalist metaphysics the idea that rational organisation places demands such that mere collections of contingently found facts do not meet. The transformation of this idea from one with ontological and theistic implications to a pure demand of rational thought, which rational thought can and ought to be able to meet through its own resources, is key to the vindication of autonomy. The upshot of instituting this internal tribunal is a complex unification project—or set of projects—which correspond to the search for external checks that contemporary metaphysical naturalisers seek, when they turn to the findings of natural sciences. At the same time, in its narrow anti-supernaturalism, idealist naturalism shows kinship with the broader naturalist kind, such as expressed, for example, in Sophie’s remarks to Leibniz quoted at the start of the paper. I qualified the anti-supernaturalism as “narrow” to indicate that there is space for transcendent elements and for a conception of the divine in both Kant and Hegel’s thought, simply not as a result of commitment to logical or epistemic principles. As for the different ways in which each defines the supporting role of philosophy in establishing continuity with the natural sciences by fulfilling a realist agenda, matters are complicated. Counterintuitively, what counts as realism for Kant and for Hegel depends on acceptance of idealist theses, which are neither straightforward nor uncontroversial even among interpreters of their work. The versions I outlined may well seem outlandish and unconvincing, and therefore inline contemporary naturalists to count their idealist cousin as a mere historical curiosity. However, in seeking to broaden the context of understanding and justification for these idealist positions is to allow

<sup>50</sup> The uniquely identifiable particular in this context is also usefully comparable to the particularities Hegel dismisses in thesis (a), which we discussed previously, in the context of motivating his unification project. From the vantage point of the *Logic*, such particularities can be described as insufficiently determinate.

consideration of the reasons shared that explain the philosophical possibilities Kant and Hegel consider as promising and those they reject. As I argued, key to their choices is the weight they both put to our capacity to think, and to the fact that once the active nature of the exercise of this capacity is acknowledged, certain intellectual responsibilities follow that simply cannot be relegated or outsourced.<sup>51</sup>

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# Hegel on the Naturalness of Logic: An Account Based on the Preface to the second edition of the *Science of Logic*

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## Abstract

The preface to the second edition of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is crucial for understanding the idea of Hegel's logic. It is an important text because what Hegel writes is not an idiosyncratic view about logic, but rather something universally true about the object, scope, and nature of logic. Something that can genuinely dialogue with more recent, and perhaps more sophisticated, accounts of logic. One central aspect of Hegel's argumentation in the preface is the idea that *logic is natural*. In this paper, I focus precisely on this aspect, addressing four Hegelian theses about the naturalness of logic.

**Keywords:** Hegel's logic, Natural logic, Natural language, Logical forms, Dialectics.

## 1. Introduction

The preface to the second edition of Hegel's *Science of Logic* can with full rights be counted amongst the classic texts of the history of philosophy. It is a classic text because it presents in a stylistically beautiful (almost poetic) way one key philosophical idea—the very idea of Hegel's logic. It is classic in that what Hegel writes is not his idiosyncratic view about logic, but rather something universally true about the object, scope, and nature of logic. Something that can genuinely dialogue with more recent, and perhaps more sophisticated, accounts of logic.

One central aspect of Hegel's argumentation in the preface is the idea that *logic is natural*. In what follows, I will focus precisely on this aspect, addressing four Hegelian theses about the naturalness of logic, namely:

1. The forms of thought permeate all our thoughts, actions, feelings, desires, representations and ideas. They are deposited in human language—they “pass our lips in every sentence we speak”. They are the natural element in which human beings live. Hegel calls this linguistic, logico-natural element in which we live *das Logische*.

2. There is a difference between the unconscious use of the forms of thought in everyday thinking and reasoning (*natural logic*), and their thematic consideration (*logic as theory*).
3. Logic as theory may be carried on in a limitative way, that is, when we consider the forms either as means for us (whereby *we* are means for *them*), or as merely accessorially attached to the content of our thought (whereby they are what is basic and substantial about the content of every thought).
4. There is a difference between the treatment of *das Logische* in the logic and metaphysics of Hegel's times and its truly scientific treatment. While the manuals of Hegel's times "kill" the forms of thought, the task of logic as science is restoring the natural life of *das Logische*.

In the following pages I present these theses in more detail, asking: how do they relate to current ideas about logic, and about the relationship between logical forms and natural language? In this context, I will limit myself to present Hegel's account, hinting in the conclusion at one idea suggested by Russell in 1914. It is the view that logical forms are deposited in human language and thought, and that the task of *philosophical logic* is to "extract the forms from their concrete integuments", and render them "explicit and pure" (Russell 1914 [2009]: 35). This idea, which I call for simplicity *E* (from *extracting forms*), is explicitly shared by some contemporary philosophers of logic, among them Lowe (2013: 1) and Sainsbury (2001: 1). In my view, *E* constitutes a genuine common ground for a possible dialogue between Hegel's idea of logic's naturalness and recent accounts of philosophical logic.

## 2. *Das Logische* is the Natural Element in which Human Beings Live

As Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976: 78) pointed out, Hegel coins a new expression, which cannot be found before him: "the logical" (*das Logische*). In the *Lectures on the history of philosophy*, Hegel talks about the "beautiful" ambiguity of the Greek language, for which *logos* means both reason and language. Thanks to this ambiguity, the Greeks were able to express the idea that natural language has a logical nature, an idea Hegel was particularly fond of.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the preface Hegel writes:

The forms of thought are, in the first instance, displayed and stored as human language [...] Into all that [we think, do, feel, represent] [...] into all that we make our own, language has penetrated, and everything that we have trans-

<sup>1</sup> See Gadamer (1976: 78). In English translations, the term *das Logische* is often rendered with "logic" (see for instance Hegel 1969: 36-37), but this could be misleading, as it risks overlooking important philosophical implications. Nuzzo (1997: 41ff.) considers Hegel's distinction between "logic" and "the logical". See also Nuzzo (1992: 193-98, and 281 note 84). Fulda (2006: 25-27 and 32ff.) stresses that "the logical" is the field of Hegel's "first philosophy" or metaphysics. D'Agostini (2000: 95ff.) examines the consequences of Hegel's new use for the relation between logic and metaphysics. Labarrière (1984: 35-41) and more recently Caron (2006: 149-83) propose a theological interpretation of "*das Logische*". Di Giovanni (2007: 85-87) rejects the theological interpretation, stressing that the expression "*das Logische*", in Hegel, stands for the field of language and thought that constitutes the subject matter of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

formed into language and express in it contains a category—concealed, mixed with other forms or clearly determined as such, so much is logic [*das Logische*] our natural element, indeed our own peculiar nature (Hegel Werke 5: 20).

Hegel uses interchangeably the terms “forms of thought” and “categories”. This use could seem weird from a contemporary point of view, for which categories, as the basic structures of reality, are dealt with in ontology and metaphysics, while the forms of thought or valid inference are the subject matter of logic. For Hegel, both essentially belong to the field of *das Logische* insofar as they are forms of our thought that claim to be forms of our thought about reality. In short they are, or claim to be, forms of truth. Gadamer puts this aspect in perhaps clearer terms when he recalls that the expression *das Logische*, in Hegel, has roots in both, ancient metaphysics and transcendental philosophy. Gadamer suggests that Hegel uses *das Logische* in the same way that the Greek philosophers used the word *logos*, as an equivalent to “reason”, as the realm of *concepts* or *forms* which are expression of the nature of reality, the universal and pure entities constituting and ruling human language and reasoning.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Hegel conceives *das Logische* as self-reflexive thought and, in this, he follows the Kantian and Fichtian transcendental tradition.

The Hegelian *das Logische* is not only the field of the forms of reality, but also and at the same time the field of self-reflexive thought. And self-reflection is natural, for human beings. It is our peculiarly human trait of thinking about ourselves. As Hegel puts it: “Because human spirit is essentially consciousness, this self-knowing is a fundamental determination of its *actuality*” (Hegel Werke 5: 27).

The nature of *logos/das Logische/der Begriff* as self-reflexive thought will turn useful later, in the context of the discussion of the fourth thesis.

That *das Logische*, so conceived, penetrates all our ideas, actions, purposes etc. means, for Hegel, that our language contains (sometimes conceals) pure forms and categories: “[we employ] those determinations of thought on every occasion, [they] pass our lips in every sentence we speak” (Hegel Werke 5: 22).

We always use categories (we use “being” and “quantity” when we say “two cats are on the mat”), thought determinations or semantic terms (we use “sentence” and “true” when we say “Blasey Ford’s statements during the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing are true”). Finally, we always use inferential forms—to recall a famous Hegelian example:

If any one, when awaking on a winter morning, hears the creaking of the carriages on the street, and is thus led to conclude that it has frozen hard in the night, he has gone through a syllogistic operation—an operation which is every day repeated under the greatest variety of complications (Hegel Werke 8: 335).

### 3. Natural Logic is the Unconscious Use of the Forms of Thought, while Logic as Theory Makes them the Object of Inquiry

However, while logical forms may be thoroughly familiar, for the most part we use them unconsciously.

<sup>2</sup> Gadamer 1976: 78.

The activity of thought which is at work in all our ideas, purposes, interests and actions is [...] unconsciously busy (natural logic) [...] To focus attention on this logical nature [...] this is the task (Hegel Werke 5: 26-27)

“*Das Logische*” and “logical nature” refer to logic as an objective fact, independent from human decision, they denote the natural field in which logical forms emerge. “Natural logic” expresses the natural and unconscious activity of using these forms. Our “task” is to focus attention upon the forms of thought, making them the object of inquiry. They are used unconsciously, and we have to bring them into consciousness. This enterprise can be carried on in terms of what Hegel calls “*die Logik*”, the theory or discipline that isolates and fixes the forms of valid inferences, “extracting them” from human language and life.

Plato and Aristotle were the first philosophers who managed to

[free the forms of thought] from the material in which they are submerged in intuition, representation, and in our desiring and willing [...] and [made] these universalities objects of consideration (Hegel Werke 5: 22).

The work, initiated by Plato and Aristotle, and carried on by the philosophers, logicians and metaphysicians in the subsequent history of philosophy, of making the forms of thought the object of the logical consideration, contributing to establishing logic as theory, is for Hegel of extreme importance. The separation of the forms from their nature (from their natural but impure occurrence in everyday language, thought, desire, will etc.) is fundamental, for Hegel. It marks the birth of logic as theory. At the same time, Hegel warns against the limits of logic as theory.

#### 4. Logic as Theory Misunderstands the Nature of the Forms of Thought

##### 4.1. Logical Forms are not Means for Us, We are Means for Them

A first limit is that, in making the forms the object of our study, we are led to taking them as mere means:

Such a use of categories, which above was called natural logic, is unconscious; and when in philosophical reflection the categories are assigned the role of *serving as means*, then thinking as such is treated as something subordinate to the other activities of mind [my emphasis] (Hegel Werke 5: 24).

Thus treating the forms as means implies thinking about them as subordinate to all our other activities—for example, we take the forms as means when we consider the knowledge of logical and argumentative laws as a way to think clearly, to act in a more effective way, to take good decisions in life. This approach, however, is misleading. It forgets that the forms permeate all our ideas, feelings, impulses, will, and that they rule everything. To go back to Hegel’s own example, if any one, when awaking on a winter morning, hears the creaking of the carriages on the street, and is thus led to conclude that it has frozen hard in the night, he has not only gone through a syllogistic operation, but his

very actions and decisions are ruled by that same operation. In another context,<sup>3</sup> Hegel writes about the march of cold necessity that inferential rules force upon us. If this is so, how can the forms be means for us?

Rather [...] we are means for them [...] they have us in their possession; what is there more in us as against them, how shall we, how shall I, set myself up as more universal than they, which are the universal as such? (Hegel Werke 5: 25).

#### 4.2. Logical Forms are not Accessorily Attached to the Content, They are What is Essential and Substantial About Every Content

A second misunderstanding that can arise in establishing logic as theory is taking the forms as only contingently attached to the content, and not as themselves content:

The activity of thought which is at work in all our ideas, purposes, interests and actions is, as we have said, unconsciously busy (natural logic); what we consciously attend to is the contents, the objects of our ideas, that in which we are interested; on this basis, the determinations of thought have the significance of forms which are only attached to the content, but are not the content itself (Hegel Werke 5: 26).

Since the forms are present in all our thoughts, actions and interactions, and since what we are normally interested in when we think, act and interact are the contents of our thoughts/actions etc., then we may think that the forms are an accessory part of our actions, purposes, ideas. For instance, to go back to Hegel's example, what I am interested in about the reasoning "I hear the creaking of the carriages on the street, and thus conclude that it has frozen hard in the night" is not the inferential form "if A then B, A hence B", but rather that it has frozen and that I cannot take my bicycle to go to school. However, what is erroneous for Hegel is the assumption: I am interested in the content of the inference, hence inferential forms are merely accessory features, and have no relevance whatsoever concerning the content. Hegel reacts against this assumption, claiming that the forms of thought are the substantial part of every content.

But if [...] the nature, the peculiar essence, that which is genuinely permanent and substantial in the complexity and contingency of appearance and fleeting manifestation, is the notion of the thing, the immanent universal, and that each human being though infinitely unique is so primarily because he is a human being, and each individual animal is such individual primarily because it is an animal: if this is true, then it would be impossible to say what such an individual could still be if this foundation were removed, no matter how richly endowed the individual might be with other predicates, if, that is, this foundation can equally be called a predicate like the others (Hegel Werke 5: 26).

Following the ancient Greek account of the universal or *logos*, Hegel recalls that the universal is the fundamental predicate that expresses the substance or essence of individual things: "being a human being" is the foundation without

<sup>3</sup> See the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel Werke 3: 15-16).

which the individual Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel would not be the particular individual being he is, “being an animal” is the fundamental predicate without which our canary Sandrino would not be what he is. To return to Hegel’s example, the content of the inference “I hear the creek of the carriages on the street and conclude that it has frozen hard in the night [and that I cannot take my bike to go to school]” is rooted in its form, and its form is rooted in the universal or notions of the thing.

This means that the universal or *das Logische* or the *logos* is the notion (the conceptual grasp) of the thing, the truth about things. As Hegel claims:

The concept [*der Begriff*] [...] the logos, the reason of that which is, the truth of what we call things; it is least of all the logos which should be left outside of the science of logic (Hegel Werke 5: 30).

The last Hegelian thesis about logic’s naturalness can now be addressed:

### 5. The Task of Logic as Science is to Restore the Natural Life of *das Logische*

Traditional logic and metaphysics as theories are, for Hegel, important inquiries. Their materials are a fundamental reference point for any development of logic as a science, to be acknowledged with gratitude. However, logic and metaphysics as theories present the forms of thought in a fragmentary way, they do not see their relations, interplays and developments. In so doing, they fail to do justice to the genuine nature of *das Logische*. Hegel writes:

The profounder basis is [the pure concept] which is the very heart of things, their simple life-pulse [...] To focus attention on this *logical* nature which animates mind, moves and works in it, this is the task (Hegel Werke 5: 27).

For example, the logic as theory of Hegel’s times fixes the law of identity as  $A = A$  and considers it as a fundamental law of truth (see Hegel Werke 5: 30ff.). But, as Hegel (as well as most philosophers of his times)<sup>4</sup> remarks, nobody thinks or speaks according to it. Nobody thinks in terms of identity, stating “a plant is... a plant”, “a casserole is... a casserole”. These rules and forms are not genuine forms of truth:

The rules of inference [...] quite as well serve impartially error and sophistry and [...] however truth may be defined [...] they concern only correctness and not truth (Hegel Werke 5: 29).

For this reason Hegel underlines that the genuine form of truth is *das Logische* or the concept [*der Begriff*], and not the forms of thought as they are

<sup>4</sup> In Hegel’s times the idea about logic’s dullness was common. Hegel criticized the limitative treatment of the forms of thought in the logic and metaphysics as theories, but he also underlined that traditional and Aristotelian logic must be studied and regarded as an extremely important reference point for any work in logic. Hegel also sharply criticized the dismissive attitude towards logic typical of the romantic philosophies of his times. See on this Krohn (1972: 56) and Ficara 2019b.

fixed by the logic and metaphysics of his times. By this he means the basic self-referential activity of thought. He writes:

When those determinations of thought which are only external forms are truly considered in themselves, this can only result in demonstrating [...] the untruth of their supposed independent self-subsistence, that their truth is the concept. Consequently, the science of logic in dealing with the thought determinations which in general run through our mind instinctively and unconsciously [...] will also be a reconstruction of those which are singled out by reflection and are fixed by it as subjective forms, external to the content (Hegel Werke 5: 30).

Hence the task of logic as science is not only to pay attention to the instinctive and unconscious forms of thought sunk in natural language, but also to analyse the forms that the logic and metaphysics as theories have already extracted and fixed. This analysis shows that they are not the forms of truth they claim to be, and roots them in the concept or logos, which is the same self-reflexive activity of thought, the process of making our thought processes and forms the object of our thought.

In sum, if we reconsider the four theses presented by Hegel in the preface to the *Science of Logic* second edition, we see that the question about the naturalness of logic runs through them at different levels.

*i.* Logic is natural in the sense that the realm of “das Logische”, which includes categories, reflexive concepts, inferential forms, *permeates natural language*. Our languages contain names for categories, such as ‘being’, for reflexive or semantic concepts, such as ‘concept’, ‘sentence’, ‘true’; our reasoning follows logical patterns. Most importantly, our languages can contain substantives and predicates expressing the self-reflexive and dialectical nature of thought, terms such as “*Aufhebung*” (which means “overcoming and maintaining” and unifies two opposites).

*ii.* Logic is natural in the sense that logical forms run *instinctively* and *unconsciously* through all our thinking, reasoning, feeling, acting. The task of logic as theory is to bring this logical nature into consciousness.

*iii.* Logic is natural in the sense that it (intended as dialectical logic) “brings life” into the theoretical treatment of *das Logische*. The logics and metaphysics of Hegel’s times extract the forms of thought from the materials in which they are submerged in a way that “kills” the logical concepts and forms. They fix the forms, isolate them from one another, from their content and their roots in human life and self-reflexive thought. The task of dialectics (logic as science) is to trace the forms back to the self-reflexive activity of thought, restoring the natural dynamicity of *das Logische*.

## 6. Conclusion

Is Hegel’s account about the naturalness of logic at all relevant for us today? How is it related to debates about the relationship between logical forms and natural language in philosophy and logic? The research on this field is immense



and has no clear boundaries.<sup>5</sup> It ranges from works on naturalness in the systems of natural deduction,<sup>6</sup> to works on “natural logic”—whereby the expression “natural logic” is not always used univocally,<sup>7</sup> to works on the psychology of reasoning,<sup>8</sup> and to more general researches on the scope and meaning of logic.<sup>9</sup> I limit myself here to hint, by way of conclusion, at one common ground for a possible dialogue between Hegel’s idea of logic and recent accounts of philosophical logic. It is what I have called *E*, a notion that goes back to Russell 1914.

Points *i.* and *ii.* concern the insight that logical forms permeate our language and natural reasoning, we use them unconsciously (they “pass our lips in every sentence we speak”) and the task of logic as theory is to make them the object of inquiry. So conceived, *i.* and *ii.* are common presuppositions in philosophical logic, shared at least by those logicians who follow Russell’s account of philosophical logic in 1914. Russell writes:

Take (say) the series of propositions “Socrates drank the hemlock”, “Coleridge drank the hemlock”, “Coleridge drank opium”, “Coleridge ate opium”. The form remains unchanged throughout this series, but all the constituents are altered. Thus form is not another constituent, but is the way the constituents are put together. It is forms, in this sense, that are the proper object of philosophical logic. It is obvious that the knowledge of logical forms is something quite different from knowledge of existing things. The form of “Socrates drank the hemlock” is not an existing thing like Socrates and the hemlock [...] some kind of knowledge of logical forms, though with most people is not explicit, is involved in all understanding of discourse. It is the business of philosophical logic to extract this knowledge from its concrete integuments, and to render it explicit and pure (Russell 1914 [2009]: 34-35).

The Hegelian spirit of this quotation is outright clear.<sup>10</sup> Logical forms for Russell (as well as for Hegel) are always involved in our concrete talking with each other and understanding each other. They have “concrete integuments”. Our talking and reasoning follows logical patterns, and this often happens implicitly, without any precise awareness on our part. The task of philosophical logic is then to “extract the knowledge about forms from its concrete integuments”, making the logical structure of our thinking explicit. Also for Hegel, the task of logic (as both theory and science) is to make our unconscious, implicit and impure use of the forms conscious, explicit and pure.

<sup>5</sup> For an clarifying overview on the research about the several meanings of “logic’s naturalness” in contemporary philosophy of logic *vis à vis* Schopenhauer’s account about the naturalness of logic see Schöler, Lemanski 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Gentzen (1969: 68-131). “Natural” is for Gentzen (1969: 68) a calculus that comes as close as possible to actual reasoning. For a similar account about logic’s naturalness see Jaskowski (1934: 5-32), Tennant 1990, Ludlow 2005, Sanchez 1991.

<sup>7</sup> For Lakoff (1970: 254) natural logic is the empirical study of human language and thought, for van Benthem (2008: 21ff.) a system of reasoning based directly on linguistic form.

<sup>8</sup> Wason, Johnston-Laird (1972).

<sup>9</sup> On logic’s rootedness in the world see Sher 2016. On the role of natural reasoning for the revision of logic see Priest 2014, Priest (2016: 29-57) and Allo (2016: 3-31).

<sup>10</sup> On Russell’s idealistic philosophical formation see Hylton (1990: 2ff.).

Russell's idea is explicitly shared by some contemporary philosophers of logic, among them Lowe (2013: 1) and Sainsbury (2001: 1). The idea of logical forms as (special kinds of) "linguistic facts" "submerged" in natural language and thought is at the very basis of the preliminary way in which contemporary philosophy has conceived the notion of "philosophical logic". Following Russell, many contemporary authors define philosophical logic as *the attempt to formalise natural language*,<sup>11</sup> which might be performed by constructing mathematical models or more or less idealized languages. In any case, "formalisation" still means, ideally, what Russell calls "extracting" the forms that are entangled in our ways of speaking and thinking.

The last point (*iii.*), expresses the need to think about forms in new terms, and to introduce self-reference and dynamicity into the static field of traditional logic. It introduces Hegel's critique of traditional logic, and anticipates reflections on logic revision<sup>12</sup> in non-classical logics.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sainsbury (2001: 1), Jaquette (2007: 1), Cook (2009: 221).

<sup>12</sup> On logic revision see Priest 2014 and Priest 2016. On logic revision in Hegel and Priest see Ficara 2019a. The literature on Hegel's dialectics *vis à vis* non-classical logics is relatively rich. See Marconi 1979, Routley, Meyer (1979: 324-53), Apostel (1979: 85-113), and more recently Priest (1989: 388-415), Berto 2005, Ficara (2013: 35-52).

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# Spiritualized Nature: Hegel on the Transformative Character of Work and History

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## Abstract

It is argued that one of Hegel's main strategies in overcoming the opposition between nature and spirit is to recognize a realm of "spiritualized nature" that has a distinctive ontological character of its own, one that, though it is rooted in nature, must be understood in essentially historical terms. It is argued that for Hegel the activity of work is premised upon a commitment to the independent standing of such spiritualized nature and its historical character, and a detailed reading of Hegel's account of the slave's work in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is developed to show just how it is that work transforms nature into something of historical import.

*Keywords:* Hegel, History, Naturalism, Master/Slave Dialectic, Work.

## 1. Introduction

There are various points in Hegel's writing in which nature is conceived as something fundamentally distinct from and opposed to spirit, where the term "spirit" is generally meant to capture what is distinctive about us as free, self-conscious, thinking, and willing beings, and which more broadly includes the various legal, moral, economic, political, aesthetic, and religious ideals or norms to which we as subjects are uniquely responsive.<sup>1</sup> I will go on to lay out this opposition in what I take to be its most extreme form, but my aim is ultimately to show that the opposition, and the way nature and spirit are defined so as to give rise to it, are not Hegel's final word. Concerned to develop an overall conception of reality in which the fundamental opposition is overcome, and so in which nature and spirit, though maintaining their difference, come to be conceived in light of a more fundamental unity, Hegel would have us recognize a distinctive domain of reality for which neither nature nor spirit in their one-sided forms can be appealed to as providing the ultimate terms for analysis. This realm is not simply *both* natural and spiritual, some sort of hybrid dimension which contains distinct elements,

<sup>1</sup> Among others, see Hegel 1977: par. 381 and *Zusatz*, and Hegel 1975: 53-55.

some of which are explained as one-sidedly natural, others as one-sidedly spiritual. This would only be to defer the issue of how these distinct elements can come to cohere into a unified account of reality. Rather, Hegel has in mind a realm populated with realities that have a distinctive logic and ontological character of their own, and that as such arguably require a distinctive set of conceptual terms to render them intelligible.

I propose that this distinctive ontological realm can be fruitfully conceived as the domain of “spiritualized nature”. I call it *spiritualized* nature to highlight the fact that it only comes to be as a result of a concrete, transformational process, a process whereby otherwise natural processes or events or objects come to take on a distinctive, new character that makes them such that they are *no longer* natural beings in the narrower, oppositional sense. As I will go on to discuss, another name for this domain overall is, simply, “history”, for history is, for Hegel, arguably nothing other than this unique transformational process.

The arc of history in its broadest outlines is for Hegel the gradual progression from purely natural, prehistoric forms of reality, including prehistoric forms of human life that are dominated exclusively by natural forces and laws, towards forms of living that are to increasing degrees free and self-determining in character—which is to say, forms of living that are not just the blind instantiations of fixed and permanently existing natural laws, but that in some sense *generate their own laws*, laws that had no real purchase on things until they were actually recognized and put into play by the historically evolving ways of life that concretely embody them. In other words, history is the gradual development of distinctive kinds of reality that are increasingly determined, not by nature, but by ideals and norms—by the forces of right, beauty, truth, and, more generally, by meaning and rationality.<sup>2</sup>

While this gradual, transformational process is, in one sense, the victory of freedom and spirit *over* nature, it is crucial to note that on Hegel’s account it takes place only *in* and *through* the concrete terms of the spatio-temporal world of nature. So, in another sense spirit and its self-determining character only enter the scene, become actual, and evolve, by being *naturalized*—but in such a way that spirit thereby transforms and surpasses what would otherwise be *merely* natural in character, rendering it into spirit’s embodiment. Nature on its own is insufficient to explain or necessitate the rise of history and so of nature’s own spiritualization process. For instance, there seems to be good reason to think that Hegel would not accept any evolutionary account that tried to reduce all that was distinctive of human spiritual life to the same sorts of natural processes that underlie the evolution of plants and other animal life. For Hegel there is something exceptional about spiritual reality and its freedom, and Hegel conceives of historical reality as something that actively *distinguishes itself from* and *works against* nature as such, affirming itself only in and through a suspension or negation of what would otherwise be natural.<sup>3</sup> But, on the other hand, spirit’s realization, in its historical inauguration, also renders nature *necessary* to it as its condition or presupposition:

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Hegel 1956: 20-27, where Hegel lays out his claim that history is the gradual realization of freedom by way of action’s turning of nature to freedom’s ends.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Hegel’s discussion of how history realizes itself through natural forces that, in their conflicts with and limitations of one another, give rise to a significance that exceeds them (Hegel 1956: 26-28).

we see—retrospectively, on the basis of spirit’s actual, historical development—how nature afforded it what it needed for its self-realization.<sup>4</sup> It is essentially this spiritualizing/ naturalizing process, as something that exists in its own right and that has a distinctive ontology of its own, that, I suggest, Hegel brings to the forefront as offering us a way of getting beyond the bare opposition between nature and spirit.

I maintain that, on Hegel’s account, we bear witness to the distinctive ontological status of this process and its transformational character above all by directly participating in it: that is, it is precisely insofar as we are ourselves the active agents of history, concretely engaged thereby in the process of rendering nature spiritual and thus meaningful, that we find ourselves committed—committed *in practice*, as it were—to the distinctive reality of spiritualized nature, and so to the surpassing of the fixed nature/spirit dichotomy. For Hegel, action, and particularly the activity of *work*, affords us an indispensable perspective on the nature of reality, one that a purely theoretical consciousness, wholly devoid of any concrete will and of any situatedness within the natural world, would not have access.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, I will go on to offer an extended account of work, particularly as Hegel conceives it in his famous discussion of the master and slave dialectic (Hegel 1977, par. 194-6). This discussion, I suggest, affords us with an exemplary opportunity to explore how both the natural world, and ourselves as natural, desiring beings, are transformed by work into something that, though still fundamentally situated in and drawing upon our character as embodied, natural beings, is no longer natural in the narrower, oppositional sense. I begin, however, by drawing out the opposition between nature and spirit in what is arguably its most extreme form, for the sake of putting into better perspective the account of spiritualized nature and of work that follows.

## 2. Nature vs. Spirit

To identify the most basic contours of the opposition between nature and spirit, let’s take nature in its most non-spiritual form to be defined generally as the spatio-temporal domain in which finite things and their various properties exist, interact, and change in such a way as to instantiate fixed causal laws of the sort that science uncovers. In his *Logic*, Hegel points to a kind of mechanistic physics as offering us a sense for what reality totally devoid of spirit, or of “subjectivity” and its associated processes, would be like (Hegel 2010: 631-34). In Hegel’s thinking, such a conception of nature is rooted in an ontology that is characterized by privileging externality and external relations: to the extent that things are individuated and extended in space and in time, they are typically conceived in terms of discrete units that are at bottom outside of and relatively independent of one another in their basic features, such that they act upon one another in an essentially external

<sup>4</sup> This, I take it, is how Hegel comes to conceive of nature as spirit’s *presupposition*, while at the same time maintaining that spirit is nature’s “truth” (Hegel 1971: sec. 381 and Remark). Spirit enables nature to reach a form that surpasses nature’s inherent limitations, and in that sense spirit is logically *prior* to nature, something that cannot be accounted for solely in natural terms.

<sup>5</sup> See Ciavatta 2016 for a more elaborate case for appealing to the resources that the distinctive perspective of practical life offers for the development of an idealist ontology.

manner.<sup>6</sup> Thus, for instance, a spatially distinct body causes some change in another spatially distinct body by exerting some kind of external force on it, a force that is contingent with respect to the latter's essential nature. And, if causal laws are conceived in temporal terms, where "X causes Y" amounts to something like "if state X is present, state Y will follow", this typically involves conceiving two successive episodes of time that are essentially distinct from and external to one another, in that each has its own set of positive features that do not expressly refer to those of the other episode, whether in the prospective or retrospective direction.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, spiritual reality in its "purest" form—that is, in the form in which it is most distinct from and opposed to natural reality—could be taken to be exemplified by the sort of pure ideality or intelligibility we associate with rationality and its essentially internal relations, as when one idea or claim presents us with a reason to affirm another.<sup>8</sup> Such logical or rational relations, or relations rooted in the meaning of things, are not fundamentally causal in nature, and do not concern the sorts of individuated things or events that take place in space or time and that alone admit of causal connection, but rather concern intelligible realities that, as such, are essentially universal and so are not individuated in time or space. The relations between otherwise distinct ideas and meanings are not merely external, as they would be in the case of mere empirical association, where thinking one idea merely reminds one of another idea, but are essentially internal, and are discovered precisely by our "entering into" the content of an idea. For instance, the meaning of the term "cause" does not just remind us of the meaning "effect" by association or by some sort of mechanical memory,<sup>9</sup> but is intrinsically linked to it, for it seems impossible to make sense of what it would mean to cause something if we could not think, or were not already thinking, something like an effect. The very content or intelligibility of the idea "cause" thus bears an internal reference to content "effect", and in that sense cannot be what it is without it.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that we come to recognize or think such intelligible realities and their relations, and when our thinking is compelled to commit itself to one idea or claim on the basis of an intellectual grasp of other ideas to which it has already committed itself, this actual compulsion and this transition of thought are, in a way, individuated events that, as such, can be said to take place in nature. At the very least they take place in time, such that we can typically differentiate between the time before and after which we cottoned on to some implication, and take our thinking to have changed in some way in the event of doing so. But we do not

<sup>6</sup> See Hegel 2010: 631; Hegel 1970: sec. 247-48; Hegel 1971: 381Z.

<sup>7</sup> Compare Hegel's discussion of the externality of moments of time to one another in Hegel 1970: sec. 259 Remark, where he argues that, in nature, any prospection or retrospection is posited as merely subjective.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Hegel's discussion of pure logical thought in Hegel 2010: 736-37.

<sup>9</sup> Though it should be noted that Hegel's does acknowledge the importance of mechanical memory in the overall development of spiritual reality (Hegel 1971: sec. 463), and as Julia Peters has argued, this is particularly revealing of the naturalist strain informing Hegel's account of spirit (Peters 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Hegel's dialectical account of the cause/effect relation hinges precisely on the fact the cause is beholden for its intelligibility on the effect, where this eventually leads to the realization that *reciprocity* is more basic than the one-way causal relation (Hegel 2010: 500-503).



typically take *our concrete act of thinking of them* to be *constitutive of what is being thought* and of the *necessity* that is borne witness to by our thinking. Rather, our thinking grasps relations and necessities that, it seems, exist *in themselves* whether we, as particular thinkers with the particular psychologies we happen to have, think them or not.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the sorts of pure, logical relationships Hegel takes up in the *Science of Logic*—as, for instance, the sort of internal relation I pointed out earlier between the concepts of cause and effect—concern matters that were presumably true before Hegel (and any of the previous thinkers he draws from) demonstrated them to be true, and that would in some sense persist as true even if we as a species forgot them. Arguably we can say the same thing of aesthetic and moral norms: while the actual recognition of their force or their implications—the recognition of the demands their meaning places on us—may take hold of us at particular times and in reference to the here and now of the particular situations we face, we typically take what we bear witness to in such cases to hold independently of our actual bearing witness to them at the time, to have a sort of independent weight and reality that is, in itself, atemporal and universal.

If nature and spirit are conceived exclusively or primarily in terms of this, their most extreme, opposition, the prospects of conceiving how they could ever be brought together into a unified account of reality seem dim indeed. Moreover, we can see how such a stark opposition between nature and spirit could lend fuel to anti-idealist forms of naturalism. For the further away spirit is from nature, and so from the metaphysical or ontological commitments that underlie modern natural science and its purported successes, the more mysterious spirit seems to become from an ontological point of view. Likewise, any attempt on the part of an idealist to challenge the contemporary hegemony of nature-oriented ontologies, by offering an alternate ontology that would make room for the distinctive way of being of this ideal realm, is bound to seem, to modern ears at least, hopeless, something akin to a summarily dismissed “Platonism”—even if it is sometimes granted that the domain of ideality *does* seem to be irreducible to nature in basic respects.<sup>12</sup>

Whether Hegel himself attempts to defend the idea that pure ideality has a reality and ontological status of its own, independently of any account of concrete nature, is a matter of some controversy. But I propose to side-step that issue to explore another side of Hegel’s approach to the nature/spirit relation, one that focuses, not on spirit in its separation and its pure ideality, but on the way spirit comes to inhabit the natural world, in effect transforming nature into a material

<sup>11</sup> See Hegel’s discussion of philosophical thought as freeing itself from its “historical outwardness” (Hegel 1991a: sec. 14). Though it should be noted that some have read Hegel’s account of pure thought in the *Logic* as depending in essential ways on the concrete movement of thinking (see Burbidge 2006) or on concrete language (McCumber 1993).

<sup>12</sup> For an insightful overview of the core tensions and attempted reconciliations between modern naturalism and idealist metaphysics, see Sebastian Gardner 2007. I share Gardner’s view that so-called “soft naturalisms”, which acknowledge the irreducibility of the normative sphere to nature, but which nevertheless continue to regard nature, narrowly conceived, as setting the ultimate ontological standard for what counts as real, cannot ultimately evade idealism’s insistence on the need for an ontology that does justice to the distinctive character of normative reality. Though Gardner does not single out McDowell’s focus on second nature, Gardner’s worries about soft naturalism arguably plague McDowell’s approach as well (McDowell 1996).

manifestation of the norms and meanings to which spirit bears witness. From this perspective, not only spirit, but nature itself, need to be reconceived so as to overcome the starkness of the opposition between them: on Hegel's account we must recognize, not only that spirit can and does draw upon and reconfigure the natural world—that spirit's self-determination and self-realization occurs precisely *in* and *through* what has been afforded to it and set in motion by nature—but also that “nature” is revealed, precisely *by* spirit's self-realization in it, to be irreducible to an inherently meaningless domain of spatio-temporal things and occurrences exhausted by physical laws. On the contrary, natural forms and processes come to show themselves as providing the concrete ground or condition of spirit's own self-realization, which suggests that the meanings and norms to which spirit comes to embody and bear witness in its concrete existence, must themselves have some sort of basis in natural reality, and so cannot be wholly foreign to it.<sup>13</sup>

If the standing norms of beauty or good or truth are not *merely* ideal, but can have an actual weight and motivational pull on us—if they *make a difference* for us—then at the very least there must be temporally-individuated episodes in which such norms are actually felt, affirmed, or heeded by our subjective experience at some specific moment in history. But more than that, in the case of some of these norms at least, what is required is not just an internal, subjective recognition of their weight and implications, but an *actual transformation of the world*, one that is informed by and grounded in such norms. For instance, moral norms are such as to demand that some specific action be taken, and aesthetic norms, when guiding the hand of the artist, exist as demanding that an object being generated by the artist take a certain form and not others. Were it impossible for such norms to ever enter into and shape the spatio-temporal world at all—if everything in the spatio-temporal world were, by definition, norm-free or without meaning, for instance as wholly exhausted by meaningless instantiations of natural laws—then such norms, in their demandingness, would in effect be demanding the impossible. Every attempt to enact them or make them effective would be to betray them. Hegel sees this tension as plaguing Kant's (and arguably also Fichte's) moral philosophy, for in his view Kant subscribes to too sharp an opposition between nature and ideality which in effect renders the moral good into an “infinite ought” that can never be concretely realized in time or in practice (see Hegel 1991a: sec. 60 and Remark). In contrast, Hegel is committed to recognizing a sort of middle terrain in which not every concretization of an ideal is its betrayal, but where there can actually *be* concrete realities that are themselves the living embodiment or

<sup>13</sup> While I will be focusing specifically on action and history, a broader defense of this claim could also turn to the “Anthropology” section of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, where the natural and corporeal roots of spirit's distinctive capacities are explored. However, it is worth noting there is still an implicit historical trajectory underlying Hegel's account in the Anthropology, for Hegel seems to suppose that historically more evolved humans (that is, those whose reality is more determined by their own agency and will) are *less determined* by the specific limits of these natural roots than less evolved humans, and so that history plays a role in mediating and cultivating the concrete character of even the most corporeal phenomena Hegel discusses here. Thus, for instance, though all humans have corporeally-expressed emotions, the content and shape of the emotions of more historically evolved humans will be more “spiritualized and the materiality of their expression diminished” (Hegel 1971: 83).

presence of a norm or a meaning—realities that are not reducible to the meaningless stuff of a one-sided nature, but are themselves the direct, material manifestations of spirit.

*Actions* themselves are what constitute the most basic “objects” populating this middle realm on Hegel’s account, for Hegel seems committed to regarding “acting bodies” or “action events” as of a different ontological status than mere natural bodies or natural events (though we will see, as we turn to Hegel’s account of work, that action also enables things otherwise external to the agent’s body to take on this distinct status as well). Generally speaking, action is conceived by Hegel as a process of enabling the norms whose meaning we bear witness to as spiritual subjects, to actually inform and in some sense govern the objective goings on of the concrete, spatio-temporal sphere: action sees to it that these otherwise ideal norms are no longer *merely* subjective and ideal, having purchase *solely* in our thoughts or intentions or interpretations, but actually *make a concrete difference* in the world, gaining a real purchase and explanatory force in the here and now.<sup>14</sup> The very project of acting hinges on the notion that it is not enough merely to *interpret* or *be conscious of* a certain given state of affairs as the embodiment of a certain norm’s meaning—as though this were merely a matter of subjectively projecting meanings onto a realm that, in itself, was essentially meaningless and indifferent to whatever meanings it might take on—but that some sort of concrete *event*, some sort of real *transformation* in the here and now of the spatio-temporal world—that is, the action-event itself—must actually take place if we are to be *warranted* in regarding the relevant state of affairs as the successful embodiment of meaning. That is, the action takes itself, its actual changing of the world, to be essential in bringing meaning into play. From the point of view of the engaged agent, then, the difference between a merely given, natural state of affairs, and a spiritualized, or “accomplished”, state of affairs—that is, one that is in itself marked by the embodiment of meaning or by answering to norms—is not merely a difference in interpretation, a difference “in us”, but a difference rooted in *actual events* and their unfolding in the here and now. And the agency of the agent, her power to make a real difference in the here and now, consists in nothing other than the capacity to give rise to such a transformational event: her agency is, then, not simply a matter of being an efficient cause in the stream of law-governed, natural events, nor is it a matter of somehow letting some norm act as such a natural cause, but rather a matter of letting *meaning actually happen* in the world and thereby *come to inform* what would otherwise be a meaningless domain of natural events. In effect, her agency consists in giving rise to a different sort of event altogether—a *historical* event. I will be arguing that it is particularly in Hegel’s account of *work* that this transformative character of human activity is brought to the forefront. Before turning to the nature of work, however, I will briefly lay out some of the most basic features of historical reality, with a view to setting up the contrast between it and nature that will underlie the account of work.

### 3. History and the Essential Place of Concrete Individuality

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Hegel 1971: sec. 484, where Hegel speaks of the will’s need to realize itself in an external objective form, thereby “making the latter a world moulded by the former”. For similar formulations, see Hegel 1991b: secs. 8, 109-10, and 1956: 22.

Part of what distinguishes us as humans, on Hegel's account, is that we are historical beings, and everything that is distinctively human is arguably marked by its essentially historical character in his view. To say that we are historical is to say, among other things, that *who we actually are* is determined, at least in part, by *what happens* in the course of our existence—by what we experience and actually undergo in life, and most especially by what we do in response to these experiences and events.<sup>15</sup> It is to say that our identities are not already fully fixed and written into the nature of things in advance, but are perpetually in question and develop in the temporally unfolding course of things, such that, not only our knowledge or consciousness of ourselves, but also who we actually are, can be fully settled only in retrospect, once our “stories” are decisively *over*, or once we have said and done the most essential things we are going to say and do.

It is arguably due to this fundamental historicity of human life that processes like work and education, or life-changing decisions such as getting married or heroically standing one's ground in a high-stakes ethical crisis, play such crucial roles in Hegel's account of human or spiritual life. For these are all essentially historical processes in that they transform the overall self-identity and sense of agency of the individuals who are engaged in them, and transform them in ways that could not have been fully predicted or affirmed in advance of their actual occurrence—such that the actual, temporal unfolding of what we put into play comes to have a bearing on determining and revealing who we are.<sup>16</sup>

To say that what happens in the course of a self's life can play a role in determining the identity of that self is to recognize the irreducible character of the self's spatio-temporal situatedness and individuation. It is to acknowledge that, though I have a past and a future, though I essentially occupy different “nows” and “heres” in the course of my life—that is, though I am *universal*, in the sense that my identity stands beyond every *particular* situation I may be in, and is not exhausted by any one of them, or perhaps even by the totality of them<sup>17</sup>—there is nevertheless a sense in which, when I am in some individual situation in the here and now, the *whole* of me is potentially at stake, such that what occurs in this particular, concrete situation can have a bearing on my whole life, my identity as a whole. For, not only is death possible at any moment, threatening to short-circuit and thereby shape the contours of my overall biography, but there are also such things as decisive turning points, as a result of which I am never quite the same the person. For instance, events can arise which finally bring to a point of resolution my deepest commitments, commitments that, until that point, had perhaps been somewhat indeterminate and had no occasion to fully articulate and pronounce themselves, but that, under the unique circumstances of the moment, were allowed to shine through in a decisive and unmistakable way, thereby setting

<sup>15</sup> Thus Hegel can say that “what the subject *is*, is the series of its actions” (Hegel 1991b: sec. 124; Hegel's emphasis).

<sup>16</sup> See Hegel 1956: 27-29, where Hegel takes up the theme of how historical action typically realizes more than what was intended by the agent. I take this account of the retrospective nature of action to be generally consistent with that put forward by authors like Robert Pippin (2008: 147-79), though my suggestion in what follows that there is a distinctive historical ontology implied in such a conception departs from Pippin's account.

<sup>17</sup> I am invoking here the specific sense of universality that Hegel develops in his account of sense-certainty in the *Phenomenology*; see Hegel 1977: pars. 98-99.

up a new standard against which all my subsequent actions (and, indeed, perhaps even my previous actions) will now be measured.

These are the sorts of heightened events that Hegel regards as especially well-suited to the manifestation of beauty on the stage, as he considers them to be among the most successful embodiments of spirit in its concreteness.<sup>18</sup> And in his account of world-historical individuals, Hegel acknowledges that such decisive events can even have a role in determining the overall shape of history (Hegel 1956: 29-32). Not every moment of a life is of such fateful significance, for, after all, much of the time we do what is typical given who we already are, and, indeed, in some respects our most prosaic actions are hardly distinctive of us as individuals and share much in common with those of others. But that there can be such formative events (or periods), suggests that our concrete situatedness in time and place is not merely the anticipatable instantiation of standing universals (as the events in nature instantiate pre-existing, standing causal laws), but rather the concrete institution of new or modified universals or norms.<sup>19</sup>

That our concrete situatedness matters in this basic way is also expressed in the fact that we as spiritual beings cannot help taking our own individual lives to be of absolute or final importance in the grand scheme of things: that is, we cannot help demanding that our individuality—this, our one and only life—be recognized as important in and of itself, rather than being taken up merely as substitutable instantiations of the general form “human” or “person”. Unlike plants, for instance, which on Hegel’s account are less fully individuated, and are more like temporary passing phases of one and the same ongoing genus cycle—the individual plant generating the seeds that lead to it being supplanted by new individuals that instantiate essentially the same processes that it instantiated, making it and its predecessor each just repetitions of the same one generic reality<sup>20</sup>—we as individuals are not simply substituted and replaced by the next generation, but can in principle make our individual mark once and for all, such that our individuality stands on its own account and is not merely one among many repetitions. The distinctiveness of history seems premised precisely on giving individuality its due in this way, whereas nature presents itself to us, in contrast, as the domain in which individuality is obliterated and forgotten for good, or in which individuals are wholly subsumed under the standing universals they instantiate, with the result that there is no fundamental difference between one natural individual and the others, each being of equal status in being fully accounted for as the instantiation of the same laws. As we will see, this way of framing the contrast between

<sup>18</sup> See Hegel 1975: 217-44, for Hegel’s general discussion of how beauty places demands on what sorts of actions are worthy of artistic presentation, and for his defense of the aesthetic superiority of the sorts of decisive, character-disclosing events typical of tragic collisions.

<sup>19</sup> Compare Hegel’s description of the beautiful individual as being “a law to itself”, rather than being beholden to existing laws (Hegel 1975: 185). Hegel’s description of the world-historical individual similarly emphasizes the fact that great historical actions cannot be adequately understood according to existing norms, but look forward towards the institution of new norms; see Hegel 1956: 29-32.

<sup>20</sup> See Hegel 1970: pars. 343-44 and 348. In elaborating on the lack of individuation in plants Hegel also notes that certain parts of plants can be cut and replanted to form other individuals, as though the original plant were only a superficial unity of many rather than a full-fledged individual in its own right.

nature and history will provide a useful backdrop to Hegel's account of the slave's working relation to the world, to which I will now turn.

#### 4. Hegel on Work and the Generation of History

Work, or formative activity, plays an important role in several of Hegel's discussions. For instance, as in Locke's view, work for Hegel transforms otherwise natural, external things into our property (Hegel 1991b: secs. 56-57); work transforms our immediate, natural desires into a spiritualized second nature, and in doing so allows us to participate in, and achieve the recognition of, the collectively-generated social order in the civil sphere (Hegel 1991b: secs. 196-98); the "spiritual" work of the artist brings about inspired artworks that give voice to the community as a whole (Hegel 1977: pars. 698-704). In each case what is at issue is the distinctive capacity of spirit to realize itself by rendering what was formerly natural and immediate into something that embodies it. I will focus in particular on Hegel's account of the slave's work and the way this work comes to transform, not only the world, but also the slave's own sense of agency: here the actual event of transformation arguably reveals to the slave something that he could not have realized inwardly, simply through reflection, and so the irreducibility of the concrete, historical event of his action comes to the fore in an especially striking way.

##### 4.1 The Fear of Death and the Unsettling of Nature

To provide the appropriate context for understanding the nature and function of the slave's work, it must be noted, first, that the slave is characterized by Hegel as subsisting in a deep-rooted fear in the face of death, a fear that permeates all of his interactions with himself and the world (Hegel 1977: par. 194). Hegel conceives of slavery as evolving out of a struggle in which self-conscious agents each seek to affirm their own freedom in its independence from nature, by risking their lives in a battle to the death (Hegel 1977: par. 187). The idea here is that the self seeks to declare that it takes its individual freedom to be more valuable than the natural life it has been given, and wants the other self to recognize this daring affirmation of freedom, and so actively puts its life, and so its very attachment to nature, on the line. This stance in effect embodies a kind of dualism between spiritual freedom and nature: by placing one's natural life at risk, thereby suspending life's claim on one's concerns and actions, one in effect declares freedom to be somehow beyond the natural realm altogether. The fear of death arises here, in response, as the realization that freedom (and so, spirit) *requires* nature as its condition, that freedom can *only* be realized *in and through* one's individual and concrete life, and so that one's individual life becomes something that needs to be preserved at all costs—thus the openness to slavery.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to note here that the slave's mortal fear is not the blind, instinctual fear that any animal might possess in the face of some specific danger, but is a fear founded upon a kind of rational realization of universal scope, the realization of freedom's necessary dependence on natural life.<sup>22</sup> That is, the slave's dread is already a primitive form of "spiritualized nature": as a feeling, it

<sup>21</sup> As Hegel puts it, "self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness" (Hegel 1977: par. 188).

<sup>22</sup> As Hegel writes, "this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread" (Hegel 1977: par. 194).

is still an immediate, and so presumably corporeal, phenomenon, one that manifests itself in a particular disposition of the body; but the specific character of this feeling that overtakes the slave is grounded in an appreciation of something that only a self-conscious being, concerned with its life as a whole and specifically in its prospects of realizing freedom, can have.<sup>23</sup> And we can already see that what this fear presumes, in its moving beyond the sheer *separation* of spirit from nature, is some kind of unity between spirit and nature. In effect, the slave's fear is a kind of immediately felt, embodied recognition of the need for a spiritualized nature, and we will see that this is precisely what the slave's actual work brings about in practice.

Hegel conceives of this distinctively spiritual fear as providing the essential backdrop for understanding the specific character of the work the slave does for his master. It is not that, out of a fear of dying, the slave consciously chooses to submit to the master and to the work the master would have him do, in the belief that this is the only way of staying alive. There is no question here of the slave having an internal capacity to size up his situation on his own terms, a capacity to hold his life in his own hands and to decide for himself how to save it. On the contrary, this is precisely the sort of self-possessioned agency and sense of independence that the slavish consciousness has been dispossessed of by his fear of death. The master directly embodies the power that death has over the slave, and so the slave experiences his life as being wholly in the master's hands. Thus seized with this utterly unsettling dread of the master's control over his very existence, he finds himself immediately compelled to do as he is told; heeding the master's commands is quite literally a matter of life and death, and so these commands are immediately equivalent, in his experience, to what life itself demands. Thus the slave's work for the master is based, not ultimately on his own desires, not even strictly speaking the desire to spare himself from death—for this presumes he still regards his life as being in his own hands and under his own control—but precisely on the unsettling character of the fear that disrupts any sense of self-possession. It is out of this fundamentally unsettled state—out of the slave's complete loss of control over his own life, and so from a sense of having no stable guarantees or reliable points of reference to turn to in his attempt to affirm himself, the sense that “everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundation” (Hegel 1977: par. 194)—that the slave approaches his work and the world upon which he is to undertake his work.

Interestingly, Hegel claims that the slave's fear is essentially an implicit or subjective expression of what, in his work, becomes outwardly expressed and realized in a concrete, objective form. That is, Hegel conceives of the event of work as bringing about, within the actual world, an unsettling of existing, stable forms, a disruption that in effect undermines the way things are in their natural givenness. Upon entering the natural world, work in effect introduces the very real prospect that *things can be other than they in fact are*, that what things happen to be now, in their current, natural form, is not the final word; for instance, trees can

<sup>23</sup> Hegel's account of emotion (Hegel 1971: sec. 401 and *Zusatz*) hinges on the notion that spirit must be corporealized, that the “inner” only realizes itself in and through the “outer”. For an excellent account of Hegel's theory of emotion, see Russon 2009.

become a table.<sup>24</sup> It is as though nature itself came to experience the unsettling “absolute melting-away of everything stable” (Hegel 1977: par. 194) that the slave himself experiences in the face of his own death.<sup>25</sup>

Work does not simply leave things in this unsettled, indeterminate state, however, for it is also essential to the nature of work that it bring about a certain “settling” or resolving of its situation, insofar as it gives rise to new objects that stand there on their own account as concrete, *stable* manifestations of its capacity to negate the existing form of things. As Hegel puts it, “the negative relation to the object becomes its form and something permanent, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence” (Hegel 1977: par. 195).

#### 4.2 Historical Permanence in the Face of Nature

The worker’s capacity to appreciate the worked-over object’s independence is conceived in contrast to the movement of *desire*, which Hegel associates with a denial of anything independent of it and with a process that perpetually undermines itself and so is doomed to repeat itself again and again, much as natural cycles do. On Hegel’s rendering, the desiring being attempts to gain an *unlimited* feeling of self—attempts to gain satisfaction for itself in affirming itself as the only being of any real ontological stature—but can do so only by destroying whatever would claim to limit or be other to it, for instance by consuming it.<sup>26</sup> This act of self-affirmation-through-negation is satisfying in a temporary way, but because it obliterates the object upon which it exerted itself, and thereby denies this object’s very otherness or independence from it, it eliminates anything that could serve as an attestation of its self-affirmation. The process of satisfying oneself, as involving the *actual negating* of something that would claim to be other, obliterates the very thing, to negate which, offers it satisfaction in the first place; that is, the desiring self needs the other to *be* precisely in order for its *negation* or *erasure* of it (that is, its satisfaction) to *be*.<sup>27</sup> So, upon satisfying itself, the desiring being finds itself desiring yet another object through which to affirm itself, which it in turn obliterates, giving rise to yet another desire, and so on.

While the desire for self-affirmation is distinctive of free selves, and so is not straightforwardly natural in Hegel’s conception, in a way the problem with desire is precisely its rootedness in nature and in its inability to escape nature’s repetitive,

<sup>24</sup> That an agent’s practical stance in relation to the world itself reveals something about the ultimate character of the world, and in particular that the way things are is not reducible to their given form, is a recurring theme in Hegel’s thought. For instance, Hegel thinks that the practical orientation of desire offers a kind of refutation of realism, in that, in devouring things, it reveals that the apparent independence and self-contained character of natural things is false; see, for instance, Hegel 1991b: sec. 44, Remark; Hegel 1977: par. 109.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel links this “absolute negativity”, which unsettles all given determinacies, with the essential character of free self-consciousness itself, and so this encounter with death’s disruption of everything fixed and stable is, in a way, just a deeper experience of what it is to be a self in the first place; see Hegel 1977: par. 194.

<sup>26</sup> “Certain of the nothingness of this other, [desire] explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself *in an objective manner*” (Hegel 1977: par. 174, Hegel’s emphases).

<sup>27</sup> As Hegel writes, “self-certainty comes from superseding this other; in order that this supersession can take place, there must be this other” (Hegel 1977: par. 175).



cyclical character. The desiring being eats, for instance, only to be faced with the prospect of having to eat again, and then again. And while each episode of desire/satisfaction may be compelling in its own right, the feeling of satisfaction disappears, without a trace, along with the consumed object, and is simply supplanted by another discrete episode that is wholly external to and independent of the last one. It is precisely this externality that above all characterizes this process as a natural one, in Hegel's sense. Note that there is essentially no possibility of historical development here—in which one episode of time carries forward and builds on the results of episodes that are no longer present—and likewise there is also no prospect of any individual episode of desire distinguishing itself from other individual episodes, or of making any lasting mark on the desiring being's overall orientation towards itself and the world. For, with the immediately compelling pull of each new desire, the desiring being is right back where it started last time—namely faced with the need to affirm itself as the only being that matters, at the expense of anything other than it. Similar to the plant's reproductive cycle mentioned above, or any other cycle in nature for that matter, the concrete, individual moments do not matter in and of themselves and in their differences from one another, but exist primarily as substitutable instantiations of the same ongoing process or law that exceeds them and that is itself is unaffected by any of its particular instantiations. The self, here, is the natural universal that claims to be in no way limited or defined by its concrete encounter with anything other, and it does this precisely by negating what is other, and along with it the potential ontological weight of any such encounter.

In conceiving of work in contrast to this desiring process—as “desire held in check” (Hegel 1977: par. 195)—Hegel is proposing that work be defined precisely in terms of its capacity to affirm and bear witness to what is other to it, and thereby to somehow interrupt and overcome the externality and recurrent cyclicity of nature. Rather than simply negating, and thus obliterating the natural object altogether, thereby leaving nothing that stands as an independent, objective attestation of its active engagement with it, work transforms its object into something that, while it is no longer natural, is nevertheless still *there*, still *present* in the world, and so into something that attests to its engagement with it. Presumably the worker experiences the worked-over object's independence most of all once the object is *finished*, and so when the work is done; for, until then, the object keeps calling for further intervention from the worker, and so keeps announcing that it is not yet ready to stand on its own account.

I take it that, in speaking of the worker's recognition of the created object's independence and permanence (in contrast to desire's simply consumptive attitude towards it), Hegel does not mean that the object retains an enduring physical integrity. Perhaps some of a slave's products will endure in this immediate, physical sense, but of course some of them will be immediately consumed by the master, and presumably even those products that do endure will undergo a more gradual consumption, eventually to disappear. What strikes the worker as permanent must lie in the *significance* this concrete object has attained through having been worked on, in the way its concrete form, precisely in its non-naturalness, directly attests to the worker's basic capacity to make a real difference in the concrete world. What ultimately *lasts* in the work, then, is not its material presence, but the fact that what this object actually is, was determined by the work that went into it, or, we can also say, by the way this individual thing embodies, once and for all, its formative past.

We can see this more clearly if we consider that whatever happens to the produced object is, in a way, also something that happens directly to the worker. Even if this object is accidentally destroyed by natural forces, this destruction is now a *significant event*, something that cannot be a matter of indifference to the worker who has been invested his work into this individual thing. For work cannot affirm its own undoing, and cannot help willing that its work stand, where this standing functions as a kind of norm that the rest of reality ideally ought to respect. Whereas, from the point of view of nature and its standing laws, an earthquake's leading to the destruction of a delicately wrought vase is nothing more than a rearrangement of fully present matter—each configuration of which was just as necessary an instantiation of nature's causal laws as every other—from the point of view of the worker who made the vase (and presumably for those others who recognize the work that went into it, who recognize it *as a vase* rather than as mere bit of natural matter), there is a substantial, irretrievable loss here, a *real infringement* of something that, in its individuality, claimed a final place in the real. If nature denies the irreducible importance of individuality by treating every configuration of matter as an equally necessary instantiation of law—like so many meaningless modes of the same one substance, or, as in our previous example, so many iterations of the same one cycle—there can be no such thing as real loss or absence, for there is no individual configuration of matter that stands on its own as a persisting reference point against which subsequent configurations could be measured. Upon its completion, however, the work in effect transforms these subsequent configurations of reality into something other than just further, equally necessary presences in themselves, wholly external to what came before, but instead into *negations of what was there*, as presences that in themselves *mark an absence*, insofar as they bear a reference back to that which they have supplanted.<sup>28</sup> It is true, nature can take back what the process of work allowed to stand out from nature, as when an abandoned house is gradually reclaimed by the forest in which it stood. But even here something of the eerie presence of past living persists in its broken remains, at least until there is nothing left that is recognizable as having the distinctive mark of the human hand. This example also shows how the work of maintaining or preserving a house (or any worked object) is essentially a matter of keeping the persistent forces of nature at bay, of continuing to suspend the hold it would otherwise have on things, so as to keep open thereby a domain in which distinctively human existence can take place.

Thus work defies the meaningless iterations of nature precisely by letting individual things matter as such and stand on their own as indelible reference points in the real. Given the link I made earlier between history and the appreciation of the irreducible role of individuality, we can see that what work does, in effect, is to suspend nature's ultimate hold on things so as to make *historical reality* possible.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> I am in effect arguing here that Hegel account of work foreshadows Sartre's account of the ontological irreducibility of negation; see Sartre 1996: 6-12.

<sup>29</sup> In linking work with the rise of history I am here coming to essentially the same conclusion that Alexandre Kojève did in his ground-breaking lectures on the *Phenomenology* (Kojève 1969: 37-52), though in focusing on the irreducibility of individuality, and the contrast to nature's downplaying of individuality, I come at this link from a rather different angle. I acknowledge, however, Kojève's argument the intersubjective dimension of the

Hegel's account of the slave's relation to his product suggests, further, that, in investing itself in the worked-over thing, and in thus rendering *its* individuality as something that matters, the slave in effect realizes something about *his own* individuality, his own individual agency.<sup>30</sup> The worker, working on the world, cannot help regarding the concrete product produced by the work as mattering in itself, in its independent individuality: work *is* nothing other than the rendering-significant of what would otherwise be meaningless nature. But the product's independent individuality and its mattering is, at once, a standing index of what the worker himself can do, of the difference the worker makes in the world, and so of the fact that the worker himself, as a concrete individual engaged with the world, matters. If work cannot but treat the product of work as mattering, holding open a domain—the domain of historical reality—in which individuality itself can stand as a final reference point, then the worker cannot but treat himself, his own individual meaning-giving capacity, as mattering in its own right and thus as an independent reference point that must be recognized by all things.

In spite of his unsettling anxiety in the face of death, which revealed the slave's very life to be in the hands of forces over which the slave himself had no ultimate control, the slave comes to find, in and through his own work, the concrete realization of his own individual capacity to make a lasting difference in the order of historical reality—a difference that natural forces, including death itself, cannot simply wipe away for good. Rather than identifying himself simply with his *natural* life, then, in working the slave comes to identify with a *life of his own making*, a life that takes the shape it does due to his own work and that is, in that sense, in his own hands. This “spiritualized life” can only take root in and through natural life and through the slave's interaction with otherwise natural things and processes, but it is only to the extent that the slave does not leave things in their natural form, and ceases to be governed by natural processes—interrupts and transforms them through work—that he comes to realize his own individual agency as such. In this sense, then, the actual, concrete event of working on the world, and so of giving rise to objects that matter, becomes a meaningful, spiritual event, a turning-point that serves to transform the working self's very identity as a self.

## 5. Conclusion

On Hegel's account, the very agency of the worker is itself realized precisely in the event of working, and so does not precede it in a straightforwardly naturalistic, causal way. The agency of spirit, in its giving rise to a meaningful nature, arises hand in hand with the meaningful work produced, and it seems we must say that *its* reality is in this sense bound up with the reality of the *work qua* work. Thus, it is not simply that the worker, standing over against nature, imposes a form upon

master/slave relationship is also crucial for understanding the reality of history here, and a fuller account of the relation between work and history would need to develop this dimension.

<sup>30</sup> As Hegel puts it, “in fashioning the thing, the bondsman's own negativity, his being-for-self, becomes an object for him only through his setting at nought the existing *shape* confronting him. ... [H]e destroys this alien negative moment, posits *himself* as a negative in the permanent order of things, and thereby becomes *for himself*, someone existing on his own account” (Hegel 1977: par. 196).

it from without. For, this way of conceiving of the matter posits the worker's distinctively spiritual agency as fully formed, prior to his actually entering into the work process. Rather, on Hegel's conception it seems that it is only once there is *work actually happening*, only in the actual, transformative activity itself, that there is *both* spiritual agency *and* work. Spirit as such only arises and becomes actual in and through the process whereby work renders the world meaningful—that is, in and through the process whereby nature, unsettled by work, gives itself over to meaningful form, to being spiritualized. This transformational process itself—the spiritualizing of nature or, what is the same, the advent of a distinctively historical reality—presents itself here as the core reality, one that is irreducible to either spirit or nature conceived in their one-sided, oppositional form, and that, indeed, attests to a deeper unity between them.

Of course, the vase and the table sit in the natural world, are exposed to the natural elements, and are themselves composed of physical and chemical materials that, as such, are fully compliant with existing natural laws. But to conceive of these objects in this way is to fail to recognize the vase or table *as such*, or in their distinctive character as works. It is in effect to refuse the privileged perspective of the worker, for whom the work stands out as an independent reality that embodies in itself the significance that his transformative work allowed it to take into itself, and instead to presume that only what is conceivable in narrowly naturalist terms and according to existing natural laws gets at its basic reality. Indeed, for the worker making a vase, there is a sense in which the primary “law” being answered to in the work is the very form or meaning of the vase *qua* vase, as this form is what guides her work throughout and what must be appealed to in determining that the work is complete, such we can at some point say that *there is now a vase standing there*, where there used to be only meaningless clay. Insofar as the work-process is above all sensitive to this real distinction, and in practice treats the vase as something fundamentally different from, indeed a supersession of, the bare clay, we can say that the worker's perspective is in practice committed to the refutation of the narrow naturalist's view, and has a living stake in maintaining the independence and irreducibility of what we have been calling a spiritualized nature.

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# Hegel's Naturalism, the Negative and the First Person Standpoint

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## *Abstract*

In this paper I attempt to move the discussion of Hegel's naturalism past what I present as an impasse between the soft naturalist interpretation of Hegel's notion of *Geist*, in which *Geist* is continuous with nature, and the opposing claim that *Geist* is essentially normative and self-legislating. In order to do so I suggest we look to the question of value which underlies this dispute. While soft naturalists seek to make sense of value as arising from material nature, those who support the autonomy thesis propose that value is something inherent to human spiritual activity. Following McDowell's suggestion that value as neither inhering or supervening on nature, but is rather something we have been estranged from and hence something to be recovered, I suggested that we adopt the first person perspective as the starting point for an examination of the relation between nature and value. The first person perspective is to be understood as a position within value which imbues value to what it encounters and hence is a process of the reenchantment of nature. Seeing things from this perspective allows us to place the question of nature as external materiality (which both the soft naturalist and autonomy view seem to share) in its proper context as something which develops as the result of the self-unfolding activity of consciousness as it encounters nature as negativity. Understanding *Geist* in this way allows us to see value as inherent in nature.

*Keywords:* Hegel, McDowell, Autonomy, First-person Standpoint, Naturalism, Negativity

## Introduction

In this paper I'd like to consider the question of Hegel's naturalism not just against the larger question of the relation between mind and nature but also by considering the perspective from which Hegel thought it proper to do philosophy. The question of naturalism thus becomes a question about the status of human subjectivity itself, or so I will argue. The thrust of much modern philosophy from Descartes on has been to come to terms with the fact-value distinction which it seemed incumbent on the modern subject to make. This distinction, however, brought with it the further question of whether this exclusion of value from nature is to be embraced and philosophy should simply become a subfield of natural

science (as thinkers from La Mettrie to Jerry Fodor have held), or whether this exclusion is itself a cultural or ideological phenomenon which should be understood as prompting the project of a reconciliation of human values with nature. By working through the debate about Hegel's naturalism I shall ultimately argue that the latter is the case in Hegel's philosophy and that the only coherent form such a project of reconciliation with nature can take is that of a first-person account.

A place to begin entering into the debate is to ask what Hegel means by mind or *Geist*. This debate is conceived primarily as a question of how to understand what Hegel is doing in the *Encyclopedia* when he moves between its three parts, Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and Philosophy of Spirit. The question within this more specialized field of Hegel studies which has recently received a lot of attention centers on what is at stake in the transition point into and out of the Philosophy of Nature. The questions underlying the debate about these transition points, however, to the larger one of what Hegel is to be understood as holding some sort of scientific naturalism, that is, as claiming that *Geist* develops *out of* nature. The two views at stake here are what I shall call the continuity view and the autonomy view.<sup>1</sup>

While the continuity view holds that Hegel's conception of *Geist* beholden to nature in some deep sense, the autonomy view holds that what constitutes *Geist* is its proper separateness from nature, its ability to legislate *independently* from nature. The former view is associated with writers who attempt to place Hegel in the context of Aristotle's thought that the soul is continuous with nature, while the latter view is most strongly associated with Robert Pippin's interpretation of Hegel. I will suggest that this debate can be clarified by drawing on John McDowell's account in *Mind and World* which effectively splits the middle, synthesizing both.<sup>2</sup> As a middle position McDowell's position does much to clarify but not to resolve the debate at the epistemic level.

I propose to move the debate forward by looking beyond the *Encyclopedia* to Hegel's position in the *Phenomenology* which, I argue, frames the discussion in the *Encyclopedia* from the standpoint of the development of consciousness. Picking up on McDowell's suggestion that the debate around nature is one of overcoming the disenchantment we have fallen into as a result of the scientific revolution, I propose the *Phenomenology* account as an attempted reconciliation between *Geist* and nature. Such an account, I argue, can only take place from the *first-person* perspective. The first-person perspective of the *Phenomenology* reveals that *all* knowledge, including that achieved in the *Encyclopedia*, is to be understood from the perspective of the subject in such a way that we cannot meaningfully speak of a nature which exists outside or independently of the subject in anything but a notional way. The relation between *Geist* and nature is in this way, I shall argue,

<sup>1</sup> I should note the parallel (and highly relevant) discussion of a similar set of issues in contemporary philosophy of mind by Matt Boyle and in Kant studies by James Conant. Both of these debates challenge what I am calling the continuity view or what Boyle calls the additive view (cf. Boyle 2016, Conant 2016).

<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps odd to suggest that McDowell synthesizes these two approaches since, as a historical matter, at least one central impetus for the debate arose from the publication of McDowell's Aristotelian/Kantian work *Mind and World* in which Hegel turns out to be the point of synthesis.

always already a value-relation since it arises from consciousness' attempt to make sense of itself and its environment.

## Part I: The Naturalism Debate

In the first part of the paper I'd like to present what I take to be three ways of understanding Hegel's discussion of the relation between *Geist* and nature: the continuity view which contends that we can understand *Geist* as emerging out of nature on an Aristotelian view, the autonomy view which argues that for Hegel *Geist* is to be understood as essentially discontinuous with nature and rather as a normative self-relation and, finally, the middle position, associated with John McDowell, which seeks to accommodate both claims. But let me not overstate the point: recent debates around Hegel's naturalism have only run the somewhat tight gamut between what might be called the soft naturalism of the continuity theory and the fairly strong idealism of the autonomy thesis. The purpose of this section is thus to set up a debate which is in need of resolution by attending to the larger question of the perspective from which to understanding of our exclusion from nature.

### 1. Soft Naturalism

The project of giving a naturalistic account of Hegel has attracted many few takers than has the project of giving a metaphysical realist account of his philosophy. Sebastian Gardner has usefully distinguished between soft and hard naturalism in this debate. Gardner sees hard naturalism as substituting natural science for the insights metaphysical has traditionally been said to provide. The move to the idea that natural science contains the answers to questions of value, however, meant that human values not authorized by nature had to be rejected as somehow supernatural. The various attempts to make value intelligible as somehow inhering *in* nature should, according to Gardner, be characterized as soft naturalism because they seek to add value back into nature.<sup>3</sup> Soft naturalism or non-reductive naturalism tries to show that "there is nothing within naturalistic commitment as such that threatens the value-interests of natural consciousness" (Gardner 2007: 28).

The paradigm for soft-naturalism is the Aristotelian claim that:

the soul is in the primary way that by which we live and perceive and think, so that it will be a sort of organization (logos) and a form, but not matter and a substrate. For substance [is either form or matter or] another what is from both; and of these the matter is potentiality and the form actuality. Since what is from both is an ensouled thing, the body is not the actuality of the soul, but the soul is the actuality of some body (Aristotle 2016: 26, 414a12-18).

<sup>3</sup> Gardner 2007: 24. For the thesis that soft naturalism adds value back in see p. 31. This point is also made by Grier (2013: 233-37) who, in the context of an analysis of Hegel's understanding of the mind-body problem, argues that contemporary writers in the Anglo-American tradition on the mind-body problem who are non-reductivist must contend with various problem in adding back in something non-natural to the view of the brain as material.



Evidence for this soft naturalism can be found in Hegel's claim that the basis paradigm of *Geist* developed in the *Phenomenology* even applies to animals:

Nor are the animals excluded from this wisdom. Instead they prove themselves to be the most deeply initiated into it, for they do not stand still in the face of sensuous things, as if those things existed in themselves. Despairing of the reality of those things and in the total certainty of the nullity of those things, they without any further ado simply help themselves to them and devour them (PS §109, 66-67; PG 9: 69).<sup>4</sup>

The secret Hegel refers here is the wisdom of knowing that the sensuous passes, and hence, in the larger sense, that we as subjects are ourselves part of the cause of this transformation.<sup>5</sup>

The general strategy of this approach is to read Hegel's treatment of nature as continuous with the psychic life of *Geist*. This strategy is particularly attractive within the confines of the *Encyclopedia* where Hegel's transitions from Logic to the Philosophy of Nature is represented as that of the same entity and therefore as *continuous* with the previous section.<sup>6</sup> A particularly strong version of this claim is made by Beiser who writes: "Hegel assumes throughout his *Naturphilosophie* that nature exists apart from and prior to human consciousness, and that the development of humanity presupposes and only arises from the prior development of the organic powers of nature".<sup>7</sup> The central claim is that by reflecting on the development of mind out of nature a non-dualistic account of mind can be developed which nevertheless does justice to the essential mindedness of spirit. This approach can also be seen in the discussion of habit which forms a key transition point from the Philosophy of Nature to the Philosophy Spirit in the final part of the *Encyclopedia*.<sup>8</sup>

A different soft naturalist approach has recently been proposed by Alison Stone who argues that we can understand Hegel's naturalism on a spectrum, lying between the two axes of (1) the continuity between the natural science and philosophy and, (2) the level of the rejection of the supernatural. Citing Hegel's claim

<sup>4</sup> In text references to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* will be to Hegel 2018 (as PS with § and page number); reference to the German edition *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, will be to Hegel 1968b (as PG followed by volume number of the *Gesammelte Werke* and page number).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, McCumber's discussion of this passage also with reference to Pippin's discussion of the same passage (McCumber 2013: 80, Pippin 2008).

<sup>6</sup> There has been significant discussion of the status of these transitions, especially the transition from Logic to the Philosophy of Nature. Recent writers have generally agreed with Houlgate that the transition cannot be understood as merely the *application* of the Logic to the Philosophy of Nature but must be seen as dialectical, with the Philosophy of Nature clarifying the metaphysical basis of science and natural science articulating some of the details that the Philosophy of Nature cannot engage with. Houlgate writes: "absolute reason discloses itself actually to be nature itself by proving logically to be immediately self-relating being" (Houlgate 2005: 107). See also Rand (2007: section II) who argues against the a priori nature of the Philosophy of Nature as well as Stone's (2005: 2) claim that Hegel's position is itself not entirely consistent.

<sup>7</sup> Beiser 2005: 68. Other who are tempted by the developmental approach include Winfield who argues that mind develops directly out of nature in a series of three stages: psyche, consciousness and intelligence. Winfield 2007: 107-108.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of habit, see Testa, forthcoming. For a more general approach to this issue see Illetterati 2016.

that “Not only must philosophy be in agreement with our empirical knowledge of Nature, but the *origin* and *formation* of the Philosophy of Nature presupposes and is conditioned by empirical physics”, Stone suggests that for Hegel there is no sharp distinction between science and philosophy since in origin and formation philosophy depends on natural science but in terms of method, science depends on philosophy<sup>9</sup> (PN §246R, 6; 20: 236).<sup>10</sup> On the continuity between natural science and philosophy, Stone argues that Hegel is more of a naturalist than Kant for whom final ends are merely regulative ideals, while on the naturalism-supernaturalism axis Hegel is more naturalistic than Schelling for whom the development of nature and philosophy depends on supernatural polar forces acting on the universe. For Stone, Hegel's concept of life is an immanent natural conception of the relation between nature and mindedness (Stone 2005: 73-74).

Peters, from whom I borrow the characterization of the soft naturalist approach as the continuity approach, suggests that while for Aristotle soul was indeed continuous with nature, this cannot be the case for Hegel who also holds an autonomy view under which nature must be consciously incorporated into subjectivity just as a proposition contains both subject and predicate (Peters 2016: 115, 120). For Peters, there is something irreducible about *Geist* which emerges out of nature.

Gardner has some more general reasons for being skeptical of the explanatory power soft naturalist approaches can offer. Gardner argues that the “having one's cake and eating it too” approach of soft naturalism is inherently unstable because in order to add value back in to the naturalist picture, soft naturalism must rely on a dual aspect view which considers value as both irreducible to nature as well as merely nature depending on which view one takes. But the very question of where to locate value, Gardner argues, is what is in need of either metaphysical or naturalistic explanation: how can a phenomenon be both one of value and also not (Gardner 2007: 30). Indeed, it is precisely the strength of hard naturalism as a substitute for metaphysics that makes soft naturalism questionable as a position. Rather, as Gardner suggests, what soft naturalism is actually trying to do is to approximate idealism's ability to make sense of value but without giving up on some version of the preeminence of the modern science (ibid.: 28). If naturalism is not the answer, then we should look to idealism.

## 2. Idealism and Autonomy

An alternative position to soft naturalism has long been prominent in the interpretation of Hegel and is associated with the positions of Pippin and, I shall argue, to some extent with that of Terry Pinkard. In moving to this interpretation we are moving from an interpretive paradigm which seeks to account for value in terms of what can be learned about nature to one which is thoroughly normative. According to Pippin, the autonomy position endorses the claims “that we are better off leaving nature out of the picture altogether and that doing so begs no questions” (Pippin 2005: 189). Pippin's comment comes in the context of a debate with McDowell about the meaning of just the appropriation of Aristotle by Hegel that was at issue in the continuity approach. For Hegel, Pippin argues,

<sup>9</sup> Stone 2013: 65. For a similar conclusion, see Houlgate 2005: 116.

<sup>10</sup> Hegel 2004: 1968a.

Spirit must be conceived [...] as some sort of collectively achieved, normative human mindedness if it is to be properly rendered intelligible, but doing *this*, as already noted, seems to require some very unusual formulations: that spirit is its own “self-liberation from Nature”, that spirit “is a product of itself” [...] and that its actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) is that it “has made itself into what it is” (PS, 1: 6-7).<sup>11</sup>

Against the continuity approach, Pippin argues that *Spirit* must be conceived as self-authorizing. Underlying this claim is Pippin’s further claim that *Geist* is only “intelligible” as self-authorizing and that other descriptions of *Geist* as nature are “inappropriate” (Pippin 2005: 16). The claim about intelligibility, I believe, fits directly into the debate about whether epistemology can bear the weight of intelligibility: is the something, the item, which perception refers to somehow *determinately* involved in the conceptual response which follows it, *without* being non-conceptually contentful. Put differently, can perception be the ground of intelligibility? The dilemma Pippin poses to McDowell and any others who seek to employ an Aristotelian paradigm is this: either nature is contentful by itself and so can explain the activity of *Geist* (this is essentially the position of the continuity thesis) *or* nature is not itself contentful and hence we do not need to worry about how nature is taken up into *Geist*.<sup>12</sup>

Pippin characterizes the terms of the dispute quite lucidly in a footnote:

It seems quite wrong to deny that a fairly rich, determinate “having the world in view” (McDowell) can come into focus directly in a sensible exchange with the world, without my yet being able to resolve just what it is I am seeing, without my affirmative judgment. But these initial presentations of such a view are wrongly described, I think, as simply “wrung out of us”. I think that we can call such views “a way the world is taken to be” without fearing that this will look like takes on an independently given sensible “material” (Pippin 2016: 69).

Pippin’s point, as he puts it in an earlier version of the debate, is that “the relevant image for our “always already engaged” conceptual and practical capacities in the German Idealist tradition is *legislative power*, not empirical discrimination and deliberative judgment”.<sup>13</sup>

The important point for the general dispute sketched here is that Pippin sides with a normative interpretation against the naturalist view. This view pits the continuity view’s *ontology* against the *normative* account of the autonomy. Pippin, paraphrasing Sellars (I think), puts the point thus: “As in Sellars, so, I think, in Hegel. The core idea: to think of someone as a person is not to ‘classify or explain, but to rehearse an intention’” (Pippin 2008: 61). The key point for Pippin is that the normative must categorically *frame* the natural in the sense that whatever nature we come in contact with must *already* be in some way intelligible to us in terms of our actual normative commitments. Nature, for Pippin, can in this way drop out of the picture as something that cannot be discussed on its own, as the continuity view holds.

<sup>11</sup> Pippin 2005: 16. The references to Hegel are to Hegel 1978: 1, 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Pippin (2016: 65) makes the stronger claim, in agreement with Gardner’s claim just above about the untenability of a soft naturalism, that if we concede that first nature is related to second nature, then second nature must ultimately be reducible to first nature.

<sup>13</sup> Pippin 2005: 197. For a discussion of naturalism which privileges Pippin’s side over McDowell in the context of the naturalism debate see Papazoglou 2012: 25-27.

### 3. McDowell's Middle Position

The two sides of the debate so far outlined consist on the one side of the claim that Hegel's naturalism is to be understood as the development of consciousness from *within* nature in accordance with the categories laid down by the Logic. The other alternative, which I've suggested we call the autonomy view or idealism, is the thought that Hegel is no kind of naturalist at all since for him it is consciousness' relation to itself which is central.

Having delineated both of these positions, it is now time to look at a proposal which walks the line between the two and to which both lines are in a sense responding namely, McDowell's position as it is articulated in *Mind and World*. We can think of McDowell's position as an attempt to draw together the ontological aspect of nature with the normative aspects of mind as judging in such a way that each becomes intelligible only in terms of the other. McDowell writes:

My alternative holds on to the thought rejected by bald naturalism, that the structure of the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*, as compared with the structure of the logical space within which natural-scientific description situates things. Even so, my alternative makes room for us to suppose [...] both that the very idea of experience is the idea of something natural and that empirical thinking is answerable to experience (McDowell 1996: xx).

McDowell seeks to make intelligible the continuity thesis, that is, the immanent relation of what he calls the space of nature to the space of reason but in such a way that it is possible to understand that the space of nature is, by being placed fully *within* the space of reason only intelligible *in terms of* the space of reason but without thereby losing the distinction between the space of nature and the space of reason.

McDowell seeks to mediate between these positions by suggesting that at the epistemic level, nature cannot make sense without the work of conceptual uptake. McDowell articulates this point by using the terms of nature and second nature, arguing that natural-scientific intelligibility is something that humans come to by being initiated into the space of reasons through what he calls second nature.<sup>14</sup> The point then is to understand the acquisition of experience as the process of nature the way science would describe it, being brought *into* the space of reason in the process of "second nature". "Human beings acquire a second nature in part by being initiated into conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong in the logical space of reasons" (ibid.).

Peters has sketched a Hegelian version of this particular thought which is able to go some way in reconciling the continuity view with the autonomy view. Pointing out both that Hegel praises Aristotle for holding a view of the soul as activity and that Hegel also understands the soul as self-differentiating, Peters argues for an autonomy view which is nevertheless beholden to nature in a determinate way. Taking as her example the first moment of the Philosophy of Nature, mechanism, Peters argues that we can understand the externality operating in the mechanism of, in her example, writing letters, as persisting while also understanding the activity of writing as the fully internalized process of *Geist*. Peters argues that the unity which is created between *Geist* and mechanism can be understood as the external having become, *as external* a reflection of *Geist* (Peters 2016: 126).

<sup>14</sup> For an account of first and second nature in McDowell see Testa 2007.

This is an attractive view in the sense that it explicates the necessity of drawing on nature in our spiritual activity in a way that constitutes an acknowledgment of our determination *by* nature as, here, needing to write in order to communicate.

Pinkard's recent account of Hegel's position in *Hegel's Naturalism* has deepened the debate significantly. As Pinkard aptly puts it, "The philosophy of nature thus deals with the kinds of conceptual problems that arise when anything 'finite' is asserted to be the 'unconditioned'" (Pinkard 2012: 20). Pinkard considers the real question of Hegel's philosophy of nature to be the task of rethinking "the nature of our own mindful agency, *Geist*, that we come to see nature as the 'other' of *Geist*. In Hegel's more dialectical terms, 'we' as natural creatures make ourselves distinct from nature" (ibid.). But in pursuing this question, Pinkard argues, Hegel distinguishes sharply between the natural and the sort of awareness which is to be found in self-consciousness. Only the latter, because it is capable of taking its inwardness *as* inwardness, has the capacity for making inferences (ibid.: 29, 27). And this means, for Pinkard, that the human soul is no longer really a soul at all but rather self-conscious agency (ibid.: 30).

This middle position understands the relation between nature and *Geist* in such a way that nature is mediated by the *work* or *activity* of consciousness rather than being given by the "brute facts" of nature. But the middle position is nevertheless careful to acknowledge that this activity is always *prompted* by consciousness' determinate embeddedness in nature.

#### 4. Disenchantment

I said at the outset that I wanted to take the discussion of Hegel's naturalism as the opportunity to reflect on some of the larger questions connected to our modern exclusion from nature and what this means for the question of values as either arising out of nature or being the product of human activity independently of nature. To make some headway here let us look at the question which McDowell's account of nature is intended to address at a deeper level, namely the question of disenchantment. This disenchantment consists, says McDowell, in the experience of being faced with a nature which is excluded from the space of reason as the result of something like the scientific revolution. The choice has either been to accept this disenchantment as bald naturalism does or to side with supernaturalism or, as McDowell puts it, with "rampant platonism [which] has what intelligibility it has as a desperate attempt to keep meaning, conceived as able to come into view only within a *sui generis* logical space, while acquiescing in the disenchantment of nature" (McDowell 1996: 110). Both views, for McDowell, accept disenchantment or, what Gardner characterized as the disappearance of value from nature.

By remaining at the epistemological level the mediating position McDowell advocates still leaves us undecided between the continuity view and the autonomy view.<sup>15</sup> For it, on the face of it, is equally plausible to construct the complete overlap between nature and mind McDowell suggests as proceeding from the perspective of nature, as in the continuity view, and as proceeding from mind, as the autonomy view suggests.

<sup>15</sup> See Peters 2016: 120. Cf. Grier (2013: 225-26) who sees Hegel's answer to the problem of mind-body interaction as lying in his claim that mind and body, spirit and nature, must overlap to a significant extent without taking a side in the debate between the continuity and the autonomy view.

However, if we attend to McDowell's metaphor of disenchantment, we can see in which way to take the idea of a second nature. McDowell argues that using the concept of second nature allows us to "refuse to equate that domain of intelligibility with nature, let alone with what is real" by constructing a "knowing" alternative to disenchantment (McDowell 1996: 109). This alternative, McDowell suggests, would be equip Kantian spontaneity with something like second nature.<sup>16</sup> This would allow us to see that "an experiencing and acting subject is a living thing, with active and passive bodily powers that are genuinely her own; she is herself embodied, substantially present in the world that she experiences and acts on" (ibid.: 111). Second nature should to be understood in an experiential or *first personal* way rather than as something that merely *happens* to the subject. Yes, second nature is still the experience of finding ourselves affected by nature and of responding to this first nature but this response is now conceived of as *the activity of the subject*. Second nature is now revealed to be active, the equivalent to Kantian spontaneity, while first nature is conceived of as Kantian receptivity.

The fundamental point is that it is only from a first-person perspective that something like a reenchantment can even begin to make sense because the project of *owning* or *authorizing* one's response to nature can only ever be something which the subject can do for herself. Bald naturalism can be exorcized only if we realize that the account of spontaneity or of meaning making is itself sufficient to generate the meaning we need. To be tempted by more meaning, meaning which goes beyond nature, would then to be to return to supernaturalism but to settle for less would be to sell ourselves short.

### 5. Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the First Person Standpoint

I have just argued that the proper way to read the dispute between those who argue for the continuity thesis and those who argue for the autonomy thesis in the debate about what Hegel means by nature can be resolved by understanding the debate itself to be framed by the question of whether a third-person or a first-person view is to be privileged.<sup>17</sup> I've just suggested that McDowell argues for the latter. I will now argue that Hegel's *Phenomenology* frames the *Encyclopedia* account as a first-personal account.

What is at issue, fundamentally, is the question of how we understand value. Is value something which exists somehow independently of us in nature and which can be grasped, does it exist in a supernatural realm which can be grasped as a "fact", or is value rather something what we imbue to nature. The first option is, with qualifications, that of soft naturalism, the second that of a theological perspective which we have not discussed. The third position is held both by autonomy and the middle position. The contrast between the first two perspectives and the third can be elucidated, I claim, in terms of two types of perspectives on nature they hold. Reversing the order let us take the autonomy/middle position first.

Let me call the autonomy/middle position the engineering model and the soft naturalism position that of philosophical naturalism.<sup>18</sup> The engineering

<sup>16</sup> For a reading of McDowell on Kant, see Bird-Pollan 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Peters (2016: 121) has noted the fact that the *Encyclopedia* can be read equally from a first and a third person perspective but that the standpoint of *Geist* is essentially that of the first person.

<sup>18</sup> For a similar distinction to the one I am proposing between naturalism and engineering, see Kuhn 1977. The distinction I am tracking is also the one employed by Heidegger

model of science takes it, as the name suggests, that our investigations into nature are essentially in the service of human projects like building better bridges, producing better crops or developing new techniques for teaching literacy. Here it is science which is made relevant to the human values which precede it. Value is not something that escapes us but something that we bestow upon nature by turning nature to our ends.<sup>19</sup> I characterize this model as first-personal because nature is here seen as continuous with human projects, hence as essentially intelligible *from within human life itself*.

The second model, philosophical naturalism, might be characterized as the radicalization of the engineering model, moving from the occasional failure of our construction projects to the Cartesian notion of radical doubt which presents nature as essentially other to us and as therefore standing in need of being given meaning *as a whole*.<sup>20</sup> The reason I characterize this perspective as third-personal is that here the conception of nature is one of an outsider looking *in*, inspecting something of which she is not part.

McDowell puts the distinction I've been drawing thus:

According to my picture, an important element in this clarification of the proper target of natural science was an increasingly firm awareness that we must sharply distinguish natural-scientific understanding from the kind of understanding achieved by situating what is understood in the logical space of reasons; that is, precisely, that the structure of the logical space of reasons is *sui generis* (McDowell 1996: xxii).

Reenchantment, as McDowell argues, consists of exorcizing the thought that the proper way to understand nature is from a perspective which is *sui generis*, that is, *independent* from that of human activity. We need to return to something like the engineering model.

I'd now like to suggest that the same worry underlies Hegel's thinking in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* in which he considers the problem of how to understand a science of consciousness in a way which avoids the picture of the subject looking in on nature and itself from the outside. The project is to reenchant nature by making it intelligible that *Geist* is essentially engaged in the project seeking to become at home with itself. By this I do not mean to suggest that we should conceive of Hegel as sanctifying all aspects of the present but merely as suggesting that certain kinds of anxieties about our relation to nature have been concerning us in a way which has prevented us from attending to the full potential of human freedom.

## Part II: Hegel's Introduction: The Path of Consciousness

I'd now like to turn to Hegel's account of the project he proposes to undertake in the *Phenomenology*. The aim is to substantiate the claim that Hegel is interested in showing that the modern conception of the opposition between consciousness and nature needs to be replaced by a conception of the reconciled subject and that

in his distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand (cf. Heidegger 1962: §22).

<sup>19</sup> For a historical perspective on this model see Shapin 1996: ch. 3.

<sup>20</sup> This move has been noted by writers in the Anglo-American tradition as well as by those in the German tradition. See, for instance, Williams 2005: 22; Klein 1936: 208.

this account is essentially given from what I've been calling the first-person point of view which is compatible with the view that nature is the site of value.

The task will thus be twofold: first I'll argue that the first three paragraphs of the Introduction (§§73-75) give an account of the problem of disenchantment or alienation of the subject from nature much as it appeared in McDowell. That is, I shall argue, following for instance Georg Bertram, that the position we find ourselves in at the beginning of the *Phenomenology* is not the position of any particular historical position but rather, as Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer puts it, that of a "philosophical mystification" of ourselves with regard to the world.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, I'll argue that the program articulated in the Introduction should be read as proposing that only a first personal standpoint can make sense of the subject's relation to nature. In proposing to understand Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* as a first-person account I follow suggestions made both by Pinkard and by Stekeler-Weithofer. Pinkard's interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as the "sociality of reason" which holds that self-consciousness

is not the awareness of a set of internal objects (sensations, mental occurrences, representations, whatever). To use a metaphor, self-consciousness is at least minimally the assumption of a position in "social space". We locate ourselves in "social space" when, for example, we reason in various ways; or when we assume various roles; or when we demand a certain type of treatment because of who we think we are (Pinkard 1994: 7).

For Pinkard (ibid.: 8), Hegel's account of knowledge is one of the authorization of the standards which govern meaning in the community through reason-giving and the immanent critique of that reason giving. As self-authorization this account is essentially first-person *plural*. There is no external standard beyond the community of reason-givers to which one can appeal in understanding the nature to which the *Geist* is subject.

Similarly Stekeler-Weithofer suggests that we should construe what Hegel means by science as a first-personal communal knowing. As he puts it, "das Kriterium des subjektiven Wissens im Ich-Modus ist ein Wissen im Wir-Modus. Ein solches Wissen setzt entsprechende Wir-Kriterien der Wahrheit voraus, und das je zu der Zeit oder Epoche, die zu betrachten ist" (Stekeler-Weithofer 2014: 360). I take it that the position articulated here by Pinkard and Stekeler-Weithofer is also consistent with positions endorsed, for instance, by Robert Brandom (2019) and, of course, by Pippin. In turning to the question of the first-person interpretation of the relation between consciousness and nature we are leaving behind both soft naturalism and the family squabble between McDowell and Pippin in order to focus on how consciousness is to understand itself as reconcilable with nature.

## 1. The Disenchantment of Modern Philosophy

Hegel begins the *Phenomenology* with a rejection of the problem that he had inherited from philosophical naturalism:

<sup>21</sup> See Bertram 2017: 35; "Was also tun wir Sinnvolles, so lautet die Frage, wenn wir unserem Wissen eine Welt gegenüberstellen und unserem Erkennen eine objektive Natur an sich, die ist, wie sie ist? Und warum tendieren wir dazu, diese Gegenüberstellungen metaphysisch zu mystifizieren und damit misszuverstehen?" (Stekeler-Weithofer 2014: 364).



It is a natural supposition that in philosophy, before one gets down to dealing with what is at issue, namely, the actual cognition of what, in truth, is, it is first necessary to come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded as the instrument by which one seizes hold of the absolute or as the means by which one catches sight of it (PS §73, 49; PG 9: 53).

Hegel is quite clear that he does not regard this “natural supposition” of the division between subject and nature as innocent. For, as he suggests, the idea that we should employ tools or a method for the investigation of nature is itself based on a “fear of error” which undermines the more innocent notion of science (as engineering) which concerns itself with laws only to the extent that they help us explain phenomena. The fear of failure is what ratchets up the need for intermediaries, paradigmatically the application of mathematics to sciences.<sup>22</sup>

[I]f the concern about falling into error sets up a mistrust of science, which itself, untroubled by such scruples, simply sets itself to work and actually cognizes, it is still difficult to see why on the contrary a mistrust of this mistrust should not be set up and why one should not be concerned that this fear of erring is already the error itself (PS §74, 50; PG 9: 54).

It is a pathology of philosophical naturalism to think that science must search for more and more severe methods of ensuring its truth. The problem is that the error cannot be guarded against by a method or tools which are themselves independent of the very problem they are meant to address. Hegel summarizes the problem thus:

[The new science] presupposes that the absolute stands *on one side* and that *cognition stands on the other* for itself, and separated from the absolute, though cognition is nevertheless something real; that is, it presupposes that cognition, which, by being outside of the absolute, is indeed also outside of the truth, is nevertheless truthful; an assumption through which that which calls itself the fear of error gives itself away to be known rather as the fear of truth (PS §75, 50; PG 9: 54).

For the moment, let us follow Stekeler-Weithofer’s (2014: 363) suggestion that we should think of the “absolute” simply as the generic object separate from its particular appearance. Hegel’s point can then be understood to be saying that philosophical naturalism wants to have it both ways: it wants, on the one hand, to claim that *it* has the power of knowing how nature is qua generic object (hence stripped of the way it appears) which means that philosophical naturalism has arrogate to itself the *power* of cognition. On the other hand, philosophical naturalism wants to claim that what it cognizes is *not* a product of its own activity but lies somehow *in nature* ready to be taken. The point is that cognition cannot at once be the authoritative source of knowledge and also the passive recipient of knowledge.

<sup>22</sup> This is how I read the passage at the end of §73: “if the testing of cognition which we suppose to be a medium made us acquainted with the law of its refraction, it would be just as useless to subtract this refraction from the result, for it is not the refraction of the ray but rather the ray itself through which the truth touches us that is cognition, and if this is subtracted, then all that would be indicated to us would be just pure direction or empty place” (PS 50; PG 9: 54).

## 2. Natural Consciousness and the First Person Perspective

We now arrive at the second element in Hegel's account I propose to investigate. After looking at the problem of the disenchantment which Hegel diagnoses in the position of traditional philosophical attitudes, we turn to the question of the reenchantment of nature by addressing the problem of the standpoint of Hegel's investigation. It has been my argument that only from the first person standpoint can something like the attribution of value make sense because the first-person standpoint exists *prior* to the separation of facts from their meaning for our projects.

It is, Hegel says, not enough to have pointed out the mistakes of the position just encountered, a new understanding of reality will have to be developed. Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* is to make plausible the first-person standpoint by showing that only it can make sense of the relation between consciousness and nature. In proposing such a position, Hegel is fully aware of the temptation of the model of philosophical naturalism and so offers the reader a way of thinking about philosophical naturalism as something to be overcome through the development of the new model of first-personal consciousness. It is not enough, in other words, to move from the naturalist paradigm we have just seen to take refuge in the engineering paradigm I outlined earlier. In these matters "*one* arid assurance is just as valid as another" (PS §76, 52; PG 9: 56). The point is rather to *show* that only the first-person standpoint can be successful in accounting for our relation to nature. To do so would be to offer a partial reenchantment of nature in the sense of revealing that human subjectivity is *already* involved in the meaning of "nature".

To this effect, Hegel offers a new beginning in what he calls "natural consciousness". Natural consciousness is supposed to be a position which does not take for granted anything or which, we could say, is still devoid of the temptation to do so.<sup>23</sup> Hegel says:

This standpoint [from which the exposition starts] can [...] be taken to be the path of natural consciousness pressing forward towards true knowing, or it can be taken to be the path of the soul wandering through the series of ways it takes shape, as if these were stations put forward in advance to it by its own nature, so that it purifies itself into spirit by arriving at a cognition of what it is in itself through the complete experience of its own self (PS §77, 52; PG 9: 55).

The key point here is that Hegel places the two basic elements, *Geist* and nature, cognition and what is, which traditionally are conceived as spatio-temporally separated, *into the subject itself*. He is thereby repeating Kant's Copernican turn of understanding mind as constituted by spontaneity's response to receptivity (Kant 1996: A50/B74). This means, in an initial expression of the first person perspective, that the subject has only itself to look to as a source of self-understanding.

Of course this move to the first person perspective hardly settled the issue since from the perspective of natural consciousness precisely nothing is yet decided. However, and this is the important point for us, the idea of the *internal*

<sup>23</sup> Fulda (2008: 24-25) suggests a long list of preconceptions about natural conscious' position that are to be avoided, chief among these are that natural consciousness is not to be supposed to have an "object" independent of itself and that what "truly is" need not be or belong to nature at all.

relation of mind to nature is, for Hegel, the correct perspective from which to launch the investigation.

### 3. Appearance, Negativity and Skepticism

Hegel characterizes the “scientific” position natural consciousness finds itself in as an appearance, and suggests that science must free itself from this appearance by “turning against appearance” (PS §76, 51; PG 9: 55). Turning against appearance is something that, Hegel says, *happens* to the subject immanently: “while [natural consciousness’ immediately] regards itself rather as real knowing, this path has negative meaning for it, and what is the realization of the concept will count instead, to it, as the loss of itself, for on this path, it loses its truth” (PS §78, 52; PG 9: 56). The point is straightforward in the sense that natural consciousness must regard certain things as true and can do so by applying a concept. However, because the concept is only limited (an appearance of truth) it will eventually be revealed to fail but will do so on *immanent* terms, that is as the failure of a conception that consciousness has itself posited. This failure will then be prompting natural consciousness to renew its efforts to make sense of its position.

Hegel’s strategy synthetic in that he works through other position to achieve his own. Accordingly, in the Introduction he presents the process of achieving knowledge in terms of a conception which is already familiar to his readers, that of skepticism.<sup>24</sup> Hegel characterizes skepticism in two ways, as a meta-conception connected to philosophical naturalism and as closer to the trial and error model implicit in the engineering model.

Skepticism is first taken up as the *meta*-insight of the subject who finds that repeated failures to grasp the world constitute not just particular failures against a background of stability or trust but rather a “path of despair” (PS §78, 52; PG 9: 56). Hegel elaborates:

this path is the conscious insight into the untruth of knowing as it appears, a knowing for which that which is the most real is rather in truth only the unrealized concept. Thus this self-consummating skepticism is also not what earnest zeal for truth and science surely thinks it has prepared and equipped itself with so that it might be ready for truth and science (PS §78, 52; PG 9: 56).

The meta-insight offered by skepticism thus returns us to the conceptual level of philosophical naturalism. Skepticism or philosophical naturalism demands knowledge without having worked through nature to achieve this knowledge. Knowledge is thus *posited* as something of which humans are both capable and incapable. Skepticism is the positing of a radical spontaneity of mind incapable of interfacing with nature on the one hand and a concomitant claim that this spontaneity should also be able to bridge the gap thereby set up to nature. This is the same thought as the thought that humans are both authorized (actively) to make claims about nature and that nature (passively) lays itself bare for human investigation, just with emphasis on the necessary failure of this project rather

<sup>24</sup> For a helpful review of the many different interpretations of Hegel’s notion of skepticism see Speight 2010. Speight himself suggests that Hegel’s notion combines the insight of Pyrrhonism that thought should take nothing for granted with a more modern existential sense of skepticism (cf. Speight 2010: 149). This approach sits well with the interpretation I offer here.

than on its success. This dilemma is what I take Hegel to mean by saying that skepticism is “self-consuming”.

In the second “engineering” sense, however, skepticism captures a more pedestrian notion of the persistence of the negative.

[T]he skepticism which is directed at the entire range of consciousness as it appears, makes spirit for the first time competent to test what truth is, by this kind of skepticism bringing about a despair regarding the so-called natural conceptions, thoughts, and opinions (PS §78, 53; PG 9: 56).

The persistence of doubt about whether consciousness has in its *particular* claims found the right concept is what allows a movement toward truth. Progress is made, Hegel says, by consistently testing or evaluating knowledge claims which arise immanently (are “natural conceptions”) in terms of the projects consciousness seeks or is driven to undertake. Here values proceed knowledge claims, making knowledge claims testable in terms of the values the subject wishes to achieve.

The experience of “appearance” (what is thought to be true) turning out to be *merely* appearance (*merely* a claim) is the basic motor of Hegel’s thinking in the *Phenomenology* and elsewhere and constitutes determinate negation.<sup>25</sup> Through determinate negation, skepticism—rightly understood—is shown not only to be negative but also to have a positive result:

while the result [of skeptical inquiry] is grasped as it is in truth, as *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation, the transition is made whereby the progression through the complete series of shapes comes about on its own accord (PS §79, 53; PG 9: 57).

Skepticism, Hegel argues, should not simply be understood as the annihilation of content but rather as a stepping back from content in order to allow new content to become available to be considered in its own right.

The idea of determinate negation is already implicit in Kant’s claim that spontaneity responds to receptivity in the sense that spontaneity, in subsuming intuition under a concept, gives the intuition a determinate content. Determinate negation is also implicit in McDowell’s claim that in order for the cognition to even *be* involved in the understanding of nature, nature (as receptivity) must be drawn on *in* cognition thereby rendering the impingement of nature something determinate.

If determinate negation is indeed the process which drives the development of Hegel’s thought this leads to a new conception of the natural. We have already seen that Hegel’s turn to the first person perspective means that there cannot, at the outset at least, be talk of the opposition between consciousness and nature as external since the relation of material externality, such as it is assumed in philosophical naturalism, is still unfounded. I would thus like to suggest that for Hegel the idea of nature can therefore best be understood in its most generic sense, as determinate negation, that is, as the continued “appearance” of an incongruence with the currently employed conceptual scheme. This is the core of the claim I attributed to McDowell against Pipping, namely that the failure of consciousness’

<sup>25</sup> Brandom (2019: ch. 2) characterizes determinate negation as Hegel’s central metaphysical assumption. See also Stekeler-Weithofer 2014: 356. For an overview see Moyar 2011: 28–29.

self-conception arises immanently, that is, in such a way which cannot be normatively explained.

It is the task of Hegel's *Phenomenology* in general to reconstruct the various relation between negativity and consciousness which lead us to talk about materially external relation as well as socially external relations. But the *Phenomenology* does not presuppose these relations, it developed them out of the notion of determinate negation as the mere disturbance or impingement of nature on consciousness.

#### 4. Bildung

From this perspective, then, the process of seeking and constructively failing to grasp the natural can be understood as what Hegel calls *Bildung*, and what we earlier saw McDowell describe as second nature. "The series of the figurings of consciousness which consciousness traverses on this path is the full history of the cultivation [*Bildung*] of consciousness itself into science" (PS §78, 52; GW 9: 56). Hegel's point is that the succession of attempts is itself the development and extension of the conceptual schema of *Geist* in general. This is a way of understanding nature as negativity as not merely prompting but also anchoring or grounding the development of our shared way of understanding the world.

Indeed, the notion of *Bildung* makes important contact with many of the issues raised in the discussion of Hegel's naturalism. There, as we saw, one of the chief questions was to what extent *Geist* should be understood as an actualization of some natural properties, as in the soft naturalism reading, or as the achievement of a certain sort of self-consciousness which is particular to spirit but not to animals, for instance, as the autonomy view held. McDowell himself seems to remain neutral here, modeling *Bildung* on initiation into a langue in which "a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene" (McDowell 1996: 125). The point of *Bildung* in the sense that I am interpreting it is that it is to be understood as the status of a certain orientation which the subject achieves for itself. On this view, the idea of an "initiation" has the status both of something that the subject *does* and that she *undergoes*. A subject may, after some time of learning French, *find* herself speaking and understanding French. What matters here is that this experience will be something that is intelligible essentially from within the first-personal experience of the subject.

The idea of speaking a language as an achievement allows us to see that while speaking a language cannot be conceived of as something that one either does or does not do, according to some external standard, there is nevertheless a strong sense in which speaking a language is dependent on being able to perform certain recognizable functions within that language. These tasks are a matter of an inter-subjective agreement of what competence in a language consists in. The notion of *Bildung* here allows us to see that the first person perspective replaces the internal-external distinction to be found in the soft-naturalism perspective with a first-person *singular*-first-person *plural* distinction.

The development of consciousness can thus be seen as a sort of self-legislation, just as Pippin suggests, in the following sense: consciousness resolves the problem (negativity) it faces by proposing a conceptual solution. This conceptual solution, however, is meant to be universally valid, that is, valid not just for itself

but for any consciousness. Hence it is meant to be valid in the first-person plural. But as valid only from a universal perspective, it still may fail to do justice to the particular of consciousness' own undergoing and so be called into question again by the very consciousness which posited the solution. So the dialectic of making sense of the negative swings back and forth between the first person singular and plural. The way in which this model diverges from Pippin's autonomy model, and the way in which it does not leave nature behind, is that the model I am attributing to Hegel following McDowell *does* include an indigestible remnant of negativity which is not subsumable fully into normativity. Self-legislation is always, on this model, done in terms of a need which cannot be given a conceptual articulation. The notion of this negativity most forcefully expressed in T. W. Adorno's notion of the non-identical.<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusion

In this paper I've tried to move the discussion of Hegel's naturalism past what I presented as an impasse between the soft naturalist interpretation of Hegel's notion of *Geist* developing out of material nature and the opposing claim that *Geist* is essentially normative and self-legislating. In order to do so I suggest we look to the question of value which underlies this dispute. While soft naturalists seek to make sense of value as arising from material nature, those who support the autonomy thesis propose that value is something inherent to human spiritual activity. Following McDowell's suggestion that value as neither inhering or supervening on nature, but is rather something to be recovered, I suggested that we adopt the first person perspective as the starting point for an examination of the relation between nature and value. The first person perspective is to be understood as a position within value which imbues value to what it encounters. Seeing things from this perspective allows us to place the question of nature as external materiality (which both the soft naturalist and autonomy view seem to share) in its proper context as something which develops as the result of the self-unfolding activity of consciousness as it encounters nature as negativity. Understanding *Geist* in this way allows us to see value as inherent in nature.

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<sup>26</sup> "To define identity as the correspondence of the thing-in-itself to its concept is hubris; but the ideal of identity must not simply be discarded. Living in the rebuke that the thing is not identical with the concept is the concept's longing to become identical with the thing" (Adorno 1992: 149; 1970: 152).

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# Hegel's Dialectical Art

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## Abstract

Most contemporary accounts of naturalism specify, as one of its necessary conditions, a community within which agents can take themselves to be adequately answerable for and responsible to the norms of autonomous practical reason. But what would it mean to succeed in giving an account of naturalism, absent such social conditions? What does it mean to think about naturalism from a position of relative alienation? My contention is that this incongruity between philosophy and the form of life sustaining it is already present within Hegel's thought, and that it should prompt us to reconsider the meaning that philosophy itself has for him. Philosophical science—along with a proper understanding of naturalism—is, on the one hand, a historical achievement for him, one that only becomes possible within modern practices and institutions. But he also views modernity's forms of subjectivity as fragmented, incomplete, and alienated, on the other. In order to understand how he reconciles the theoretical possibilities with the practical limitations of modernity, I argue that we need to attend to two features of Hegel's philosophical account. First, that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (and Hegel's systematic thought generally) has been patterned after a specifically aesthetic mode of intelligibility. Second, that Hegel's philosophy is intended to effect a transformation on its readers, analogous to the transformation that works of art are supposed to effect on their audiences (as understood by Schiller, Schelling, and other post-Kantian thinkers).

*Keywords:* Naturalism, Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Aesthetics, Recognition, *Sensus Communis*.

*Is the situation so uncommon, then, in which  
philosophy forbids one to philosophize?  
(Lichtenberg)*

## 1. Introduction: Naturalism in Progress

John McDowell (1996: 93-94) observes that “modern philosophy has taken itself to be called on to bridge dualistic gulfs, between subject and object, thought and world [...] what is debatable is how we ought to respond to the deeper dualism”. At stake in the question of naturalism, in other words—of the possibility of communication between nature and freedom as aspects of self-conscious life—is

not only the question itself, but the tacit demands that we place on the very asking of it. What task do we take ourselves to be called on to perform, when we ask for a philosophical account of this relation? In one sense, the answer is obvious (and the question churlish): to clarify the truth of the matter. One of the most striking features of this particular question, however, is its continuing urgency in the face of a longstanding and lopsided consensus about it. The *bête noir* of an outsize region of post-Kantian and then post-Wittgensteinian philosophy has remained unchanging: dualism (whether putatively Cartesian or Kantian), some version of the Myth of the Given, eliminativism, or heteronomy—the threat that something about how the world empirically is should impinge on our own knowing of it and acting within it as we freely ought. The holy grail of such accounts has remained, by contrast, an account of the embodied reality of normative life—one that explains how it is that the difference between freedom and nature is irreducible, while also accounting for our double status as naturally bodied creatures and as freely minded agents in such a way that the two statuses enable, rather than constrain, our capacity to lead our own lives. One might say that post-Kantian philosophy just *is* a variety of local elaborations of what is basically global consensus on these issues.

To what purpose does the question continue to be asked, then? What remains to be seen? I do not say that agreement at such a terribly high altitude is the most interesting feature of such accounts—running, as they do, the gamut from Königsberg to Pittsburgh—nor that empiricism has no defenders left standing (far from), nor that agreement about large areas of inquiry is a reason to discontinue them. It is only on the basis of provisional agreement about desiderata that there can be meaningful discussion at all. But it has also been a steady feature of the most influential such accounts to point out that the resolution of the question of our embodied freedom is not merely theoretical—a puzzle that could be figured out once and for all on paper—but one that involves us necessarily in a social undertaking. I cannot know my nature free from a position of first-personal privilege, anterior to and separate from my circumstances, but only as a participant in a form of life that sustains the knowing of it. I must be able to be committed to and held responsible for that knowledge. My knowledge of myself as a freely embodied agent is, in this sense, a practical achievement within and through my expressive “mindedness” with others.<sup>1</sup>

Just *how* to describe the bearing of such mindedness on the very possibility of normative agency is the subject of a well-known controversy between McDowell and Robert Pippin. But even for McDowell—arguing against Pippin’s thicker view of agency as a status constituted by communal acknowledgment<sup>2</sup>—“the idea of conceptual capacities makes sense only in the context of a communal practice” (McDowell 2009a: 178). McDowell’s defense of second-nature debouches in appeals to *Bildung* and tradition as formal conditions for being responsible to reason: “When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of

<sup>1</sup> I am borrowing Lear’s (1998: 290-97) well-known phrase. Cf. Brandom’s (2009: 4) remark that “Because the space of reasons is a *normative* space, it is a *social* space”.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. “Hegel considers the distinct normative status of human subjects (as persons, agents) not as a reflection of some substantive or metaphysical nature, but as a social achievement of a kind and so as bound up with an inevitable and distinct form of social conflict” (Pippin 2011a: 75).

the space of reasons" (McDowell 1996: 82). As in Aristotle, questions of conceptual capacity entail questions of practical reason, and questions of practical reason (Pippin would insist) turn out to entail questions of world-history.

McDowell's strategy in the face of this conclusion is to insist on the fact that our demand that philosophy "solve" the question of naturalism is misplaced—the problem lies in our interpretation of the question as a problem in search of a doctrinal or constructive solution.<sup>3</sup> But a different corollary one might draw from this insight—one that, I think, we do not usually take seriously enough—is that in some sense we cannot settle the question absent the right form of communal recognition. So long as our forms of practical reason are vitiated by the assumption that there is a fundamental caesura between freedom and nature, then the question of their relation must continue to come to mind, and the answer must remain a matter for wishful thinking. It may well be, in other words, that the *bête noir* cannot be killed off for good not because we don't have the right philosophical silver bullet, but because its power radiates from assumptions embedded in our most ordinary customs, activities, and attitudes (say: in the institutional status we accord to all manner of quantitative reasoning, in the thin forms of communal recognition available to mass societies, in our technological, political, and economic forms of alienation, and so on). The most significant obstacle to settling a second-natural, or neo-Aristotelian, or emergentist, or transformative, or top-down/bottom-up understanding of our conceptual capacities is, in this sense, not exclusively and perhaps not even primarily a theoretical one, since it may be that our very forms of practice cannot sustain such an account (or at any rate permanently destabilize it).<sup>4</sup>

My question here is therefore not about naturalism's best version but about the meta-philosophical role that we ask it to perform—what we expect such a mediation to "do" for us. So far from being part of a Critical Theoretical despair about the incapacity of the world to meet our demands for it, the issue already has this cast within Hegel's thought. On the one hand, he evidently thinks that we cannot fully address the question of naturalism without rightly situating ourselves within a teleological account of historical norms: that, in sum, our freedom is only realized within a specific form of (modern) communal answerability for it, and, in this sense, that the reconciliation of freedom and nature cannot be a matter for philosophy alone. On the other hand, he also thinks that philosophy is where this reconciliation happens—that naturalism in some sense takes place in and through our knowing of it. His position is neither quietist nor revolutionary. To explain the middle position he occupies in this regard, I present two related theses here: that Hegel's account of the embodied mediation of norms stems directly from the fruition of his conception of aesthetics as a paradigm for

<sup>3</sup> This is how he glosses Wittgenstein's quietism; see McDowell 1996: 93, and McDowell 2009b.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to McDowell's defense of "second nature" (the best-known version of which is found in *Mind and World*), I am referring to Thompson's (2008) neo-Aristotelian account connecting practical dispositions to social practices, Eldridge's (2014) account of Hegel's naturalism as "emergentist", Boyle's (2016) "transformative" view of reason, and Ikäheimo's (2014: 36) view of top-down/bottom-up naturalism in the *Encyclopedia*. My thesis here echoes well-known arguments that have stressed the dependence of moral philosophy on its underlying forms of life (cf. Anscombe 1958, Williams 1996 and MacIntyre 2007). The relation between the specific question philosophical naturalism and our forms of life has not received the same scrutiny.

intelligibility, and that Hegel sees this analogy to aesthetics as responding to the problem I've noted, namely, the mismatch between a philosophical account and the form of communal life that could sustain it. In other words, that Hegel's solution to the problem of the incomplete forms of modern recognition is to show that philosophy can transform the difference between what we are and what we know. Hegel's naturalism undertakes to reveal the truth of the ordinary by transfiguring it as a work of art was supposed to do.

## 2. Aesthetics and Idealism

Let me begin, then, by saying something about the sense in which I take Hegel's view of conceptual mediation to be an aesthetic one. To briefly retread some well-worn ground: the half-century of philosophical activity we designate 'German Idealism' might be described as an attempt to square the Kantian circle. It is as if Kant's distinctions of intuition and concept, sensibility and understanding, practical and theoretical reason—along with his tantalizing description of his critical labor as a "propaedeutic" (A11/B25)—were taken as a momentous provocation, to which Reinhold, Fichte, Hölderlin, Novalis, Schelling, Schiller, and Hegel replied by developing accounts of what the whole beyond such oppositions might be. It is immensely telling how quickly each of these figures lay aside the fact that dualism was a deliberate, rather than unintended, feature of Kant's position. It was fundamental to his compatibilism, after all, to secure moral freedom's autonomy against empirical necessity. But this defensive sequestration of worlds seemed to elicit a further reconciliation, and Kant himself turned his attention in his third *Critique* to phenomena that, even if empirically available, are also evocative of or resonant with our moral vocation.

It makes sense, in connection with this reconciliation, that aesthetics in particular should have come to be of keen interest. Under the influence of Hume and Hutcheson—in whom the notion of philosophical judgment was initially fused with the notion of taste—and Baumgarten—who coined the term 'aesthetics'—Kant's *Critique of Judgment* marks out aesthetics as a distinct form of intelligibility. Works of art have no translation into words; they express a significance that is neither fully assessable by nor reducible to some discursive content separable from their material expression. Their sensible form animates their conceptual content in such a way as to be able to present us with concrete manifestations of purpose, though it is a "purposiveness without a purpose" (KU §15)—an intimation of freedom for our senses. They are one-of-a-kind for this reason—an achievement that rhymes with our own sense of being ends-in-ourselves within the empirical world. And so even as Kant has a stake in stopping short of saying that sensible purposiveness can in any way *ratify* his moral theory, he is nonetheless interested in aesthetics as a sort of sensible "expression of moral ideas" (KU §17)<sup>5</sup> one that is (in a qualified way) congruent with our moral aims.

While for Kant this congruence is still bracketed as problematic and subordinate to the status of natural teleology, to his immediate successors aesthetics looked like far the most promising paradigm for thinking about agency and the relation between thinking and being generally—the best way for integrating Kant's dualisms into a form of living freedom. This is manifestly the case in

<sup>5</sup> This phrase is, admittedly, restricted to representations of the human body.

Schiller's and Schelling's writings from the decade following the publication of the third *Critique*. Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, along with his *Kallias Letters* and other writings from the period, explore ways in which beauty can help us harmonize our moral vocation with our natural inclinations, and in so doing surmount the threat of mechanical, empirical, positivistic reductions of human freedom; while Schelling's 1800 *System* places aesthetic experience and its articulation at the summit of the possibilities of freedom's purposive manifestations. "The objective world is simply the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit; the universal organon of philosophy—and the keystone of its entire arch—is the philosophy of art" (SW III.349/STI 12).<sup>6</sup> Art exhibits the ground of the inner harmony between subjective and objective, by bringing the former into concrete manifestation. The book ends with Schelling prophesying the absorption of philosophy and science into a new type of mythology, within which form and content will be entirely adequate to each other (SW III.624-34/STI 229-36). This reiterates the quasi-millenarian claims made by the so-called *Oldest Surviving Program of German Idealism*—variously attributed to Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling—which concludes by pronouncing that "*truth and goodness* are only siblings in beauty" and that a new rational mythology is needed to make philosophy widely compelling (CRGA 186-87).

In Hegel's case, this line of aesthetic thinking is more tangled. In some of his early theological writings, beauty still figures as the signature of embodied autonomy, as it does in Schiller and Schelling. In the 1798 *Spirit of Christianity* essay, for instance, Hegel writes that "the need to unite subject with object, to unite feeling, and feeling's demand for objects, with the intellect, to unite them in something beautiful, in a god, by means of imagination, is the supreme need of the human spirit and the urge to religion" (ETW 289). Jesus is himself presented there as a beautiful soul (ETW 285), whose central message is formulated as the overcoming of differences through love: "in love man has found himself again in other" (ETW 278). Hegel dropped love as the focal point of his thinking in the early 1800's,<sup>7</sup> but in the first years of the nineteenth century, he nonetheless continued to identify his own conception of philosophical intelligibility with that of the expressive intelligibility of the *Critique of Judgment* in particular. In his 1801 *Differenzschrift* and 1802 *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel still follows Schelling in presenting art as the sensuous equivalent to philosophy—art exemplifies the task of transforming the divisions of the understanding into concrete unity, so that "both art and speculation are in their essence divine service—both are a living intuition of the absolute life and hence a being at one with it" (GW 4.76/DFS 172; cf. LFA 101).

In Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology*, however, the beautiful as such no longer bears the conceptual weight that it had in his earlier writings; art is now specified as a form of religion, and so as one rung within a much more ambitious ladder of concepts.<sup>8</sup> I want nonetheless to claim that this undertaking is continuous with the aestheticism that dominated the first wave of post-Kantians. By

<sup>6</sup> See Dahlstrom 1991: 249-54.

<sup>7</sup> I've elaborated this in Barba-Kay 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Art, religion, and philosophy—the triad comprising Absolute Spirit—are run together in the 1805-6 *Philosophy of Spirit* and in chapters 7-8 of the 1807 *Phenomenology*. Hegel did not fully develop the differences between the three tiers until sometime after the 1817 *Encyclopedia*.

this I don't mean that Hegel is the author of lovely prose (a thesis scarcely credible), or that the *Phenomenology* should not be regarded as a work of *echt* philosophy. What I mean is that this work (like all of Hegel's subsequent, systematic writing) relies on a paradigm of apodictic necessity that is borrowed from aesthetics; that is, that Hegel's conception of his dialectical method rests in crucial respects on its analogy to organic and therefore artistic form, and that, furthermore, its aesthetic features can help us to identify the kinds of expectations underlying the role that the argument itself is expected to perform for us. The book as a whole functions as a work of art is meant to for other post-Kantian thinkers: Hegelian philosophy is to take the place of art as the vehicle of the recognition by which we are reconciled to our time in reason and to reason in our time.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. *Phenomenology* as a Work of Art

The *Phenomenology* is a "science of the experience of consciousness", as the alternative title has it. This science is *sui generis* not only in that it consists in its own justification, but in that it is a narrative of telling failures. Each "shape" of consciousness is sequentially tasked with adapting to the inadequacies of its predecessor, while motivating through its own specific defeat the formulation of the issue that it hands off to its successor. The plot begins with straightforward ostensive judgments—"now is night", "I am this"—which, unable to explain how they ostend, are shown to entail richer and richer forms of knowing that point to the "absolute" form of knowing with which Hegel concludes. As Hegel insists elsewhere, it is not that every reader must literally reenact each stage in order to achieve the ending; it is that each position is determinately contained within the subsequent one (as we might say that the concept of crime is logically contained within the concept of willing, in that our willing rightly must always take place against the backdrop possibility of trespass—even if someone in particular happened never to have committed a crime).<sup>10</sup> The ensemble of such necessary mistakes that make up the book must in this way elucidate, underlie, and constitute the structure of our freedom realized. The procedure as a whole therefore relies on at least three programmatic commitments, all three of which in combination suggest that the argument has an aesthetic character, that in some sense it functions as a work of art: expressivism, teleology, and culmination. I'll touch on each of these in order.

First, Hegel's conception of each stage of the narrative is expressive. I mean this in the sense clarified by Charles Taylor (2010) that the meaning of each of the figures Hegel examines is neither merely propositional, nor inferential, nor

<sup>9</sup> Cf. GW 9.38/PS §52. Some form of this thesis—that there is an important affinity between Hegel's conception of aesthetics and his conception of philosophy—would perhaps be hard to miss. For versions of it, see Desmond 1991, Pippin 2011b, Förster 2012 and Taylor 1977. What I am arguing is that we should take seriously the "meta-philosophical" consequences of what this means about how Hegel envisioned the bearing of his system on its readers.

<sup>10</sup> "This conception of derangement as a *necessarily* emerging form or stage in the development of the soul is naturally not to be understood as if we were asserting that *every* mind, *every* soul, must go through this stage of extreme disruption. Such an assertion would be as absurd as to assume that because *crime* is considered in the *Philosophy of Right* as a *necessary* appearance of the human will, therefore the commission of crime is supposed to be made inevitable for *every* individual" (E3 §408z). See also (E1 §86z).

available to it through an *ex ante* introspective view that could be finally adequate to its whole content; rather, while each begins by identifying itself with some philosophical commitment, it is only through working through that commitment that it is confronted by its implications and inadequacies. Concepts have lives of their own, in this sense. Without the condition of actualization, Hegel's "figures" would not be properly narrative—they would be picturesque examples, but not really exemplary of the developmental activity that Hegel wants to describe in opposition to the apriorism he associates with Kant's first two *Critiques*, or to the self-indulgent, vatic ineffability he associates with Schelling's appeals to Romantic intuition. Our forms of self-understanding, that is, acquire *essential* content through their enactment and realization; or, as Hegel puts it, "we learn by experience [*die Meinung erfährt*] that we meant something other than we meant to mean" (GW 9.44/PS §63). It is the possibility of noticing and responding to this mismatch that in turn makes transformations in our self-conception possible—what Hegel calls the "criterion" (*Maßstab*) of knowledge (GW 9.59/PS §§83-84).<sup>11</sup>

A general commitment to expressivism may evidently have some connection to aesthetics without being closely identified with it—it is not so in Aristotle's case, for instance,<sup>12</sup> even if for most modern expressivists the affinity has been irresistible (as it was for Herder, Nietzsche, or Dewey). When it comes to the *Phenomenology*, however, it is not simply that Hegel has borrowed conceptual resources that he happened to find in the *Critique of Judgment* to his analysis of agency. It is that each shape of consciousness is at once particular while bearing essential universal purport for the larger narrative. In other words, it is not just that *some* content is expressed by the actuality of each shape, but that the content is *exemplary* of a larger whole that is entirely and inescapably at stake within it.<sup>13</sup> It is precisely this investing of concrete instance with universal significance that allows each of Hegel's stages to be consequential to the narrative, since each is essential to Spirit's coming to know itself in us—every shape of consciousness bears, for the space of its turn, the full weight of the whole: "every moment, as it gains concrete form and a shape of its own, displays itself in the universal individual" (GW 9.24/PS §28). Hegel explicitly reaches for an aesthetic description of these stages, referring to them as *Gestalten* and tableaux: "a slow-moving succession of Spirits, a gallery of images [*eine Gallerie von Bildern*]" that penetrates the whole wealth of all Spiritual substance (GW 9.433/PS §808).<sup>14</sup> It is this saturated expressivism—the fact that what is of universal moment is utterly ex-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pippin's comment that "in Hegel's view in the relevant sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, actually to have an intention is to struggle to express that intention in a public and publicly contestable deed, subject to great temporal fluidity and to appropriations and interpretations by others that can greatly alter one's own sense of what one is about" (Pippin 2011b: 117).

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle compares acts of moral virtue to works of art ("so that we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything"), but immediately qualifies this by adding that moral virtue is "more exact and better than any art" (Aristotle 2009: 1106b7-15).

<sup>13</sup> One might say that they are exemplary of "sensible rational ideas", as Kant puts it in *KU*: §49.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. GW 9.56/PS §78.

pressed into each of its instances, the presence of the whole in the part—that is more specifically aesthetic.<sup>15</sup>

Second, Hegel's view of the demonstrative necessity that connects each of the stages is aesthetic in that it is appropriated from natural teleology. This logical organicism is perhaps most lavishly in view in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, where he compares the unfolding truth of his narrative to the way a bud issues into a blossom that issues into a fruit, refers several times to the "inner-life and self-movement" of the process, and speaks of his account as a speculative "rhythm" that makes sense of the relation between subjects and predicates (GW 9.10, 37, 43-44/PS §§2, 51, 61, respectively). Such vitalistic characterizations of reason are not novel—they are everywhere in Schelling, and have older roots in Herder, Hooker, and Pascal—but their specific application encapsulates one of Hegel's defining insights: that the history of freedom can be read as a series of developing moments belonging the same activity, rather than as an alternation of competing views to be endorsed or discarded seriatim. In contrast to the various kinds of epistemological formalism he criticizes in the Preface, that is, his project is to gather the collective logic of all shapes of sense-making into the unified, purposive form of activity he calls Spirit. Eckart Förster has shown that Hegel came to this notion by studying Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants*. Goethe shows there that the plant is a self-differentiating whole whose parts are coordinated functions of a single process: Hegel came to see this as the right analogy for the working out of human freedom through time.<sup>16</sup>

In that it appeals to some kind of analogy between artifice and organism, Hegel's *Phenomenology* would already be, again, "artistic" in a weak sense. But here too I mean something more specific. Beyond allowing him to make the Aristotelian point that intelligibility is activity and that its different instances may be organized into parts of a larger whole, the analogy to organism affords Hegel a sense of implacable deductive necessity. If Aristotle ranks plants, animals, and human beings as lower and higher, for instance, he never claims to be able to deduce them from each other, nor is it clear that he thought of himself as having a system in the modern sense. But Hegel's anti-foundationalist holism (in the *Phenomenology* and *Encyclopedia*) cannot *but* make up a complete, deductive, ordered system. He evidently does not view Spirit's purposive activity as mechanically necessary or theologically pre-ordained, yet he does think that the stages he

<sup>15</sup> The visibility of the whole within the part—the notions of analogy and archetype, in sum—is one of the most familiar motifs in Romantic thinking about art and nature, in Germany and elsewhere (as in Blake's "To see the world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wildflower"). For its classic expression, cf. Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants* (esp. 76-78 in Goethe 1989), and this passage from his 1798 poem (also called "The Metamorphosis of Plants"): "All the shapes are akin and none is quite like the other;/ So to a secret law surely that chorus must point,/ To a sacred enigma" (Goethe 2016: 27). There is an echo of this thinking in Hegel's epistolary comment that "I saw the Emperor—this world-soul—riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it" (quoted in Pinkard 2000: 228). The *Phenomenology*, I am arguing, offers us a relay of just such "concentrated" figures.

<sup>16</sup> See Förster 2012: 297-301; cf. Goethe's comment that "In the end, the phenomena must form a series, or rather, overlap; thus they give the scientist a picture of some organization by which the inner life of the phenomena become manifest as a whole" (Goethe 2010: 984).



describes are the essential aspects of Spirit's activity, that they are rightly arranged within the teleologically arranged sequence within which he identifies them, and that their expression within this order is constitutive of what they are.<sup>17</sup> If this is not the necessity of a mathematical proof, it is necessity in the sense that any self-impelling organic process exhibits. And it is because narrative necessity obtains in this sense that Hegel occasionally invokes the notion that "we", readers and Hegelians, can be its spectators: "since what consciousness examines is its own self, all that is left for us to do is simply to look on [*nur das reine Zusehen bleibt*]" (GW 9.59/PS §85). History supplants nature as the decisive framework of human experience that it had been from Thales to Kant: Hegel puts a period to that trajectory by transforming history itself into a quasi-natural unfolding that presses on to its own actualization.

Even so, neither expressivism nor teleology would of itself justify the claim that the *Phenomenology* is an aesthetic work. The third consideration that still needs adding is that of Hegel's conception of the goal: a form of knowledge that incorporates and harmonizes all the previous chapters of the narrative, thereby overcoming, absolving, and consummating all failures at interpreting the relation between self and other, thinking and being. Whatever "absolute knowing" means exactly, it is not omniscience: it is not knowledge of every particular. It is, furthermore, a kind of knowing that can fully take place only within philosophy itself—Hegel consistently argues that it can only be partially intimated within politics, art, or religion.<sup>18</sup> But such knowing is nonetheless "absolute" in that it can identify all the conceptual links of the world in their necessary order of concatenation, and that this comprehension is such that it in some sense thereby changes the meaning of the whole it comprehends: once Spirit understands what it is about and what it has been *at all along*, it fulfills its purpose of coming to know itself in all otherness, of redeeming the reason of the world as what is unconditionally true. Spirit's self-knowledge replaces the role that love had played in Hegel's earlier writings.

This can be made to sound somewhat less outlandish when we hear it as an echo of another Aristotelian position, that to know the world completes it, that the cosmos's purpose is to come to know itself, and that in this sense all being strives, after its own manner and *sub specie aeternitatis*, to participate in the life of the mind. Hegel concludes the *Encyclopedia* with a quotation from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* to this effect (E3 §577). But the differences here again suggest that Hegel's notion of what philosophy can achieve is fundamentally an aesthetic one. First, because Hegel is committed to the fundamental univocity and commensurability of the logical "content" that emerges from each dialectical transition. Even where Aristotle ranks different species, he does not insist on the point that lower kinds are fundamentally commensurable with higher, that they are reducible to some common content. The theoretical life may be higher than the practical one for him, but the practical domain's integrity is not simply an ersatz version of theoretical content. No such *aporia* presents itself to Hegel, for whom each dialectical sublation carries over the same content as its lower version, but

<sup>17</sup> See esp. GW 9.366-67, 428-29/PS §§681, 801. Cf. "Hegel has taken a decisive step beyond Goethe: not only is it impossible to grasp the idea that philosophy strives to comprehend (the absolute) prior to the conclusion of the complete series of its realization; in fact *it is not what it is* until the end of that series" (Förster 2012: 300).

<sup>18</sup> Cf., e.g., LFA 99-100.

in a higher key. Thus, for instance: philosophy realizes the *same* purport that is only sensuously intimated in art and religion.<sup>19</sup> But, finally, the achievement of absolute knowing is identified with the culmination of historical time for Hegel, as of course it is not for Aristotle. This confounds the distinction between art and history, as it had been previously understood. Aristotle's observation that poetry is higher than history because the former is better at identifying universals whereas the latter is mired in contingency no longer holds for Hegel's narrative system, which is an apotheosis of both into a new kind of science of history. The final position, the way we are now, is not simply where things stand so far, but the justification of time and its fulfillment, inasmuch as this means a resolution and incorporation of every previous stage. There is a total identification of form to content in the finale that is not only expressive, and not only organically deduced, but wholly necessary and necessarily whole—a work that in some sense puts an end to all such work: a showstopper.

Recent scholarship on Hegel has tended to underplay this aspect of his position, rather stressing its provisional, proleptic, and corrigible character.<sup>20</sup> To have suggested that anything, let alone history or philosophy, ended in 1807 seems (rightly) premature to us, and I agree that we should distinguish the abiding value of Hegel's position from some of his more stupendous claims.<sup>21</sup> But we would also miss a crucial aspect of Hegel's position, were we to overlook the fact that its ambition evidently extends beyond the correctness of its propositional content—that it lays extraordinary claim not only to actualize or awaken consciousness to the latent significance of the whole, but to our recognition of it, Hegel's system, as the essential vehicle of that awakening. Just what this means is not yet clear; certainly it is not our way of regarding the work of ordinary scholarship. What I mean to say so far is that Hegel's insistence on the perfection of the result—on the notion that the final position is an expressive, developmental, autonomous whole in which form and content are fully harmonized with each other, and which in this way supplies us with a means for transformative recognition of ourselves—is rightly called aesthetic, and that this bears on how we are to recognize the *Phenomenology's* bearing on us, its readers.

#### 4. The Burden of Philosophy

I have argued so far that these three general features of Hegel's *Phenomenology*—its saturated expressivism, its teleological necessity, and its culminating harmony—render it if not a work of art, then at any rate into a work of philosophy formally patterned after what had been for Kant a specifically aesthetic mode of intelligibility. This is not to say that Hegel ever went so far as to conflate aesthetics with philosophy, as some of his contemporaries did. The *Phenomenology* itself states that “beauty hates the understanding” for asking it to perform what it

<sup>19</sup> Cf., e.g., GW 9.364-65, 368, 420-21/PS §§678, 683, 787.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Pinkard 2012, Pippin 2014, and Dale 2014 for such accounts in three heterogeneous domains.

<sup>21</sup> In other words, even as scholars continue to deny that Hegel has a strong end of history thesis, it is a position that readers cannot but continue to attribute to him, because it follows from his underlying principle that Spirit *cannot stop short* of achieving the total identification of being and thinking, that such an identification is properly located in modernity. For discussion of this question, see Dale 2014, Brooks 2007: 157, and Pinkard 2017: 140-68.

cannot (GW 9.27/PS §32), and throughout the 1820's he continued to describe art as a distinct practice, subordinate to philosophy. And Hegel is well known for the thesis that this practice has now ended for us, that it no longer sustains our deepest spiritual needs (LFA 10-11, 102-103).

Even in the *Lectures on Fine Art*, however, Hegel reiterates the claim that philosophy only grasps its own essence precisely along with the essence of art and nature—an explicit concession of the weight that the *Critique of Judgment* carried for him (LFA 56).<sup>22</sup> The discovery of philosophical science is also the discovery of the science of art, he says, because both have a common way of unifying conceptual oppositions into teleological activity: both are concerned with the mediated “life” of concepts.<sup>23</sup> It is in this sense that I think that by attending to the kind of work that the *Phenomenology* is—to its character as an organic deduction of a single, concrete, culminating activity—it is plausible to regard it as a philosophical work of art that answers to the modern demand for certainty by showing, as he says, “that now is the time for philosophy to be raised to the status of a science”, replacing the “love of knowing” for “actual knowing” (GW 9.11/PS §5). The work undertakes not only a true demonstration, but a reorientation of our impulse toward knowledge as such: our erotic restlessness is put to rest.<sup>24</sup>

I note in passing that it was these very features of Hegel's account of mediation that were associated with his philosophical hubris by the Left Hegelians in the generation after him. The sense that Hegel represented a philosophical dead end stemmed in part from the fact that his system could not be contested or extended in ordinary ways (since every possible distinction is supposed to be always already sublated within it), and so had to be repudiated wholesale. Its very perfection threatened to leave “us” out: the system's totality explained away our own existing, historical subjectivity. And this charge against Hegel's system was early on formulated as a problem of confounding philosophy with art. Thus Feuerbach writes, in his 1839 *Toward a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy*, that “Hegel is the most accomplished philosophical artist, and his presentations, at least in part, are *unsurpassed models of scientific art sense* [...] The Hegelian philosophy is thus the culminating point of all speculative-systematic philosophy” (Feuerbach 2012: 68). Similar accusations may be readily found in the writings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.<sup>25</sup>

But setting his reception aside, it will be more helpful to ask how Hegel himself conceived of the relationship between his system and the form of life that grounds it. If it is relatively uncontroversial to point out that Hegel's thought is “aesthetic” in the sense that it elaborates a notion of mediation that is in opposition to the scientific formalism of the Enlightenment, the question of what this means for the role that Hegel's thought takes itself to be called on to perform (to return to McDowell's phrase) has not been adequately addressed.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. LFA: 63.

<sup>23</sup> For the connection between this theme in the *Phenomenology* and in the 1820's *Lectures on Fine Art*, see Pippin 2011b: 104-108.

<sup>24</sup> For a telling contrast to Kant, cf. A 850/878: “we will always return to metaphysics as to a beloved from whom we have been estranged”.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. e.g. Kierkegaard (1992: 347); Nietzsche (1997a: §190) and (1997b: 104): “such a point of view [i.e. the Hegelian one] has set history [...] in place of the other spiritual powers, art and religion, as the sole sovereign power”.

What is the relation between this aesthetic dimension and its supposed function vis-à-vis *us*? Does Hegel understand his project as the explication or reiteration of norms already tacitly obtaining within modernity (as the Owl of Minerva comment suggests)? Or does he regard his own project as making some transformative difference to their full realization? What, in sum, is philosophical mediation *for*, in his view, and how is this purpose connected to its aesthetic character? Two further issues become salient in this connection: Hegel's view of the historical character of his position and his view of the task of philosophy as such. Either one of these is matter for a much longer study, but let me outline some lines of thinking on each in turn.

Hegel's thought is conspicuous, as I've said, for tethering itself to a particular historical situation. Philosophy cannot culminate in science before Spirit has worked out all the practical and conceptual conditions entailed by it; the "end" of history and the "end" of philosophy (however stipulated) are indivisible for this reason. As he put it in 1806: "This is the standpoint of the present time, and for now it is the last in the series of the forms of spirit [*geistigen Gestaltungen*].—With this the history of philosophy is *concluded*" (*Werke* 20: 479).<sup>26</sup> One may put more or less pressure on that "for now". But while Hegel balks at anything like prediction, he sees modernity as making a decisive, qualitative difference that he is in a position to articulate, and so his project is predicated on spelling out now what has already been realized in practice. Had it been articulated by any pre-modern thinker, in other words, the same position would not have been *true* (would not have been an expression of its actuality). The philosophical culmination of the *Phenomenology*—its sublation of the meaning of time itself<sup>27</sup>—is accordingly presented as evincing or completing the moment's historical significance:

Ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past [...] The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world (GW 9.14-15/PS §11).

And while in the 1820's Hegel was no longer so euphoric about the thoroughness of the historical conversion taking place,<sup>28</sup> he never detached his own position from the fact that modernity represents a decisive shift in key to a higher historical register, a key that he takes himself to discover and codify, such that the most flagrant statements he made about the end of history date from that period.<sup>29</sup>

It would be much easier to shrug this off as a version of C-major Whiggish triumphalism, however, if there were not an additional, minor key present in Hegel's writings from the 1790's on: an insistence about the crises facing modern institutions. One may be so easily distracted by the heady tenor of the *Phe-*

<sup>26</sup> See note in Förster 2012: 301.

<sup>27</sup> See GW 9.428-29/PS §801.

<sup>28</sup> On this subject, see esp. Pinkard 2012: 173-96. My essay owes much to Pinkard's description, though he does not press what I'm calling the aesthetic character of Hegel's position.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. "Europe is essentially [*schlechthin*] the end of history" (*Werke* 12: 134).

*nomenology*, for instance, that one may miss the fact that Hegel describes his historical moment as one of decline, in which the traditional meanings of things have lost their grip on ordinary agents: "Spirit has lost not only its essential life; it is also conscious of this loss and of the finitude of its own content" (GW 9.12/PS §7).<sup>30</sup> Our spiritual situation is as impoverished as that of "a wanderer in the desert craving for a mere mouthful of water" (GW 9.13/PS §8). Later, in chapter 5, Hegel says that the narrative he has chosen is one of declension rather than ascent, because it more appropriate: "in our times that form of these moments is more familiar in which they appear after consciousness has lost its ethical life, and in the search for it, repeats those forms" (GW 9.197/PS §357). It is (also) the worst of times.

If these descriptions of crisis in the *Phenomenology* are to be identified with the collapse of the *ancien régime* in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the sense of crisis is even more pronounced in the *Philosophy of Right*, which, over ten years later, criticizes modern negative view of the free will, the atomism and contractarianism that dominates liberal thinking about the state, and the excesses of Romantic subjectivity. Philosophy has fallen into a "shameful decline" Hegel says; its bent toward merely subjective ends leads to the destruction of ethics and of the laws of the state (GW 14.1.6, 12/PR 10, 18, respectively). A remark in the *Encyclopedia* adds that "the sickness of our time, which has arrived at the point of despair, is the assumption that cognition is only subjective" (E1 §22z). Hegel is, admittedly, responding to a different political reality here, one no longer pervaded by Napoleonic optimism. But there is nonetheless a striking and persistent gap between Hegel's stake in philosophical modernity—his view that the modern state alone offers the conditions for the realization of human freedom, and that he is only articulating the rationality of the actual—and his observations on modernity, as he finds it. The fact remains that Hegel never uncoupled these two systematically dissonant principles: the historical dependence of his position, and the incomplete or inadequate character of modern subjectivity. He did not, in sum, view his position either as one that could be out of sync with its time, nor as one that was a mere explication of modernity as he found it. His position stems from modernity, but he finds modernity, in and of itself, not quite as it could or should be.

This raises the second issue I noted above, about Hegel's view of the meaning of philosophy within its historical context: if modernity is, practically speaking, incomplete, then what is philosophy for? What is its status with respect to the not-quite-yet realization of the form of life that nonetheless makes it possible? It is at least clear that Hegel regarded philosophy as having some role to perform within this realization, some *potentially* public function. In contrast to Fichte, Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche who often write under the presumption of public incomprehension, Hegel writes that "the intelligible form of science is the way open and equally accessible to everyone [...] what is intelligible is what is already familiar and common to science and the unscientific consciousness alike" (GW 9.15-16/PS §13). And: "the individual has the right to demand that Science provide him with the ladder to this standpoint, should show him this standpoint within himself" (GW 9.22-23/PS §26). At no point in Hegel's career is philosophy presented as esoteric in principle. So much so that around the time of the *Phenomenology's* appearance, he reiterated, in a letter to Niethammer, that

<sup>30</sup> Cf. GW 9.14-5/PS §11.

it was the world-historical role of German philosophy to complete in thought what the French Revolution had accomplished in practice.<sup>31</sup>

But what is it that philosophy can be said to “accomplish” for him exactly? The darker strain of analysis I’ve noted culminates in a passage from the 1820’s *Lectures on Fine Art*, in which he says that the harsh opposition between inner freedom and the necessity of external nature have, in fact, been driven to harshest contradiction in modern culture:

Spiritual culture, the modern intellect, produces this opposition in man which makes him an amphibious animal because he now has to live in two worlds which contradict one another. The result is that now consciousness wanders about in this contradiction, and, driven from one side to the other, cannot find satisfaction for itself in either the one or the other [...] it becomes the task of philosophy to supersede the oppositions [...] Philosophy affords a reflective insight into the essence of the opposition only in so far as it shows how truth is just the dissolving of opposition and, at that, not in the sense, as may be supposed, that the opposition and its two sides do not exist at all, but that they exist reconciled (LFA 54-55).

This ‘amphibious’ view of agency seems on the face of it far from the seamless, second-natural view we might have expected or desired from him.<sup>32</sup> In a sense, it reverses the priority between practical agency and philosophy, by suggesting that it is only in philosophy that we are able to make sense of our own amphibious status as creatures natural and free. Philosophy performs the task of showing us the unity underlying a practical conflict, but the insight is one that cannot as such take place in practice, cannot be actualized within a world that must remain at harsh odds with itself. We may be Hegelian naturalists in theory, in other words, even as we must remain Kantian dualists in practice.

The passage nonetheless agrees with the *Phenomenology* on the point that our understanding of modern agency is not just a mirror explication of circumstances on the ground, as it were, but one that transforms our very view of those circumstances, by freeing them from their contingency and transposing them into the terms of absolute knowledge. In these passages, philosophy exceeds or surpasses the possibilities of what is possible or even implicit within our not-quite-yet form of life, such that what is asunder in practice may be reconciled only in theory. In that this reconciliation can only take place in philosophy, it is a position that was castigated as conformist by Hegel’s revolutionary disciples. But in that the reconciliation effects, in being thought, a transformative recognition of the very aspect of the world, the position is not the therapy of quietism either—it proposes not an escape from practice into theory, after all, but the raising to a higher power in theory of what remains latent within practice. I would suggest that the meaning of Hegel’s position for us crucially depends on what I’ve called the aesthetic character of his thought: Hegel does not mean his system simply to acknowledge the otherwise practically realized freedom of mod-

<sup>31</sup> See *Briefe*, vol. II, #233. The notion is likewise implicit in the architecture of the *Phenomenology* itself, with “Absolute Freedom and Terror” giving way to “Morality” within chapter 6.

<sup>32</sup> One might add that Hegel makes clear that he does not regard an amphibian as an admirable thing to be—referring to them in the *Encyclopedia* as repulsive and “imperfect products of nature” (E2: §368z.).

ern life, but in some sense to bring it into being through a transformation of consciousness, that is, through the shared acknowledgment that Hegel's thought is our form of unity. If Hegel's thought is akin to a work of art, in other words, it is not simply a work of art that is meant to express the canons of taste of a pre-existing community; rather it aims to actively convoke that very community by giving it an image in which it can recognize itself, to bring into being something that is at once implicit in modern consciousness but not yet fully present to us prior to our awareness of it.

In order to motivate this suggestion, I'd like to return to the *Critique of Judgment* for a moment. Aesthetic or "reflective" judgments interest Kant, as I've said, as embodied intimation of freedom.<sup>33</sup> But they also interest him as a proxy for intersubjectivity. It is within his treatment of aesthetic judgment that Kant comes closest to addressing the distinctive character of intersubjectivity, since he openly entertains the social dimension of such judgments as constitutive to their intelligibility. Aesthetic taste is presented as a *sensus communis*.<sup>34</sup> It is a shared power of appealing to the collective judgment of human reason in general. Two essential yardsticks of aesthetic judgments are therefore their universal communicability, and our right to demand (in principle) everyone's agreement with our view that such and such is beautiful (KU §§8: 32):

By "*sensus communis*"[...] must be understood the idea of a **communal** sense, i.e., a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order **as it were** to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole [...] Now this happens by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else [*man ... sich in die Stelle jedes anderen versetzt*], merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judging (KU §40).

Kant does not say much about the social conditions underlying this power of abstraction, nor about the relation between the universality of judgments of taste and the specific practices and objects on which we exercise them. Standards of beauty are not, after all, universal without qualification—they are not even the same throughout Western Europe, as Kant knew. But this ambiguity as to "the merely possible judgment of others" is nonetheless a fruitful one. Some of Kant's comments suggest that as a condition for this *sensus communis* we should understand the unstated presence of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism—aesthetic judgment would be an expression of the fact that we already been disciplined into a certain way of seeing things with others.<sup>35</sup> Art makes explicit the cultural norms that already inform our vision, in this sense. But Kant's emphasis in other passages suggests a more ambitious, constitutive role for the *sensus communis*—not simply as the reiteration of shared European sensibility, but as the project of calling into being what is shareable *par excellence*, the solicitation of a human communion that is not yet realized but that is nonetheless internal to beauty's "should".<sup>36</sup> From this angle, art summons us to see what we could be

<sup>33</sup> See esp. KU §59.

<sup>34</sup> For the history of this phrase, see Gadamer 2003: 19-30.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. KU §§14: 40, 83.

<sup>36</sup> See esp. KU §§8: 9, 18, 19, 41.

by showing us what we've been all along—it has, in this sense, the performative function of being the means through which we come to recognize ourselves in common, “as if from an original contract dictated by humanity itself” (KU §41).

It is this performative role for aesthetics that was most interesting to Schiller in the 1790's; beauty functions for him in the *Letters* as the activity conforming a community's ethical harmony; it both expresses and constitutes a community's ethical transparency to itself in practice. The same may be said of Schelling, of the young Hegel, and of the author of the *Oldest Program*, whose project of a “new rational mythology” had a transformative, rather than simply imitative, notion of beauty. What I'm suggesting is that Hegel's *Phenomenology* and his system as a whole should be seen as aspiring to perform this kind of function. If it is a sort of aesthetic artifact, and if it can be said to be out of sync with the historical advent to which it nonetheless insists on closely tethering itself, then it is because his project should be understood neither as reiterating the norms and attitudes of modern life, nor as misidentifying them, but as aiming to summon us to a shared vision of ourselves that could itself bear the weight of constituting our modern wholeness.

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel notes that modern education differs from that of ancient times in that “the individual [now] finds the abstract form ready-made [...] the task nowadays consists [...] in freeing determinate thoughts from their fixity so as to give actuality to the universal, and impart to it spiritual life” (GW 9.28/PS §33). Not only does the notion of bringing “life” to the universal have a clear aesthetic resonance—it stems from Kant's description of the “quickening” (*Belebung*) of sense that takes place in reflective judgment<sup>37</sup>—the suggestion is that the ambition of Hegelian science is neither to recapitulate the world nor to change it: the aim of science is the “recognition” of what is already the case in some sense, but which is transformed in our self-conception of it. Modernity has the same character for him in many descriptions: it is not a situation of seamless harmony, but rather one in positive need of harmonization. In the “end of art” passage from the *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel notes that such a harmonizing cannot be done by art any longer, and that this magnifies our need for philosophy—both for “knowing philosophically what art is” and for meeting the demands that our spiritual culture places on us. Philosophy in this way takes the place of art as the practice through which we recognize ourselves in otherness: more than just conciliating us to (or allowing us to cope with) our position *faute de mieux*, it is what restores our nature whole.

## 5. Becoming Who We Are

I think that we are sometimes misled by the useful textbook fiction that Plato, Aquinas, Hegel, and Wittgenstein could be said to understand themselves as providing the same kinds of answers to the same kinds of questions.<sup>38</sup> The difference is most jarring, say, when Plato ends a dialogue with a myth, or when Aristotle gets started by canvassing popular opinions, or when Aquinas offers us arguments for God's existence that are not presumed to be independent from faith. It is not that these moments are inscrutable to us, it is rather that we find

<sup>37</sup> Cf., e.g., KU §§12: 43, 49.

<sup>38</sup> For two (very different) elaborations of this thesis, see Hadot 1995 (esp. 101-109), and MacIntyre 1991.



thinkers working within a terrain in which bearings must be taken differently from ours. One way to describe this strangeness is the changing relation that philosophy has to its communal context, the question of who, in each case, the author is reasoning with and for, and, given the shape of “our” shared commitments, what kinds of investigations are understood to be available for measured progress. But another way of understanding this relation would be to note that in each case philosophy takes itself to be called on to discharge different sorts of functions with respect to its form of life, functions that—like the changing roles of the fine arts—are themselves historically variable.

The roles most familiar to us now are perhaps revolutionary activism, therapeutic quietism, and scientific (or scholarly) research. Hegel's position should interest us all the more because it conforms to none of these patterns, in fact: he offers us a completion of history that cannot take place within history alone, a means to effect the transformative recognition that Romantic art was expected to play by some of his contemporaries. To instance Novalis' formulation, to “romanticize” means “to give a higher significance to the commonplace, an appearance of mystery to the ordinary, the dignity of the unknown to the familiar, the semblance of infinity to the finite” (quoted in Martini 1977: 319).<sup>39</sup> Hegel's conception of his project is in line with this transfiguration of the ordinary by revealing its deepest rational grounds; it at once attends to the recurrence of the alienation to which it is addressed and, in acknowledging the fundamental difference between modernity and its self-conception, aims to heal the gap by providing us with an invocation of a wholeness in which we may acknowledge ourselves already whole. It is not revolutionary because this transformation is not institutional, but nor it is quietist because it supplies us with the means of recognizing the unity that remains latent within our riven forms of practice.

This characterization doubtless raises a larger crowd of questions than it answers—about the scope of this “we”, about whether it finally amounts to a form of obfuscatory escapism, and about the very feasibility of recognizing ourselves as whole in absolute thought. Unlike the *amor fati* of thinkers ancient and modern, however—a position solitary in its encounter with eternity—Hegel's position accounts for the necessary persistence of the questions that we continue to address in common. We are permanently encumbered by the question of naturalism, because it is not the kind of question that could be set to rest in theory or in practice alone: our amphibious form of life is such as not to be a given, such as to remain in question, and so it cannot but continue to elicit questions about its own (and our own) status and unity. These questions still speak to us, in this sense, because we are continually forced to try to realize what it would mean to say “we” and to mean it. Inasmuch as “we may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection” (LFA 103), Hegel still becomes us.

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# Hegel's Fact of Reason: Life and Death in the Experience of Freedom

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## Abstract

This paper shows how Hegel transforms Kant's Fact of Reason argument for freedom, and in particular how Hegel takes over the role of experience and death in Kant's "Gallows Man" illustration of the Fact. I reconstruct a central thread of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which Hegel develops his view of freedom and practical rationality through a series of life and death experiences undergone by "shapes of consciousness". While Hegel views his fact of reason as a *result* of a developmental process rather than as an immediate brute fact, the method of that development is itself deeply informed by Kant's argument that the moral law must be opposed to attachment to life in order to establish the reality of freedom. By contrast with Kant, Hegel begins with an immediate unity of life and self-consciousness, and only through a painful trial is the subject of the *Phenomenology* educated to free obedience to reason. Hegel departs fundamentally from Kant both in uniting life and freedom and in simultaneously developing a *world* of freedom, a socially embodied fact of reason, through which individuals express their freedom in action.

*Keywords:* Kant, Freedom, Hegel, Reason, Life, Self-consciousness.

## 1. Introduction

If freedom of will is strictly opposed to determination by natural causes, then there is nothing that would, or could, count as evidence of freedom, for all our evidence comes through the operations of nature. One possible way out of this bind is to prove freedom of will from freedom of thinking, for the spontaneity of thinking seems both undeniable and in a medium (consciousness) that is at least somewhat plausibly undetermined by ordinary natural causes. Kant attempted such a proof in the third section of his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, arguing that reason shows "a spontaneity so pure that it thereby goes far beyond anything that sensibility can ever afford it" (Kant.Ak. 4: 452, PP: 99),<sup>1</sup> and that

<sup>1</sup> I cite Kant's texts from the Academy edition: Kant.Ak. = Kant 1900ff.; PP = Kant 1996.

we can infer from this faculty to membership in an intelligible world above the domain of causality and appearance. The problem with this kind of argument is that it leaves unexplained the move from thinking to willing, from theoretical to practical reason. Kant recognized the deficiencies in his own argument, and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he based his proof of freedom on an explicitly moral consciousness of the will as governed by the moral law. This is his *Fact of Reason* (hereafter Fact), the claim that as agents we are necessarily conscious of ourselves as standing under a moral law that is supremely binding on the will. From this Fact we infer that the will really is free, outside of causal influence, for the Fact would be impossible without such freedom. The difficulty with this type of proof is that it seems to rely on a practical need: I need to think of myself as an agent under moral laws, and therefore I need to think of my will as transcendently free. The trouble is that we could grant all this and still say that needing to think this way does not make it so. From the demand to conceive of action in a certain way no fact of the matter follows. The demand could very well be yet another dictate of life, of nature.<sup>2</sup>

The only way to prove that life itself is not pulling the strings, so to speak, is through the willingness to *die* for the sake of the law. This is the insight of Kant's famous Gallows Man example in support of the Fact,<sup>3</sup> and, I argue in this paper, it is an insight that Hegel exploits to great effect in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Kant looks for "confirmation" of freedom through willingness to sacrifice one's life to obey the moral law, the conclusion of practical reason. He holds that the motivation of an action risking one's life can only signify the determination of the will through reason alone. This argument for freedom through conscious opposition to life deeply influenced the development of German Idealism. While Fichte employs it for his political philosophy, Hegel generalizes the argument in his account of the experience of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. In contrast to Kant's anti-naturalist approach to freedom, Hegel uses the experience of death in the service of an argument that unites nature and freedom. Hegel too aims to prove the reality of freedom, but he argues that freedom is realized within a social order conceived as a living system of rights and duties. Hegel's fact of reason is the ethical consciousness reached at the end of the *Phenomenology* and at the beginning of *Sittlichkeit* in the *Philosophy of Right*.

Rather than analyze the consciousness of the individual in the *Philosophy of Right* account of ethical life, or analyze the various passages where he critiques Kant's moral philosophy, in this paper I follow a central thread of the *Phenomenology* in which Hegel argues for his view of freedom through a series of life and death experiences undergone by "shapes of consciousness". Hegel views his fact of reason as a *result* of a developmental process rather than as an immediate brute fact. But the path or method of that development is itself deeply informed by Kant's argument that the moral law must be opposed to attachment to life in order to establish the reality of freedom. By contrast with Kant, Hegel's freedom begins as a pure self-consciousness, and only through a painful trial is the subject of the *Phenomenology* educated to free obedience to reason. The subject does find the source of the bindingness of norms in her own free will, but Hegel departs

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of a version of this naturalistic challenge leveled by Salomon Maimon, see Franks 2007.

<sup>3</sup> I take the Gallows Man label from Grenberg 2013. For a critical discussion of her view, see Moyar 2015a.

fundamentally from Kant in simultaneously developing a *world* of freedom, a socially embodied fact of reason, through which individuals express their freedom in action. What Hegel rather mysteriously names *die Sache selbst* is the concept of an action bearing all the rational structure needed for the agent, in knowing and acting on it, to demonstrate that she is actually free.

## 2. Kant's Fact of Reason and the Gallows Experience

Kant's Fact of Reason is the consciousness of the moral law as supremely *binding* on the will of a rational being. One is conscious that one must *judge* actions according to the principle of the moral law and that the law can be effective on its own to *motivate* one to act on it. For Kant this consciousness is not derivative from a prior consciousness of freedom, but rather is the grounds for our knowledge of freedom.<sup>4</sup> On the side of *judgment*, Kant gives a version of the universal law formulation of the Categorical Imperative: "ask yourself whether, if the action you propose were to take place by a law of the nature of which you were yourself a part, you could indeed regard it as possible through your will" (Kant.Ak. 5: 69; PP: 196). The *motivational* component of the Fact comes from the doctrine of respect, a "moral feeling" that proceeds from the representation of the law, and from the idea that consciousness of the moral law creates an *interest* that shows that the law is independent of the mechanism of nature (Kant.Ak. 5: 31; PP: 164-65). On Kant's story about transcendental freedom, this independence must be different from the "relative independence" that comes from subordinating one inclination to another (Allison 1990: 242). The only contrast with relative independence, however, is total independence, which manifests itself in the total elevation above life, namely in the willingness to die for the sake of the moral law.

The element of death comes out in an illustration that Kant introduces as experiential support for the priority of the law over inclination.<sup>5</sup> He writes,

But experience also confirms this order of concepts in us. Suppose someone asserts of his lustful inclination that, when the desired object and the opportunity are present, it is quite irresistible to him; ask him whether, if a gallows were erected in front of the house where he finds this opportunity and he would be hanged on it immediately after gratifying his lust, he would not then control his inclination. One need not conjecture very long what he would reply. But ask him whether, if his prince demanded, on pain of the same immediate execution, that he give false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext, he would consider it possible to overcome his love of life, however great it may be. He would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which,

<sup>4</sup> I am drawing here especially on Allison 1990: Ch. 13, and Franks 2005: Ch. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Allison emphasizes the importance of the gallows experience for the deduction of freedom from the Fact. "Although this passage occurs prior to the 'official' deduction of freedom in the text, it is crucial to the understanding of this deduction, since it clearly illustrates the inseparability of the consciousness of the moral law and the consciousness of freedom (including negative freedom) as two aspects of the fact of reason" (Allison 1990: 242-43).

without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him (Kant.Ak. 5: 30; PP: 163-64).

The strength of self-preservation is calibrated against the sexual desire or lust that one claims is uncontrollable. The moral law creates an interest that is so strong that it *can* (not that it necessarily will) overcome even the desire for self-preservation. Especially important here is that Kant is proposing that one identifies with the moral law, and is free, precisely in so far as one is willing to *give up one's life* for the sake of the moral law. Dying for the law would be the real, and perhaps only, proof of one's morality.

Kant takes the Fact as a crucial step in his argument for transcendental freedom because it demonstrates our independence from nature. The mystery in the account is how Kant can simultaneously assert motivational efficacy (of the pure interest generated by consciousness of the law) and transcendental freedom as an exemption from natural causality. Must this interest not also be part of nature if it is to be efficacious in a natural being? Even if we grant that everyone takes this moral law as a guide to judgment, and through this consciousness can be moved to risk their life, what grounds are there for the further move to the claim that this willingness to sacrifice is proof of freedom from determination by nature? Furthermore, even if we were right that this is proven in such cases as this one, in which one actually sacrifices oneself for the sake of morality, what are we to say about the other, prosaic instances of moral action in which no such sacrifice is called for? Can they plausibly be seen as identical with the life-staking cases? If the non-naturalism of transcendental freedom is supposed to be established in the life-staking cases, must that same freedom also be operative in all actions that have moral worth? One imagines a character who adds to each moral intention "and I would rather die than fail to do my duty".

The importance of the Fact for the development of German Idealism has been brought out best by the Fichtean interpretation of Paul Franks. Franks stresses the motivational dimension of the Fact, writing that "the moral law immediately constitutes a reason for acting and a motivation for acting, without the need for any further desire or interest to accompany it", and "it provides a motivating reason that outweighs any and—as we shall see—every possible competing reason" (Franks 2005: 280). The "as we shall see" points to the Gallows passage, of which Franks writes that it "plays a crucial role throughout the rest of the *Analytic*" (ibid.: 281). Franks argues that the Gallows Man invites the readers of Kant's text to experience the moral law and thus to raise themselves to the standpoint of morality in the very process of philosophizing. He thinks that this appeal to experience answers the objection that the Fact only shows "that I *cannot help but believe* that I ought to act for the sake of the moral law and that I therefore *cannot help but believe* that I can act as an absolute free agent" (ibid.: 284). Kant needs to show that I actually can do so, where this is a version of what Franks identifies as the general "Actuality Problem" with transcendental, first-person arguments (ibid.: 246ff.). This actuality is established in the feeling of respect that is produced in considering the Gallows Man: "in considering the exemplary choice between duty and death, we actually *produce* the feeling of respect. So Kant is claiming that in reading the *Analytic*, we *demonstrate* the reality of freedom by *producing* an effect necessitated by the moral law" (ibid., 286-



87). The deduction functions properly only when the reader has taken up the example and has been transformed through moral feeling.<sup>6</sup>

The Kantian Fact finds a broader application in Fichte's philosophy, for Fichte claims that consciousness of the moral law is necessary for taking up the standpoint of transcendental philosophy. He aims to derive rational content starting from the self-positing I, the transcendental self-consciousness that is the condition of the possibility of all other consciousness. This is already an act of freedom, and one known, in line with Kant's view, only through the consciousness of the moral law. In Franks' view, the moral law is not itself the first principle of Fichte's philosophy, but consciousness of it is required for the philosopher to "acknowledge real activity *as the absolute first principle of philosophy*" (Franks 2005: 319). For my account it is important to stress that Fichte derives content from this original unity by engaging an idealized subject in an experiment, namely by positing obstacles to that original unity and then reincorporating those obstacles into a further determined unity. Fichte writes,

The part played by the philosopher is no more than this: His task is to engage this living subject in purposeful activity, to apprehend it, and to comprehend it as a single, unified activity. He conducts an experiment. The *Wissenschaftslehre* contains two very different series of mental acting: that of the I the philosopher is observing, as well as the series consisting of the philosopher's own observations (Fichte 1971, I: 454; Fichte 1994: 37).

The "living subject" is confronted by a world opposed to her activity, and the philosopher's job in reconstructing an idealized experience of that activity is to show how in each case that freedom can be restored through the positing of a new conceptual determination. I take the philosopher's role in conducting the experiment to be in part the reiteration of the requirement of freedom at each point that the limitation by the object is on the verge of eliminating the possibility of self-consciousness. It is as if the philosopher repeatedly calls the subject back from immersion in, or attachment to, the object. This is a calling back in each case to something akin to Kant's Fact of Reason because if you were to stop with the object your freedom and your ability to follow the moral law would be compromised. There must be another concept, Fichte argues, that would unite your previous activity with this new object. In his best known work of practical philosophy, Fichte argues that the only kind of object that is compatible with the self-determination of the subject is another subject who summons the first to free activity. This argument continues into his theory of right as a relation of mutual recognition, the basic freedom secured by political institutions.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. The Experience of Consciousness and the Actuality of Freedom

My argument is that in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel demonstrates (among other things) the actuality of freedom through an "experience of con-

<sup>6</sup> Grenberg (2013) also emphasizes the Gallows example, but she holds that the Fact is an experience first and foremost of restraint, not of an activity.

<sup>7</sup> See Fichte 1971, III: 41-53 and Fichte 2000: 39-49.

sciousness” that draws on Kant’s Fact and its Gallows Man illustration.<sup>8</sup> Recall that Kant cannot argue straight from the consciousness of the moral law to the actuality of freedom, for the freedom at issue for him is the transcendental freedom from causal determination, and that is something to which introspective consciousness has no access. The best case we can make for actuality is that exhibited in the Gallows Man example, whereby one establishes the reality of freedom by one’s ability (willingness) to sacrifice one’s life rather than violate the moral law. Hegel’s argument in the *Phenomenology*, by contrast, demonstrates the actuality of freedom through a series of experiences, many of which involve staking one’s life for the sake of freedom. While drawing on Kant’s argument Hegel also radically transforms it, for in Hegel’s view proving the actuality of freedom does not involve establishing an inner freedom from nature. Rather, such a proof consists of showing how the outer expression of freedom in ethical activity, by living beings situated within “the life of a people”, just is the actuality of freedom. Hegel’s ultimate picture is of an inferential totality in which individuals are embedded in a complex system of ethical roles, and that picture may seem to have little to do with Kantian pure practical reason and its Fact (see Moyar 2017). But Hegel does have a view of individual practical reason within the social system, a view that he discusses under the title of actual or true conscience. What I focus on in this paper is not so much the final view itself, which I have explored elsewhere (See Moyar 2011), but rather how Hegel derives the view through experience in the central chapters of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel does not think he can take any of the components of this view of ethical action for granted, and his account of what makes ethical judgments true is quite a bit more complicated than Kant’s universal law account, but the same elements of judgment, motivation, and bindingness inform both views. In the next section I focus on Hegel’s naturalizing account of self-consciousness and desire, while in this section I unpack the *Phenomenology*’s method to show how it could demonstrate freedom’s actuality.

Hegel’s argument in the *Phenomenology* very much follows Fichte’s lead in using an experimental method designed to “engage” a “living subject in purposeful activity” and to draw lessons from the experimental results. Of course this is a reconstructed, idealized experience; such an experimental method is a perspicuous way to test various claims to knowledge through examining the consequences that follow from those claims. The goal for both Fichte and Hegel is to *develop* or *generate* conceptual content and validity from minimal presuppositions. They were responding to a dissatisfaction with Kant’s mere assumption of content, especially in the theory of the categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The goal is to derive the categories, both theoretical and practical, in a way that would not be subject to skeptical challenges. Hegel’s method departs from Fichte’s in so far as Hegel holds that an account must start with *immediate content* rather than *immediate form*. Fichte begins with the immediate absolute form of the I=I, the pure self-consciousness that is the condition of the possibility of all content. Hegel, by contrast, begins with immediate content and develops its inner negativity in order to reveal the form latent within it. He thinks that Fichte just begs the question of freedom by beginning with unconditioned freedom rather than proving it, and that such a position ends up (not surprisingly) having no argument that the other side could possibly find persuasive. Fichte’s view also

<sup>8</sup> The original title of the work was “The Science of the Experience of Consciousness”.

departs too much from common sense, for resting idealism on such an absolute starting point asks the ordinary consciousness “to walk upside down all of a sudden” (PS 26, GW 23).<sup>9</sup> Hegel begins the *Phenomenology* with “Sense-certainty”, the most immediate claim to knowledge. From there he works up to a conception of self-consciousness and eventually, with “Reason”, to the standpoint of idealism. The Fichtean self-positing I always hovers above ethical action as an unattainable standard, whereas for Hegel freedom always is situated within a context of life.<sup>10</sup>

What Hegel calls a “shape of consciousness” consists of a specific concept and subjective (conceptual) capacities, on the one hand, and an object characterized as the truth that the concept is aiming to capture. The *realist* assumption of each shape is that the object to be known is something different than the activity of the subject attempting to know it. The experimental test involves the comparison of the concept of knowing/acting with the object of knowing/acting once the subject has made specific judgments or performed specific actions. Hegel calls the *Phenomenology* a “self-consummating skepticism” (PS 78, GW 56) because the experience demonstrates the internal breakdown of each shape of consciousness (the skepticism) in order to eliminate the gap between subjectivity and objectivity presupposed by that shape (the skepticism is “consummated” when this gap is completely eliminated and idealism is achieved thereby).<sup>11</sup> In the practical domain the concept is a *purposive concept* that does not seek to mirror an already constituted world of objects but rather aims to bring its purpose to fruition through altering the world in some way. Success in such an endeavor cannot be the mere consumption of the world, for then the subject would be eliminating its object rather than realizing the purpose objectively. The practical consciousness must be *productive* in some sense, must have as its purpose the establishment or constitution of objects with standing in the world. Because the practical domain has a certain idealism built into its very purposive character, the challenge is to establish the agent and a world such that the agent can conceive of her purpose as reflecting an order that is *already* constituted as purposive. This task will require developing a social world from individual practical reason, and then, conversely, showing how the modern social world has become one in which individual conscience is at home.

The key to Hegel’s method in the *Phenomenology* is the *determinate negation* involved in the breakdown of a shape and in the subsequent *reversal of consciousness* that produces a new shape. Each breakdown provides the raw materials for a new shape of consciousness that contains the lessons of the previous one. When a shape of consciousness fails at its knowing or acting, it fails for a certain reason, typically because of a certain abstraction or incompleteness in its conception. Quite often Hegel portrays the failure in intersubjective terms: two individuals with the same conceptual resources make conflicting judgments, interpret their actions in conflicting ways, thereby negating the truth-claims of the other. It is crucial for Hegel to characterize this experimental result in a specific way, typically by showing that the result reveals that there was a universality implicit in the original concept. So in “Sense-certainty” the knower thought to

<sup>9</sup> Citations of the *Phenomenology* give the paragraph number from the Pinkard translation followed by the page number in volume 9 of the *Gesammelte Werke*.

<sup>10</sup> See Moyar 2015b for a more detailed explication of the method.

<sup>11</sup> See Pippin 1989: Ch. 5, esp. 108.

grasp a singular “this”, but the result of the experience is that the knower in fact could only grasp an indexical, a universal “now” or “here”.<sup>12</sup> In the practical case of Faust that we will look at below, Faust thinks he is going to grasp life as singular pleasure, but instead he grasps only death, a universal. In such cases of action matters are more complicated because Hegel thinks of the result as itself containing a kind of *process* of action and reaction. The death that Faust experiences is actually the *necessity* that Hegel identifies with *fate*, a certain blank causality that is the immediate *consequence* relation.

Once he has adequately characterized the result of the breakdown of one shape, Hegel makes a move to a new shape through what he calls the “reversal of consciousness” (PS 87, GW 61). The reversal takes the “*being-for-consciousness of the in-itself*” (PS 87, GW 61), namely what the previous object turned out to be *for consciousness* in the failure of its knowing/acting, and converts (reverses) that content into a *new object*. This reversing and the simultaneous connecting of shapes to each other is the philosopher’s contribution to the overall argument. It is in fact a version of the philosopher’s reiteration of the requirement of freedom in Fichte’s method mentioned above, and it bears some similarities to the methodological use of the Fact that Franks identified in Kant and Fichte.<sup>13</sup> Hegel’s method involves a split into a participant consciousness and phenomenological observer, which is his version of Fichte’s split between the living subject and the philosopher. While in Fichte the philosopher comes in to say that self-consciousness would be impossible if we do not find a new synthetic concept, for Hegel the philosopher arrives at the new concept/object pair simply by relocating the lessons of the previous experience. Those lessons are made constitutive of the new *object*, but they are also transferred to the new concept, or to the new subject who is aiming to know that new object.

The argument that I will follow in the rest of this paper leads from self-consciousness to reason to spirit, with each major step in the development representing a progression on the side of the concept and the object. In *self-consciousness* the subject does not really get beyond considering anything other than itself truly objective; in *reason* there is an objective world, and the individual rational subject believes that in her reason she has all the resources she needs to comprehend that world; in *spirit* the subject is a collective *social* subject, a polis, culture, etc., and the objective world is a *social* world of customs and laws. In all three domains the same basic moves are repeated, with death playing a central role in overcoming the immediacy of desire and establishing the supremacy of rational judgment. Death is the central player, so to speak, in Hegel’s dramatic development of the actuality of freedom. The *motivational* dimension of the Fact tracks the development of desire, through interest, to utility, each of which is natural and yet reflects the development of conceptual capacities. The development of *judgment* takes place through the building out of the rational capacities of the subject and the rationality of the ethical world. The issue of the

<sup>12</sup> For a reading of the opening of the *Phenomenology*, see deVries 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Franks sees an affective transformation for the readers of Kant’s text and the philosopher elevating herself to the Fichtean standpoint. Hegel does call the *Phenomenology* “the path of despair” (PS 78, GW 56), and he is elevating the ordinary consciousness to the standpoint of idealism. The difference is that it is not clear that Hegel expects the phenomenological observer to experience any of that despair, or to be transformed along the way.

*bindingness* of moral norms is in some ways the trickiest, for Hegel moves towards what looks like a social obligation theory, and yet he ends his account with an appeal to individual conscience that is a clear successor notion to the Kantian conception of self-binding.

The encounters with death have both *subjective* and *objective consequences* that track the two side of the reversal of consciousness. On the subjective side, the attachment to the immediate objects of desire is disrupted when facing the prospect of death. This is clearest in the cases (especially the case of the initial struggle to the death) in which no one actually dies but the fear of death shakes one to the core. Its correlate in Kant's example is the giving up of lust when confronted with the gallows. One is forced to subordinate all desires to the one desire for self-preservation, and such a move prepares one for the next step of restructuring desire through a subordination to a new conceptual structure. That is, self-consciousness or reason infuses the subject's motivational structure after that structure is disrupted or rendered "fluid" through the confrontation with death. For the issue of naturalism it is important to see that this is how Hegel moves beyond mere life and its immediate instinctual processes. Death is of course a category of nature, but it also represents a *finality* and *absolute limit* to life. Death represents the move towards universality, towards the reflexivity of cognition and intentional action, because it represents the persistence of the universal genus in the face of the loss of individual living beings.<sup>14</sup>

The objective side of the lessons of death is much more complicated. Hegel employs death as a necessary *consequence* of a free deed, and through his method of reversal the consequence relation (necessity) comes to constitute the subject's thinking and the object's constitution, eventually giving both sides the inferential structure of reason. Hegel's name for the *necessity* that connects action to death is *fate*, and he employs it repeatedly to bring the structure of *lawfulness* into the picture. The free deed is counter to the normativity of natural or mere species life, but through it and the sacrifice of life it brings about, the act-consequence relation and a robust modality (necessity) enter the will and the world. The normative landscape is expanded in the recognition that it must take the individuality that can perform such counternormative deeds into account. This recognition is central to the *modern* ethical life in which individual particularity is reconciled with the universal purposes of the state.

#### 4. The Fear of the Lord and the Fact of Service

At the outset of the famous Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology* Hegel sets up his naturalistic account of practical freedom with an exposition of *life* and *self-consciousness*. The demanding introductory text lays out the structure of life that is the basic model of Hegel's conception of *rationality*. What Hegel calls the "whole cycle [that] constitutes life" (PS 171, GW 106) is a complex process of the self-constitution (self-differentiation into functional subsystems) of an individual organism through processes of assimilation and reproduction.<sup>15</sup> While I cannot go into the details of this account in this paper, it is important to recog-

<sup>14</sup> In his *Science of Logic* Hegel directly uses death to make the transition from Life to Cognition at SL 12: 191-92, 688-89.

<sup>15</sup> For this treatment of life I have drawn on Kreines 2015, Englert 2017 and Ng forthcoming.

nize that this structure is *the replacement for Kant's law of nature formulation of the moral law*. While Kant would have you imagine your maxim as a law of nature in a world in which you are a part, Hegel would have you locate your judgment within a highly differentiated system of ethical institutions and ethical roles. The same action could be required by both accounts, but the modality is fundamentally different because Hegel rejects the idea that the bindingness of ethical action is conditional on a test of permissibility performed by an individual subject. On Hegel's account one is always already situated within a form of life, which if it is well-ordered will have educated you to a second nature that brings motivation along with it.<sup>16</sup> Hegel infamously provides little guidance in the *Philosophy of Right* for how to characterize the individual judgment within ethical life: one of the main advantages of the *Phenomenology* account is that he actually spells out what this looks like from the individual's point of view, and how such a functional account is justified to the individual. But that is only achieved at the end of "Spirit". He first needs to derive the subject's capacity to evaluate the world through concepts, to establish the dependence of practical reason on social practice, and then to show how the ancient Greek polis developed into the modern state.

Hegel initially presents self-consciousness as a "pure I" (PS 176, GW 108) that resembles Kantian apperception. But for Hegel this is only the first of three "moments" of the concept of self-consciousness. In the second he emphasizes that this pure I also stands in relation to the objective world apprehended by consciousness. The pure I taken together with the consciousness of objects is in fact an activity of mediation that he sums up with the statement that "self-consciousness is *desire* in general" (PS 167, GW 104). I take this statement to be a declaration that self-consciousness is fundamentally *purposive*, oriented by uniting the external with itself, evaluating the world in relation to its purposes.<sup>17</sup> This basic view goes together with the naturalist theory of value *par excellence* according to which something is good because I desire it. This initial immediate self-consciousness embarks on a developmental process when it realizes that immediate desire makes the objects of desire, rather than its own activity, the

<sup>16</sup> For my understanding of Hegel's naturalism I am drawing on Pinkard's (2012) excellent treatment. My defense of Hegel as giving a naturalistic account is an argument mainly about a certain contrast with Kant's moral anti-naturalism. I am not touching on the interesting and complex question of how Hegel's official philosophy of nature relates to his philosophy of spirit, nor am I answering the general question of whether or not Hegel counts by today's standards as a naturalist. I do think he falls into the "soft naturalist" camp, but defending this view would require a lengthy parsing of the many varieties of contemporary naturalism and a treatment of the overall architectonics of Hegel's system. For an account of the general nature-spirit problematic in Hegel, see Quante 2011. For an excellent account of Hegel's relation to contemporary naturalism debates, see Ostritsch 2014. There are deeper questions about whether Hegel's system as a whole can be considered naturalistic. Some of these are raised by Gardener 2007.

<sup>17</sup> I am in broad agreement with Pippin's comments on this move that "its apperceptive self-awareness is not of an object but rather is something like the avowing of a practical commitment of a sort, something like a projecting [...] of oneself outward into the world and the future" Pippin (2011: 65). See also Jenkins' (2017) survey of possible interpretations. It is important to keep in mind, as Jenkins says, that "it would be a mistake to regard any particular claim about self-consciousness or 'a self-consciousness' in this chapter as articulating a Hegelian *theory* of self-consciousness" (ibid.: 84).

dominant factor in the relationship. The only object of desire that could satisfy the freedom implied by the *unity* of self-consciousness would have to possess this same capacity of unification, or would have to be an object that is also a self-conscious subject. When Hegel introduces this point, he puts the stress on the need for the object to be the genus, or another of one's same kind.<sup>18</sup> He thus transposes Fichte's deduction of right from mutual recognition into a deduction of species life, the need to conceive of the world through the mediation of another member of the species. One achieves freedom, then, not by achieving universality in the sense of a universal exceptionless law, but rather in the sense that one is united with one's species.<sup>19</sup>

We need to understand better how Hegel can give a *naturalistic account* of the move from action on value-conferring desire to something akin to Kant's Fact of Reason, namely self-determining ethical agency within a self-organizing form of life. Hegel's account retains a conception of subjective value, with the term *interest* taking over the role of desire. But this value-as-interest is also transformed into a *rational* account of value, and the question is just how that rationality, and the *bindingness* of the reasons, enters the picture. Hegel gives an account of the "pure concept of recognition" (PS 185, GW 110) that suggests some kind of formal transcendental account of the possibility of self-consciousness. But that pure concept is misleading, for while full mutuality of recognition is the goal of the account, every stage on the way is part of the process of constituting the self-conscious subject and the world in which such a subject can act ethically. These stages are developed through *attitudes* and *actions* that lead to the transformation of subject and object through lessons learned from the failure of nascent attempts at recognition and self-realization.

The one move whose naturalistic credentials could be called into question is the movement of the "reversal of consciousness" whereby the lessons are converted into new subjective capacities and attitudes, on the one hand, and new objects or standards, on the other. We will see the first such reversal in the move from the master-servant relation to the Stoic sage later in this section. These reversals represent above all a switch from an action-consequence relation in experience to a deontic requirement within the subject and a corresponding rationality in the world (though this correspondence can be defective in various ways, as it is in the Stoic case). If there is a problem here vis-à-vis naturalism, it is with how you could move from an experience within a process of life, with living individuals, to a strict necessity of a deontic requirement. This is *exactly why death plays a central role*. Death represents necessity within the process of life, so it is from the experience of death that there arises the deontic raw materials, as it were, for a reversal into a more rational shape of self-consciousness. Kant's Gallows Man experiences the threat to life that proves his greater attachment to life than to lust, and then in the second gallows he experiences his greater attachment to the moral law than to life. The two experiences together prove that the moral law really is supremely binding on the will of a rational agent. For Hegel the initially merely desiring subject must develop this self-binding and self-direction through repeated negations of life experienced as consequences of the

<sup>18</sup> See Siep 2014a: 92. For a guide to Hegel's theory of recognition in general, see Siep 2014b.

<sup>19</sup> This talk of species is of course not completely foreign to Kant's philosophy, but it is not prominent in his writings on the foundation of morality.

subject's own deeds. The philosopher who reverses these consequences is in a sense constituting the rational will, but only with materials provided by desire and by the subsequent attitudes of interacting agents.

Hegel does not merely assert mutuality of recognition as a normative ideal, but rather develops a multi-layered conception of freedom and rationality through a series of conflicts. In the most *immediate* form of recognition between desiring individuals who are driven to prove their freedom, they present themselves as free from attachment to life, as *risking* their own life and thereby "showing that it is fettered to no determinate *existence*, that it is not at all bound to the universal individuality of existence, that it is not shackled to life" (PS 187, GW 111).<sup>20</sup> The result of this struggle is the scenario in which both individuals survive and one surrenders to servitude. The meaning of the surrender is that "self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as is pure self-consciousness" (PS 189, GW 112). This first main reconciliation or unification of freedom and life is the first main expressive *naturalization of freedom*. The desiring element of life is co-essential with the pure self-ascription of self-identity, so that purity must find expression within the finite world of life.

Hegel's famous depiction of the superiority of the servant's self-consciousness to the master's can be seen as expressing a *fact of service* akin to Kant's Fact of Reason. Along the dimension of *bindingness* the servant remains simply in obedience to the master (bound by threat of force). The servant progresses dramatically beyond the master along the motivational and judgmental dimensions. The motivational dimension concerns, first of all, the results of the negative dimension of fear:

It felt the fear of death, the absolute master. In that feeling, it had inwardly fallen into dissolution, trembled in its depths, and all that was fixed within it had been shaken loose. However, this pure universal movement, this way in which all stable existence becomes absolutely fluid, is the simple essence of self-consciousness; it is absolute negativity, *pure being-for-itself*, which thereby is in this consciousness (PS 194, GW 114).

This shaking loose, this absolute fluidity and negativity, is a key move towards freedom in the constitution of the servant. The servant is in a position of surprising strength in relation to the master because he is in a position to be transformed through obedience to the master's will and through practical education in laboring on the material world. Although the master maintains the freedom of pure self-consciousness, at the level of life the master still only aims at immediate satisfaction, and thus has not developed. The servant, on the other hand, is distanced from immediate desire in having to work for someone else,

<sup>20</sup> Robert Brandom captures the general connection of commitment and sacrifice in writing, "So we should ask: what is it that one must *do* in order properly to be understood as thereby *identifying oneself* with some but perhaps not all elements of one's self-conception? The answer we are given in *Self-Consciousness* is that one identifies with what one is willing to *risk* and *sacrifice* for. Hegel's metonymic image for this point concerns the important case of making the initial transition from being merely a living organism, belonging to the realm of Nature, to being a denizen of the normative realm of Spirit. The key element in this index case is willingness to risk one's biological life in the service of a commitment—something that goes beyond a mere desire" (Brandom 2019: 238).



and can see in labor the activity of self-consciousness made objective. Hegel contrasts the servant's work to the master's satisfaction:

In the moment corresponding to desire in the master's consciousness, the aspect of the non-essential relation to the thing seemed to fall to the lot of the servant, as the thing there retained its self-sufficiency. Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object, and, as a result, it has reserved to itself that unmixed feeling for its own self [*Selbstgefühl*]. However, for that reason, this satisfaction is itself only a vanishing, for it lacks the *objective* aspect, or *stable existence*. In contrast, work is desire *held in check* [*gehemmte Begierde*], it is vanishing *staved off*, or: work *cultivates* [*bildet*]. The negative relation to the object becomes the *form* of the object; it becomes something that *endures* because it is just for the laborer himself that the object has self-sufficiency (PS 195, GW 114-15).

Work is cultivating and forming, giving an objective shape to desire by investing the objective world with distinctions that have their origin in a subject's desire, but, importantly, *not* in the servant's own desire. Hegel calls work "desire held in check", a vanishing that is nonetheless "staved off". The servant *creates value* by investing the objective world with form, in cultivating objects or fields, and it is that form-investing activity that Hegel views as the essential step in the move from nature to freedom.

Hegel states the full import of the fact of service in connecting the inner and outer transformations of the servant. The servant comes to find in the world what is meaningful or valuable, and Hegel stresses that the servant could not have done so without the experience of the full fear of death.<sup>21</sup> The key point in the servant's development is when he comes to see his own "being-for-itself" or self-conception as identical with the *expression* (what Hegel calls "posited as external) of form in formative activity. In the following crucial passage, Hegel links the servant's "mind" or "meaning" [*Sinn*] to the internalization of the formative activity:

In formative activity [*Bilden*], being-for-itself becomes for him *his own* being-for-itself, and he attains the consciousness that he himself is in and for himself. As a result, the form, by being *posited as external*, becomes to him not something other than himself, for his pure being-for-itself is that very form, which to him therein becomes the truth. Therefore, through this retrieval, he comes to acquire through himself a *mind of his own*, and he does this precisely in the work in which there had seemed to be only some *outsider's mind* (PS 196, GW 115).

But how does this switch from work to mindedness function? What formative activity and mindedness/meaning have in common is that certain patterns of inference are present in both. Formative activity can be conceived as action according to instrumental reasoning. One has been given a task, and one must learn the means to accomplishing that task. The objects take on form in so far as they acquire a shape that serves the goal. In work one comes to see one's own being-for-self in that form "posited as external". By seeing that identification

<sup>21</sup> "Without the discipline of service and obedience, fear is mired in formality and does not diffuse itself over the conscious actuality of existence. Without culturally formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness will not become for it [consciousness] itself [*wird nicht für es selbst*]" (PS 196, GW 115).

with oneself is the same connection (I=I) that is present in connecting premises in an inference, where the formative steps are the particular means to the (universal) goal of producing food. The identification of the connections between formative steps is the mind at work, the self that sees its being not in an immediate self-relation but as a relation to itself through the connections between universal goals and particular means to those goals.

When through a “reversal of consciousness” Hegel makes the switch from the working servant to the Stoic sage, the account is squarely back in the orbit of Kantian ideas, for the Stoic was Kant’s leading example of the correct view of the good (the view that the good applies only to people and not to things or mere states of affairs).<sup>22</sup> The basic idea behind this reversal is that the element of *form*, which previously had been imposed on a recalcitrant world in *formative work*, is now taken simply to *be* the essence of the world. The reversal is from the form as for-consciousness to the form as what is in-itself or objective. This objective form does not really exist in its own right, but rather only in relation to the thinking individual who claims mastery over the world through thought. The world is now seen *to be* only in so far as it is an *expression of* the unity of self-consciousness. The master-servant relation was of course a *failed* attempt at mutual recognition, and the Stoic is an advance in so far as the Stoic unites the sides of form and the binding power of the master. Instead of an external master, one is now the master of one’s own thoughts and thereby of all reality.<sup>23</sup> The Stoic does not confront a world with standing of its own, but rather the subject treats the world as containing meaning or significance only *in relation to itself as thinking*. The fundamental shift on the side of the *bindingness* of norms is to now locate the subject’s thinking as the source of what “is true and good for it” (PS 198, GW 117).<sup>24</sup>

The biggest failure of Stoicism comes along the dimension of *judgment*, for its inner standard for judgment is too divided from the rich content of desire-based life. Stoicism has an inner standard of judgment, and is conceptual or a thinking self-consciousness, but it has an overly *simplistic* standard of value that cannot account for the differentiation of life. In contrast to the “multiple self-differentiating spreading out, isolation, and complexity of life [...] with respect to which desire and labor are active”, it “consists in being free within all the dependencies of his singular existence, whether on the throne or in fetters, and in maintaining the lifelessness which consistently *withdraws* from the movement of existence, *withdraws* from actual doing as well as from suffering” (PS 199, GW 117). It thus purchases the overcoming of the master-servant dialectic with a withdrawal that results in “lifelessness”. One maintains one’s mastery over value and truth *in thought* as a “*simple essentiality*”, yet this means that the “freedom

<sup>22</sup> He refers to the Stoic’s attitude towards pain in the *Critique of Practical Reason* discussion of good and evil. See Kant.Ak. 5: 60; PP: 188-89.

<sup>23</sup> Hegel writes, “*To think* does not mean to think as an *abstract I*, but as an *I* which, at the same time, signifies being-*in-itself*, or it has the meaning of being an object to itself, or of conducting itself vis-à-vis the objective essence in such a way that its meaning is that of the *being-for-itself* of that consciousness for which it is” (PS 197, GW 116).

<sup>24</sup> As Hegel puts it in his compressed description of stoicism, “Its principle is this: Consciousness is the thinking essence and something only has essentiality [*Wesenheit*] for consciousness, or is true and good for it, insofar as consciousness conducts itself therein as a thinking being” (PS 198, GW 117).

of self-consciousness is *indifferent* with respect to natural existence and for that reason has *likewise let go of natural existence, has let it be free-standing* [...] a truth without any fulfillment [*Erfüllung*] in life" (PS 200, GW 118). This is a failure of judgment, though one that also reflects the poor social reality in which Stoicism found itself. The point is that Stoicism is "not living freedom itself but only the concept of freedom" (PS 200, GW 118). While the servant had been able to see the world as an expression of himself in his labor, the Stoic has forfeited this expressive relation to life and the world.<sup>25</sup> The problem of lifelessness is the problem of *determinate content*; the challenge going forward is to unite the pure form of self-consciousness with the content of "the living world". The living world must be a differentiated social world, and the individual must be able to locate her judgment within the system of norms that constitute such a world. That world is not good simply by virtue of being living, yet only a living world can be the vehicle of the rational realization of the good.

### 5. Fate and the Object Born of Self-consciousness

Looking at the two sections of "active reason" in the *Phenomenology* in light of Kant's Fact and Gallows Man, it is quite striking that Hegel begins with a tale of the gratification of lust that leads to a death sentence and ends with an account of Kantian autonomy as reason testing laws through a standard of universality. It is as if Hegel aims to derive the moral psychology and principles of judgment that would take us from the lusting man, through the self-preserving prudential man, to the man willing to give up his life for the sake of the moral law. The account is also in an important sense a repetition of the movement that we traced in the last chapter: "reason will also once again pass through the doubled movement of *self-consciousness*, and then from self-sufficiency it will make its transition into its freedom" (PS 348, GW 193).<sup>26</sup> We thus begin again with basic desire (pleasure) and a process of recognition, but now with a background conception of a social world rather than a one-on-one confrontation of abstractly conceived self-conscious beings in mere nature.<sup>27</sup> We move closer here to typical modern attempts to justify the political order through self-interest, and indeed Hobbes' war of all against all makes an explicit appearance within these sections. But "Reason" only gives one side of the derivation of Hegel's fact of rea-

<sup>25</sup> Hegel writes, "However, while individuality, as acting, is supposed to show itself to be **living**, or, as thinking, is supposed to grasp the **living world** as a system of thoughts, so too within the *thoughts themselves* there must be for the former expansion [of action] a *content* for what is good, and, for the latter expansion [of thinking], a *content* for what is true" (PS 200, GW 118, my bold).

<sup>26</sup> So Reason B corresponds to Self-consciousness A and Reason C corresponds to Self-consciousness B.

<sup>27</sup> Hegel frames the entire account of active reason with a portrayal of "the life of a people" (PS 350, GW 194), his basic or immediate model of life enriched through freedom. This is a proleptic account of the goal of reason, and Hegel introduces it in part to justify his unusual choice of methodology for the shapes of practical reason. They are shapes of a consciousness that has lost the ethical order, rather than (what would have been the normal mode) shapes of increasingly universal motivational and justificatory structure that have ethical life as their goal (PS 356, GW 196). The argument still charts a progression from immediacy to mediation, but its shapes have a dramatic tension that comes with the dynamics of loss and recovery.

son, namely the side “within which consciousness sublates *its* purposes” (PS 357, GW 197). The complement to this picture is the derivation within forms of life themselves, namely the development of spirit, “the aspect according to which it [morality] comes forth from out of the substance” (PS 357, GW 197).

Goethe’s Faust is an especially effective initial shape of active reason because Hegel has transitioned from “Observing Reason”, the domain of natural science, leaving it behind just as Faust leaves his scientific endeavors behind when he makes his deal with the devil.<sup>28</sup> In terms of our three dimensions of the Fact, Faust has abandoned judgment to enjoy unmediated desire through binding himself to the devil. Faust has given up the dead knowledge that could inform judgment, and has embraced pure hedonistic motivation. In Goethe’s drama, Faust “plunges into life” (PS 361, GW 199) in seducing Gretchen: as Hegel puts it, “a ripe fruit is plucked” (PS 361, GW 199). The consummation of Faust’s sexual desire is not supposed to be the literal destruction of Gretchen; she is supposed to be the vehicle for the “doubling” of rational self-consciousness.<sup>29</sup> In the drama Faust actually comes to love her and tries to save her when she has been imprisoned and sentenced to death for killing their child. Faust’s deed does stand for a kind of freedom, but the meaning (or truth) of that freedom comes in its consequences, namely death. Hegel writes,

Instead of having plunged from dead theory into life, the only singular individuality, which at first has only the pure concept of reason for its content, has thus instead plunged into the consciousness of its own lifelessness, and, to itself, has come to be only as empty and alien necessity, as *dead actuality*” (PS 363, GW 200).

The alien necessity or dead actuality is the result of Faust’s experiment in living. His deed results in unintelligible but necessary consequences, and in doing so sets the stage for the introduction of necessity into the will and into the world.

Hegel’s best explanation of this deed’s relation to life comes in a passage from the *Science of Logic* in which Hegel links the concept of fate to self-consciousness and freedom. He contrasts fate proper with “the fate of a living thing”, which “is in general the *genus*, for the genus manifests itself through the fleetingness of the living individuals that do not possess it as genus in their *actual singularity*” (SL 12: 141, 639). With Faust’s free deed clearly in mind, he continues,

Only self-consciousness has fate in a strict sense, because it is *free*, and therefore in the *singularity* of its “I” it absolutely exists *in and for itself* and can oppose itself to its objective universality and *alienate* itself from it. By this separation, however, it excites against itself the mechanical relation of a fate. Hence, for the latter to have violent power over it, it must have given itself some determinateness or other over against the essential universality; it must have committed a *deed*. Self-consciousness has thereby made itself into a *particular*, and this existence, like ab-

<sup>28</sup> “Insofar as it has elevated itself to its *being-for-itself* from out of the ethical substance and from out of the motionless being of thought, the law of custom [*Sitte*] and existence [*Dasein*], together with the knowledge related to observation and theory, only lay behind it as a gray and gradually vanishing shadow” (PS 360, GW 198).

<sup>29</sup> See Pinkard 1994: 95 for the claim that Faust plays the role of the master in this repetition of the earlier dynamics.

stract universality, is at the same time the side open to the communication of its alienated essence; it is from this side that it is drawn into the process. A people without deeds is without blame; it is wrapped up in objective, ethical universality, is dissolved into it, is without the individuality that moves the unmoved, that gives itself a determinateness on the outside and an abstract universality separated from the objective universality; yet in this individuality the subject is also divested of its essence, becomes an *object* and enters into the relation of *externality* towards its nature, into that of mechanism (SL 12: 141-42, 639-40).

Faust's deed is an expression of freedom, of the individuality asserting itself against the merely objective or universal essence of communal life. The deed sets the individual out of the ordinary course of species life, but outside of that species life there is only blank causality, the process that makes no sense but that one nevertheless cannot avoid. In the *Phenomenology* account Hegel is saying that such an individual deed is necessary to separate the self-conscious individual from mere life. But he is also saying that disconnected from the "ethical universality" of the innocent community, such a deed is captured in a mechanical process with deadly consequences. What in the above passage Hegel identifies as mechanism is the same thing he calls "lifeless necessity", "a pure leap into the opposite", and "a riddle" (PS 365, GW 201) in the *Phenomenology*.

In his characterization of the Faust episode's experimental result, Hegel makes a crucial move towards overcoming the agent-world split that characterizes the Kantian Fact. I have stressed that Faust's fate shows the overcoming of the practical concept/purpose of immediate pleasure, and thus lines up with the first phase in Kant's Gallows example. But the necessity of the result, of the "dead actuality" that Faust finds as a consequence of his deed, has the deeper meaning of shifting the conception of reality from something to be observed (as in the natural sciences) to something constituted fundamentally by and through self-consciousness. We had an early abstract version of this move in the transition to Stoicism, but in that case the knowing subject stood aloof from life in order to maintain its simple judgments of the true and the good. The move here is trickier, but Hegel's goal is clear: to transform the world into a rational world through the necessity revealed in experience. He writes,

Its essence is therefore only the *abstract* category. However, it no longer has the form of *immediate, simple* being, a form which it had for the observing spirit, where it was abstract *being*, or posited as alien, or was *thinghood* itself. Here, being-for-itself and mediation have entered into this thinghood. Therefore, they come on the scene here as a *circle* whose content is the developed pure relation of the simple essentialities. The attained actualization of this individuality thus consists in nothing more than this, namely, that this cycle of abstractions has been cast out from the self-enclosed confines of simple self-consciousness into the element of *being-for-itself* [*Für es seyns*], or into the element of objective expansion (PS 363, GW 200).

The "essentialities" Hegel refers to here are pure unity, pure distinction, and their relation, which as the "*absolute relation* and abstract movement constitute necessity" (PS 363, GW 200). Self-consciousness is "this cycle of abstractions" that constitutes the basic logical rules governing all inference. Even though this fate or necessity is empty and blind, it is "the simple and empty but nonetheless inexorable and impassive [*unstörbare*] *relation*" and a "*firm connec-*

tion [*feste Zusammenhang*]" (PS 363, GW 200). Taking on board from Kant's theoretical philosophy the idea that all necessity and normativity has its roots in the unity of self-consciousness, the move here is to thinking of that necessity and (at this point entirely formal) rationality as governing human action and interaction. It is a first step within "Reason" towards converting desire into practical reason and towards converting individual rationality into the social rationality that constitutes a form of life. At the end of the process the ethical action as conceived by the individual subject will be already set up as a concrete possibility within the objective world, and thus not something the subject needs to isolate from the purposes that structure that world.

The reversal of consciousness that follows the Faust episode produces what Hegel calls "The Law of the Heart". In this shape the necessity of fate has been internalized as law. The consciousness that has the law as residing in its own heart has the source of bindingness in itself. Yet that internalization remains deficient, for "[t]he law is immediately self-consciousness' own law, or it is a heart which in itself has a law" (PS 368, GW 202). Hegel thus characterizes it as "the contradiction between the law and singular individuality" (PS 369, GW 202). This consciousness has not progressed to the Kantian viewpoint where one is willing to sacrifice individuality for the sake of the law. In Hegel's presentation the individual self-consciousness determines the content of the law through its own heart, through the immediate desire that is its natural individuality. The shape has made some progress towards freedom on the *motivational* level, but in its abstraction it is not motivated to perform specific actions. Rather, this figure is only motivated to *judge* the world of hard necessity as a corrupt world opposed to its own lawfulness. The other agency towards which the agent's activity is directed (the successor to Gretchen as the object of desire) is now represented by "humanity", a universal. But this consciousness finds its assumption that its law is the law of the actual world frustrated, for it does not see others sharing this same law, and thus "[t]he heart-throb for the welfare of mankind therefore passes over into the bluster of a mad self-conceit" (PS 377, GW 206).

The objective world is also constituted by necessity, but the law of that world is one of competition in which each individual works to get the better of the others. Hegel calls it "the way of the world" (PS 379, GW 207), which looks like nothing so much as the Hobbesian state of nature—"this universal feud within which each in itself wrests for himself what he can, in which each executes justice upon the singular individuality of others" (PS 379, GW 207). We are at the level of ordinary prudence or self-interest. We can think of this as the intermediate stage of Kant's Gallows episode, the point at which self-preservation is placed above the immediate lust. Those actual agents, in a world determined by the loss of ethical life, are motivated to pursue their own good. This self-consciousness is obviously lacking along the dimension of universality of content, but Hegel will show (in the subsequent battle with virtue) that it "is better than it thinks" (PS 392, GW 213). In uniting virtue with the way of the world, Hegel unites moral and non-moral value in a single conception of individuality that realizes the good through its own nature.

One could say that the high point of Hegel's naturalism is what he calls "The Spiritual Kingdom of Animals", but it is a rather dubious high that unites nature and normativity in a way that makes judgments of good vs. bad impossi-

ble.<sup>30</sup> The hallmark of these shapes is the individual's confidence that she is united with the world and thus does not need to set her purposes *against* the world in order to realize reason. There is now no contradiction between the power of self-consciousness over the action and the fact that the action stems from one's nature. The focus is on the value of action as an accomplishment rather than on the purity of motive. Hegel identifies four components of action: circumstances, purpose, means, and realized action (that he also calls the "work"). These components are the correlates, at the level of rational willing, of the components of life (environment, self-preserving individual, process of assimilation, and reproducing genus). Determined immediately by nature, the individual does not yet connect all four moments in a rational unity that would guarantee that one's intentions are expressed in the world. In this agent's experience, "It is *fortune* [*Glück*] that decides in favor of a badly determined purpose and badly chosen means just as much as it decides against them" (PS 406, GW 222). Another move must be made for the individual's authority to extend beyond the intention to the completed action.

The perishing of the deed in the contingency of the external world precipitates the introduction of one of the most important and least well understood concepts/objects in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's term for this object, *die Sache selbst*, is virtually untranslatable. Translations include "the fact of the matter", "what really matters", "the crux of the matter". It would not be too much of a stretch to translate it as "the fact itself". In my view *die Sache selbst* is the object that the agent is conscious of in ethical action, and I propose that this is the intentional object of Hegel's fact of reason. That is, *die Sache selbst* is the successor to Kant's conception of a maxim of action evaluated by the categorical imperative. It has been hard for commentators to see this because Hegel introduces *die Sache selbst* in an immediate and thus subjectivist way as the object (including circumstances, purpose, means, and accomplished purpose) that stands fully under the authority of self-consciousness. He is very clear that this is another case in which self-consciousness continues its "objective expansion": "It is an object born out of self-consciousness as its *own* object, without thereby ceasing to be a free-standing, genuine object" (PS 409, GW 223). The problem with the immediate version of *die Sache selbst* is that self-consciousness treats it as a predicate, and takes itself to be entitled to *judge* which of the four components is essential to the action. *Die Sache selbst* is thus at first just a way for self-consciousness to manipulate the aspects of action to claim credit for whatever it wants (this is what Hegel calls the "honest consciousness"). The key point to keep in mind is that the subsequent concepts and objects of reason are themselves versions of *die Sache selbst*, attempts to locate that view of intentional action that could express the necessity of self-consciousness in the social world. At the end of Spirit Hegel returns to *die Sache selbst* and thereby confirms that is the objective side of his fact of reason.

The agent must come to accept that its deeds only have meaning in so far as they are open to the deeds of others. In a striking metaphor in which humans figure as insects, Hegel writes that others come to one's deed "like flies to freshly poured milk" (PS 417, GW 227). We feed off of each others' actions, an experience that Hegel turns into a new conception, the crucial idea of a spiritual es-

<sup>30</sup> More precisely, "all of it is good" (PS 402, GW 219).

sence. Hegel writes, “it is an essence, whose *being* is the *doing* of *singular* individuals and of all individuals, and whose doing is immediately *for others*, or it is a *fact* [*Sache*] and is only a fact insofar as it is the *doing* of *each* and *all*, the essence that is the essence of all essence, that is *spiritual essence*” (PS 417, GW 227). The move that Hegel makes from individual to universal authority does dislodge the singular individuality and thus follows the same general dynamic as the other transitions we have seen. But unlike the fate of tragic action, this witness to one’s deed’s consumption involves reciprocal agency that is intelligible to the agent. It is the basis for expressive recognitive success, for a teleological relationship in which one’s purposes are recognized. Rather than a way to introduce bare necessity into the world, this transition sets up a return to life as the ethical life of a people.

Having apparently reached the living social substance divided into a living system of estates,<sup>31</sup> Hegel reminds us that we are still dealing with the individual self-consciousness burdened by immediacy. The agent has to capture the content of the spiritual essence through “healthy reason” (PS 421, GW 229), with “healthy” a final mark of nature in reason that indicates a problematic attempt to isolate universal content in the form of individual reason. As in the previous cases, *law* is the first form of universality. Hegel turns to the shapes of law-giving and law-testing reason as the immediate forms of reason that meet the standard just discovered in the spiritual essence. The individual and universal must coincide in the ethical laws, such as “Everyone ought to speak the truth” (PS 423, GW 229), and “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (PS 424, GW 230). These laws founder on the *ceteris paribus* clauses that must attach to them once counterexamples are brought into play. In the concrete actuality of life things are seldom “all equal”, so laws that are binding only on that condition are useless.

If these laws do not reveal the true rationality of the spiritual essence, perhaps the Kantian testing of laws for non-contradictoriness would fare better. But the retreat to formality in “Law-testing Reason” is an even less promising way to capture the content of the spiritual essence. What for Kant had been the undeniable *bindingness* of the form of reason is for Hegel a pale reflection of the bindingness of actual laws, what is actually right, in the ethical life of a people. He thus turns in the closing sections of “Reason” to the ethical viewpoint embodied in Antigone’s relation to the divine laws set by the gods of the community. The point of this shift is to say that we cannot make the bindingness of the law conditional on the universalization test of reason as pure form. Kant’s Fact thus fails on the issues of judgment and bindingness. Both aspects have to be more fully anchored in the life of a people, for only with such a life can the actuality of freedom be proven. It is only there that his account of ethical habit or second nature can be united with freedom. Hegel does not thereby give up on the Fact, but he thinks he has to exhibit morality as it “comes forth from out of the substance” (PS 357, GW 197). At the end of his account of Spirit he brings back *die Sache selbst*, casting it in terms of conscience, as an actual or fulfilled universal that incorporates the experiences that substance has passed through in the course of world history.

<sup>31</sup> Passage on division: “The object is the *real* object in its own self as object, for it has in it the difference of consciousness. It divides itself into social estates [*Massen*] which are the *determinate laws* of the absolute essence” (PS 419, GW 229).



## 6. The Fact Fulfilled through Spirit

The agent in "Spirit" is the entire city-state, beginning with the immediate ethical life of the Greeks. The downfall of the Greek city-state's ethical life and the subsequent rise of Roman personhood follow much the same logic, at the social level, as the episode of Faust. With the breakdown of the immediately individual Greek city-state that Hegel depicts through Sophocles' *Antigone* the result is once again *fate*, the empty necessity that followed upon the deed of Faust and the death of Gretchen. In Hegel's portrayal of the Greek case, the deed belongs to Antigone as the representative of the divine law, the law of the family and the individual. The divine law and human law are interdependent, and the tragedy brings out the incompatibility that stems from the immediacy of nature in this seemingly harmonious, but in the end merely individual, ethical life.

The human law, represented by Creon, maintains a *living* universality only through the periodic threat of death in warfare, and this means that it is dependent on the divine law that governs burial rites and the afterlife. Hegel writes,

The spirit of the universal gathering is the *simplicity* and the *negative* essence of these self-isolating systems. In order not to let them become rooted and rigidly fixed within this activity of isolating themselves, [...] the government must from time to time shake them to their core by means of war" (PS 454, GW 246).

In war, the individuals "are made to feel the power of their lord and master, death" (PS 454, GW 246). The immediate, true, beautiful ethical life of the Greeks was parasitic on warfare and death.<sup>32</sup>

In Hegel's diagnosis, the twin shortcomings of the Greek polis are the insufficient integration of individuality and, relatedly, the suppression of the women whose primary job was to keep the divine laws of the family intact. The divine law requires that Antigone bury her brother, and the strength of her commitment to that law is seen in her willingness to die in order to uphold it. Individuality is not genuinely recognized as such, but only as *natural*, as blood and family, and thus it is not recognized by the human law (PS 463, GW 251). As Hegel puts it, "In the life of a people, self-consciousness descends from the universal only down to the point of particularity; it does not get as far as the point of singular individuality, which in its doings posits an excluding self, an actuality negative to itself" (PS 467, GW 254). Antigone's deed is both the act of a free individual and an act performed for the sake of an individual. Hegel writes,

Ethical consciousness is more complete and its guilt more pure if it *knows beforehand* the law and the power against which it takes an opposing stance, takes them to be violence and wrong, to be an ethical contingency, and then, like Antigone, knowingly commits the crime" (PS 469, GW 255).

The point of this deed, according to Hegel, "is that the *ethical* must be *actual*" (PS 469, GW 255). The non-actuality of Creon's human law just is its failure

<sup>32</sup> This problematic immediacy was also reflected in the dependence of the human law on the divine in the sense of the oath that binds the community together. Hegel writes, "the people's self-reassuring *certainty* possesses the *truth* of its oath which binds them all into one only in the mute unconscious substance of all, in the waters of forgetfulness" (PS 473, GW 258).

to recognize the individual who is the actuality of the state. Antigone steps out from this living but immediate universality and stakes her life for the divine law, for the proper burial of her dead brother. She dies, Creon's son and wife both die, and the city is caught up in the fate that is instigated by Antigone but whose guilt is shared by the whole.<sup>33</sup>

Just as the successor to Faust was law and the world of hard necessity, so the successor to Greece is the legal status of personhood and the harsh ethical reality of the Roman empire. Once again death (and fate) is productive of the *form* of lawfulness. The experience of necessity in the tragic ending of *Antigone* provides the material for the actuality of lawfulness. This move to personhood is another entry of self-consciousness into the actual world. Unlike the shapes of "Reason", this move occurs within the social domain of spirit, inaugurating a new rights-based form of social reason that remains to this day at the core of European legal practices. In Hegel's portrayal, the very spirit of the dead and unburied Polyneices rises up to be the formal recognition of the singular individual:

As *this* singular individual, he was the *selfless departed spirit*, but now he has emerged from out of his non-actuality. [...] He is that substance as the *positive* universal, but his actuality is to be a *negative*, universal *self*. – We saw the powers and shapes of the ethical world immersed into the simple necessity of an empty *fate*. This power of the ethical world is substance reflecting itself into its simplicity, but the absolute essence reflecting itself into itself, the very necessity of empty fate, is nothing but the *I* of self-consciousness (PS 476, GW 261).

The cost of this elevation, this resurrection as it were, of individual self-consciousness, is quite high. Based on the bare I of self-consciousness and nothing more, the public power of the human law has no substantive ethical constraints. In the figure of the Roman emperor, the "monstrous self-consciousness" (PS 480, GW 263) who exercises "destructive violence" (PS 481, GW 263) on his subjects, we can see the consequences of cutting off the individual from the life of a people.

The formality of right leads to the "Self-alienated spirit" of early modern Europe, a culture of aristocracy and faith that eventually succumbs to the Enlightenment. At the end of the account Hegel presents "Absolute Freedom" as the result of the Enlightenment's drive to bring all value to the level of utility. The extreme consequentialism of the Enlightenment hollows out the world of intrinsic value, and then flips into an extreme deontology in which the principle of the general will is the only thing that matters in any and all action. The unity of the individual and universal is immediate and absolute, but this means that there is no room for mediation of the two; the individual must give way to the universal. The terror, whereby the self that would be universal in fact becomes the instrument of death in the figure of Robespierre, is an inversion of Kant's Gallows scene. Not willingness to die, but rather willingness to put others to death becomes the mark of freedom: "The sole work and deed of universal freedom is in fact *death*, namely, a *death* which has no inner extent and no inner ful-

<sup>33</sup> "It is in the equal subjection of both sides that absolute right is first achieved, and ethical substance, as the negative power that devours both sides has emerged. That is, *fate*, omnipotent and just, has come on the scene" (PS 471, GW 256).

fillment, for what is negated is the unfulfilled point of the absolutely free self. It is therefore the coldest, emptiest death of all, having no more meaning than chopping off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water" (PS 590, GW 320). Such is the consequence of the Enlightenment disavowal of the differentiated living social order. This ruler puts you to death on mere suspicion of not doing as the universal law says. And you cannot protest, for his will is your will, the very universality that constitutes your reason. But this self-destructive will precipitates the birth of the moral will proper: "this will is unmediated oneness with self-consciousness, or it is the purely positive because it is the purely negative, and within its inner concept the meaningless death, the unfulfilled negativity of the self, changes over suddenly into absolute positivity" (PS 594, GW 322). The lesson of absolute freedom is that one cannot locate that freedom in the activity of the point-like individual participating in a political process or sentencing the suspicious to the guillotine. Individuality has to be thought of as the universality of pure knowing and willing that is the heart of Kantian morality.

In order to move from Kant's moral theory as presented in "The Moral Worldview" to his own version of ethical agency in conscience, Hegel characteristically employs a mismatch between one's presentation to others and one's own knowledge of one's deeds. The main problem with Kant's view is that he cannot properly locate the role of happiness or interest; he excludes it from considerations of moral worth and yet he admits that it is an ineluctable part of finite human action. This problem can be solved, and Kant's Fact transformed, by rethinking the role played by the authority of self-consciousness in relation to the action as a whole. Instead of thinking of the unity of the rational will strictly and exclusively in terms of lawfulness, as Kant does, Hegel thinks that the unity of the subject has the relation to the various aspects of action of whole to parts/moments, and he holds that the universality or lawfulness of an action is only one of those moments. We saw in the last section that Hegel's term for the holistic ethical object is *die Sache selbst*. The problem with it in its initial appearance is that the whole-moment relation is too unstructured, thus allowing the agent to simply choose which of the moments of action is the essential one. The answer in that episode was to bind action to "the spiritual essence" as a socially recognized standard, and that move led to the full account of "Spirit" and then finally to Kantian moral teleology.

When Hegel contrasts conscience with Kantian duty, he emphasizes the role that *interest* plays in its action and the role that *recognition* plays in the formation of conscience's intention. The interest is the element of subjective value, and more specifically of *utility*, that gives to the action its determinate relation in the world to the purposes of others and the institutional purposes. Mutual recognition figures in the account as the presumption and requirement that one act on reasons that one can communicate to others.<sup>34</sup> Above all, Hegel emphasizes that this is no free-floating authority of self-consciousness, for it is bound to the previous development from which it has resulted. Contrasting it with the earlier account, he writes,

<sup>34</sup> "Conscience has not abandoned pure duty, or the *abstract in-itself*; rather, pure duty is the essential moment in its conducting itself as *universality* towards others" (PS 640, GW 344).

This *crux of the matter* [*Sache selbst*] was there a *predicate*, but in conscience it is for the first time the *subject* which has posited all the moments of consciousness as residing in it and for which all of these moments, namely, substantiality as such, external existence, and the essence of thinking, are contained in this certainty of itself" (PS 641, GW 345).<sup>35</sup>

Conscience captures *die Sache selbst*, the ethical action, "in its fullness, something which conscience gives it by way of itself" (PS 641, GW 345). Like Kant's Fact, the consciousness at issue here is the power of self-binding, of *judgment*, and has motivating force in its incorporation of interest. It is not based on the opposition of freedom and nature, but rather on the transparency of self-consciousness to the moments that structure the action. It is this transparency that makes the individual's self-binding simultaneously a responsiveness to reasons that are *recognized* by other agents.

Yet the authority of self-consciousness over its moments can nonetheless appear absolute to the reasoning subject, for there is nothing that can be opposed to self-consciousness, and this presents yet another hazard of freedom. The hazard goes by the name of the beautiful soul, which for Hegel is the result of withdrawing so completely into the fluidity of self-consciousness that one balks at the re-externalization required for actual action. "It lives with the anxiety that it will stain the splendor of its innerness though action and existence" (PS 658, GW 354). Hegel seems to think of this as a special hazard of speculative philosophy, as he comes close to identifying the beautiful soul with the standpoint of absolute knowing itself (see PS 795, GW 425). The ultimate warning sign and block to this withdrawal is yet another figure of death and/or madness in which some have seen allusions to the fate of Hegel's once best friend, Hölderlin. Hegel writes, "In this transparent unity of its moments it becomes an unhappy, so-called *beautiful soul*, and its burning embers gradually die out, and, as they do, the beautiful soul vanishes like a shapeless vapor dissolving into thin air" (PS 658, GW 355). In this case Hegel makes death equivalent to the inability of self-consciousness to externalize itself in nature. This death thus motivates not only the embrace of getting one's hands dirty in willing specific actions, but also the controversial move from logic to the philosophy of nature.

The story of "Spirit" is not quite over, for there remains a question of whether the *self-binding* of conscience has been genuinely united with the social binding of the substance-like community. The version of the beautiful soul that does not simply dissolve is the self-righteous judge, the hard-hearted individual who despises the self that acts on interest. In the final scene of "Spirit", the breaking of this hard heart effects the final reconciliation with reason as universal and reason as individual, an act of forgiveness. Even here we have a reference to death in the very act of mutual recognition whereby the two sides of morality are united.

The former dies back from its being-for-itself [*jenes stirbt seinem Für-sich-sein ab*], relinquishes itself and confesses; the latter disavows the rigidity of its abstract universality and thereby dies back from its self devoid of liveliness and its unmoved universality (PS 796, GW 427).

<sup>35</sup> I have discussed this passage at greater length in Moyar 2011: 93-100.

This is a fitting end to Hegel's engagement with Kant's Fact. We do not realize our freedom in the possibility that we could sacrifice life for the sake of the moral law, but rather we realize our freedom in sacrificing our abstract self-determination for the sake of a life with others who recognize us as the finite, living, free beings that we are.

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# Some Limits to Hegel's Appeal to Life

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## Abstract

For two hundred years, people have been trying to make sense of Hegel's so-called "dialectical method". Helpfully, Hegel frequently compares this method with the idea of life, or the organic (cf., e.g., PhG 2, 34, 56). This comparison has become very popular in the literature (in, e.g., Pippin, Beiser, and Ng). Typically, scholars who invoke the idea of life also note that the comparison has limits and that no organic analogy can completely explain the nature of the dialectical method. To my knowledge, however, no scholar has attempted to explain exactly where or why the organic analogy falls short. In this paper, I propose to remedy this lack by exploring in depth two different organic models. In brief, I argue that both versions of the organic model require an appeal to something external to the organism, and no such appeal can be made sense of within the dialectical method.

*Keywords:* The Dialectical Method, Speculative Knowledge, Life, The Organic, Hegel's *Logic*.

## 1. Introduction

Since Hegel first wrote, people have been trying to make sense of his so-called "dialectical method". This method, everyone acknowledges, is incredibly difficult to understand and Hegel says some very puzzling things about it. But, to many, understanding it holds out the promise of solving a vast host of philosophical puzzles—indeed, it can seem like understanding it would yield knowledge of the most fundamental nature of being.

In fact, Hegel preferred to call what now goes by "dialectical method" the "speculative method", as dialectics was the non-ultimate aspect of this method (cf. EL §§81-82).<sup>1</sup> By calling it speculative, he meant in particular to mark out a

<sup>1</sup> Citations of Hegel will be as follows: citations to the *Phenomenology* will use the abbreviation PhG, and cite by paragraph number (e.g. PhG 40). Citations of the *Encyclopedia Logic* will use the abbreviation EL, and cite by the section number (e.g. EL §23). Citations of all other works by Hegel will use the volume/page number of the two versions of his collected works (Suhrkamp followed by Felix Meiner), separated by a '/'. All translations from Hegel are my own, though I have consulted Terry Pinkard's translation of the *Phenomenology* and George di Giovanni's translation of the *Science of Logic*. Finally, when I

special form of knowledge. This in turn suggests that even the term “method” is potentially misleading: method suggests a way of coming to have knowledge of some claim, where a different method might yield knowledge of the very same claim. In fact, Hegel is interested in a distinctive form of knowledge, where part of what is distinctive about this form is that what it knows is inseparable from it and so cannot be known in any other way. Thus, it would be better to talk not of a special method, but of a special form of knowledge. So, rather than using the term “dialectical method”, I will use the term “speculative knowledge”.

In the first instance, the distinctiveness of speculative knowledge was intended by Hegel to mark it off from the two more standardly recognized forms of knowledge: theoretical and practical knowledge. Theoretical knowledge is knowledge of what is whether it is known to be so or not. Practical knowledge is knowledge that is productive of its object in the sense that it brings its object about. These forms of knowledge are perfectly valid, Hegel thought, but are not suitable to the distinctive task of philosophy—knowledge of the absolute.<sup>2</sup> Whatever he meant by that, he didn’t think knowledge of it could be either theoretical or practical, and that sets up the problem of explaining just what form of knowledge would comprehend the absolute.

Hegel was writing against the backdrop of both Aristotle and Kant. So it makes sense that to clarify the nature of speculative knowledge, he might reach for various ideas in their work. One idea he invokes fairly often is the idea of life, or the organic (cf., e.g., PhG 2, 34, 56). This idea has become very popular in the literature on Hegel. In particular, scholars appeal to organic models to try to clarify the manner in which speculative knowledge progresses from one concept to another. Here are three representative quotations from scholars:

One of [Hegel’s] frequent complaints about the presumed stability and classificatory “deadness” of traditional categorial schemes is that they do a great injustice to the “organic” nature of thought, that thought should be understood, to say everything at once, as “life” (Pippin 1989: 236).

For all Hegel’s thinking essentially proceeds from an organic vision of the world, a view of the universe as a single vast living organism. Hegel saw the absolute as the “one and all”, the *Hen Kai Pan*, of the pantheistic tradition. But, like Herder, Schiller, Schelling and Hölderlin, he understood this structure in dynamic, indeed organic, terms. The absolute develops in the same manner as all living things (Beiser 2005: 80).

The form of thinking is not dependent on “external objects” for content, but generates and is its own content insofar as it is a living, spiritual object [...]

use the term “*Logic*” I mean to refer to Hegel’s account in both the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia Logic*.

<sup>2</sup> Hegel explicitly says that speculative knowledge is neither theoretical nor practical, but he also says that it is “the identity” of both (cf. 6.548-9/12.236). This (and related comments in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit*) might lead one to think that Hegel denies that there is a strict distinction between theory and practice. As I read the claim, however, Hegel is not claiming that speculative knowledge takes the place of theoretical and practical knowledge; those forms of knowledge, in their distinctness, are perfectly valid, but unsuited for philosophy. I will not try to explore the sense in which speculative knowledge is the identity of theoretical and practical knowledge here. (My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this.)



[T]hought is said to be living because it gives shape to itself, actualizes itself, and gives itself its own content through this negative process (Ng 2013: 61).

Typically, scholars who invoke the model of life also note that the comparison has limits and that no organic analogy can completely explain the nature of speculative knowledge. Some kind of limit is implicit in Ng's discussion of a life that is also spirit (or of a distinctively human kind of life) and a limit is explicit when Pippin describes the appeal to life as a "highly metaphorical notion" in the sentence following the quoted passage.<sup>3</sup>

To my knowledge, however, no scholar has attempted to explain exactly where or why the organic model falls short of being an adequate model for speculative knowledge. In this paper, I propose to remedy this lack by exploring in depth two different organic models and showing exactly why each falls short of being an adequate model for speculative knowledge. For ease of exposition, I focus on the account of speculative knowledge in the *Logic*, but what I say about it should fairly obviously also hold true of speculative knowledge as it figures in Hegel's other works (e.g., the *Phenomenology*). In brief, I argue that the organic model always requires an appeal to something external to the organism, and no such appeal can be made sense of within speculative knowledge.

One last note before I begin: as I discuss the two models, I will note the respects in which they get something right about speculative knowledge in addition to noting why and where they fail. A consequence of this approach is that one may, for any model, note that we can just accept that model as completely adequate if we abandon whatever feature of it causes it to be inadequate as a model. I have no objections to doing that, so long as we are clear about what we are doing and the argumentative burden it places on us of making sense of the now altered model.

## 2. Speculative Knowledge

In this section, I want to outline two features of speculative knowledge in the *Logic* that will serve as starting points in the sections that follow. In particular, I will argue that the *Logic* offers an explanation of the most basic forms of thought, and that this explanation is meant to avert the skeptical threat that our forms of thought are parochial. These starting points are meant to serve as relatively minimal ways of characterizing the project of the *Logic*: certainly the *Logic* is more than simply an account of the objective validity of the most basic forms of thought, and there are certainly other skeptical challenges that the *Logic* is meant to dissolve. But these minimal characterizations will be sufficient for the arguments that follow.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Noting such limits is not universal among scholars, though: Beiser, for instance, thinks that the analogy has no limits, and that informs his claim that Hegel thinks that the universe is a vast living organism. On this point, as I will show in §§2-4, the texts fairly clearly bear out Pippin and Ng as against Beiser.

<sup>4</sup> To say that these are minimal characterizations is not to say that they are uncontroversial. The second characterization is certainly not accepted by all Hegel scholars. I will try to show that there is good textual evidence in favor of it. If the characterization is nevertheless rejected, then the arguments in the following sections will not (just as they stand) be compelling.

First, the *Logic* offers an explanation of the various fundamental forms of thought. The evidence for this claim is plain. Hegel begins the *Encyclopedia Logic* by noting that one of the ways of describing his *Logic* is as “the science of *thinking*, of its *determinations and laws*” (EL §19; cf. also §§19z2, 23, 24). And, similarly, towards the beginning of the *Science of Logic* he notes that the subject matter (“*Gegenstand*”) of the *Logic* is “*thinking* or more determinately *conceptual thinking*” the concept of which has to “emerge” in the course of the *Logic* itself (5.35/21.27).

That the *Logic* explains the fundamental forms of thinking is not controversial. What is controversial is how its explanation of these forms relates to an account of what is. And, indeed, such controversy makes good sense, since Hegel spends the bulk of his introductions to the two versions of the *Logic* trying to describe the (obviously difficult to grasp) relation between the activity of thinking and what is. Most notably, he spends fifty-two sections (§§26-78) in the *Encyclopedia Logic* describing and challenging the way in which other philosophers have accounted for the relation between thinking and “objectivity” to try to motivate the distinctive way the two are related in the *Logic*. Clearly, Hegel thinks that the fundamental forms of thinking are the fundamental forms of what is, but it is very unclear how he thinks about that “are”. For my purpose in this essay, we do not need to start with any controversial assumptions about this important topic.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the explanation of the forms of thought that the *Logic* offers is meant to avert the threat that they are parochial. A “parochial” form of thought would be such that an adequate explanation for why we judge as we do when using that form would leave open whether the judgment was true. When we err and even when we just accidentally happen to be right, our judging is parochial: our so judging is not explained by the fact that the world is as we judge it to be, but rather by some fact about us which explains why the world seems to us to be that way. For instance, I might err because I have poor eyesight, or because my community raised me to believe in ghosts, or because human beings cannot hear a particular pitch. Such explanations, which appeal to something about me as a way of explaining why I do not judge truly, are incompatible with my judgments being knowledge. Because we judge as we do whether our judgment is true or not, our judgment does not “track the truth” in the way that is required for it to be knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the *Logic* is not meant to avert the very possibility of error—it is not meant to avert the threat posed by the possibility that I have bad eyesight, or was taught superstitious beliefs as a child. But it is meant to avert the threat of parochialism about our fundamental forms of thought: for instance, it is meant to show that the fact that we think about the world as causally structured is not parochial to us, that the world is indeed causally structured.

The worry that our forms of thought are parochial is meant to be generic enough to encompass both Cartesian and Kantian worries.<sup>7</sup> According to Carte-

<sup>5</sup> Further, the issue of how the *Logic* relates to our activity of thinking is extremely important for determining the vexed and complicated relationship between the *Logic* and Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit*. Again, however, my purpose in this essay do not require that I take a stand on this topic.

<sup>6</sup> For a more thorough development of this idea, cf. Rödl 2007 and 2018.

<sup>7</sup> For a helpful account of the differences between these two kinds of worries, cf. Conant 2004.

sian skepticism, we can form beliefs about the world without being able to exclude the possibility that those beliefs are false. According to Kantian skepticism, we cannot so much as make sense of our capacity to form beliefs about the world, such that we cannot even make sense of our forms of thought as being about the world. Both forms of skepticism share the feature that our forms of thinking reflect something that renders thinking in general (or at least, our thinking in general) unfit to arrive at knowledge of the world. Both, then, are worries about the parochiality of the forms of thinking at which they are directed.

The generic nature of the worry about parochiality as I have spelled it out here does not make it the most incisive tool for examining Hegel's response to skepticism.<sup>8</sup> But its generic nature does enable me to say, without raising many objections, that the method of Hegel's *Logic* is designed to avert the threat that thought is parochial. One sees evidence of some version of the parochialism worry plainly present in Hegel's criticism of the Kantian philosophy, for instance. Hegel writes,

When the critical philosophy understands the relation of these three *terminorum* such that we place the thoughts between us and the matters [*Sachen*] as means in the sense that this means closes us off from the matters instead of merging us with them, this view is opposed by the simple remark that even these matters, which should stand at the other extreme beyond us and beyond the thoughts that refer to them, are themselves thought-things (5.25-6/21.14).<sup>9</sup>

A lot can, has, and should be made of these remarks (which recur frequently in Hegel's discussions of Kant). What I want to note is simply that Hegel is concerned to avoid a conception of thought which locks us up within subjectivity and thereby prevents us from understanding how our thoughts are able to arrive at knowledge of the world.

Moreover, it is clear that he thinks that the method of the *Logic* is one of the keys to overcoming this conception. So he notes that we need to avoid the conception of the forms of thought that "hangs together with" the critical philosophy: we need to avoid the conception of forms of thought "as external forms", forms that are only "*in the content* [*Gehalt*]" and are not conceived of as "the con-

<sup>8</sup> At least, it is not incisive when it is only developed as far as I develop it here, in the interests of remaining non-controversial. I develop a much more controversial account of it in connection to Hegel in other work.

<sup>9</sup> Another helpful formulation occurs in a student transcript of his lectures: "To experience what the truth in things would be is not done [*abgetan*] with mere attention, but rather belongs to our subjective activity which reshapes [*umgestaltet*] the immediately available [*Vorhandene*]. At first glance, this appears totally perverted and to be contrary to the end that cognition concerns itself with. Nevertheless one can say that it has been the persuasion of all times that the substantial is attained first through the re-working of the immediate effected by means of reflection. [...] It is the sickness of our times that has come to despair that our cognition is only something subjective and that this subjective is the final [*das Letzte*]" (EL §22z). The sickness of the times is to think that the nature of the activity of thinking makes thinking parochial, unfit to arrive at knowledge of what is. In this quote Hegel refers to a specific source for this worry, that thinking somehow changes our perceptual representation of the world (cf. EL §22). But we can abstract from that specific suggestion (which is more controversial in the literature) to note that Hegel's conception of thought's relation to the world, as it is developed in the *Logic*, was meant to avert parochialism.

tent itself' (5.26/21.15). One of the principal characteristics of the method of the *Logic* is to take the forms of thought as themselves the "truth" and the content of the investigation (cf. 5.29/21.17). And so it follows that the method of the *Logic* is supposed to avoid closing thought off from the world. Or, positively stated, the method of the *Logic* is supposed to make sense of the objective validity of thought, the capacity to get, non-accidentally, at the true nature of things by thinking.

### 3. Organic Growth

I want now to turn to the first of the two organic models I will discuss in this essay: the Aristotelian model of organic growth. This model is suggested by Hegel's frequent claim that the progress in the *Logic* is self-determining. For instance, he describes "the demand for the *realization of the concept*, which does not lie in the *beginning* itself, but rather much more is the aim and work of the entire further development of cognition" (6.554/12.240).<sup>10</sup> I will first articulate the model and then show in what respect and why it fails to be an adequate model of the logical progression.

In an account of organic growth, we distinguish between immature and mature states of an organism. The immature state is posterior to the mature state in account, or conceptually, because what it is to be the immature state is to be that which tends towards the mature state. So, an account of the immature state must refer to the mature state, as that which makes the immature state intelligible as what it is. Moreover, the immature state tends towards the mature state through its own activity.<sup>11</sup> An acorn, on this view, is an immature oak tree; without grasping that the acorn is an immature oak tree, or at least that it contains a seed and so something that becomes a tree, you would not have any idea what an acorn is. That is, what it is to be an acorn is to be that which tends towards being an oak tree (or, more immediately, tends towards being an oak sapling). Moreover, the acorn becomes an oak through its own activity: by taking in nutrients from the soil, for instance, and—when it is a little more mature—by taking in sunlight.

The first claim, that what it is to be an immature state is defined in terms of the mature state, explains how we can think of the progress as an enrichment—the acorn has not yet realized its nature, to be an oak tree, and in realizing this nature it is enriched, in that it is now actually what it was merely potentially. Moreover, it explains how this can be combined with the thought that the enrichment is already contained (implicitly or in an undeveloped form) in the starting point, since the acorn is defined in terms of the oak tree. Finally, it does this while providing a clear model for thinking about the progress as grounded in the starting point, the immature state (the acorn). The acorn itself tends towards becoming an oak tree. This tendency would explain Hegel's language of "self-determination".

<sup>10</sup> Or, as he puts it a little later, "[T]he progress consists much more in that the universal determines its self and is *for itself* the universal [...] Only in its completion [*Vollendung*] is it the absolute" (6.555-6/12.241). He elsewhere describes the progress in the *Logic* as "this way that constructs its self" and claims that its "self-movement is its spiritual life" (5.17/21.8). Cf. also EL §17, §28z, §238, 5.35/21.27, 5.43/21.33, PhG 2.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 08 1049b12-1050a16.

However, if we apply this model to speculative knowledge, we make thought parochial. To see this, note again that organic growth is defined by the transition from an immature state to a mature state. These two states are incompatible with one another, and the immaturity is eliminated by the time one arrives at the mature state. So, in organic growth there are distinct states of the existence of the organism, each one exclusive of the others: seed, sapling, tree. The immature state is a way in which the organism can exist, while also being a state in which the organism is a potentiality (potentially mature). So, it belongs to the idea of an immature state that it can fail to realize its potential, that it can fail to become mature.

Aristotle makes this point quite well in his discussion of potentiality in *Metaphysics Theta*. He writes,

Every potentiality is at one and the same time a potentiality for the opposite; for, while that which is not capable of being present in a subject cannot be present, everything that is capable of being may possibly not be actual. That, then, which is capable of being may either be or not be; the same thing, then, is capable both of being and of not being. And that which is capable of not being may possibly not be; and that which may possibly not be is perishable, either without qualification, or in the precise sense in which it is said that it possibly may not be.<sup>12</sup>

When we apply this general point to our example of the acorn, we get the following: the sapling is potentially an oak. That means that it might not be an oak. That is, it might fail in its striving to become an oak.

Since the organism can cease to be without becoming fully mature, there must be conditions outside of or other than it which enable it to become mature: when those conditions are not met, the organism cannot reach maturity; when they are met, it can. I do not mean that there are conditions on the continued existence of the organism in its present state, though there are such conditions: for instance, that all of the air not suddenly become acid, or that the sun not explode. These are enabling conditions on the existence of the organism—in Aristotle's terms, enabling condition on the organism's continuing to be "without qualification". I mean that, in addition to these, there must be distinct enabling conditions on the growth of the organism—those concerned with the possibility that it "perish" in "the precise sense" at issue in maturation, by failing to become mature. The need for these distinct enabling conditions comes with the idea of growth. If the acorn already had that which it needed to be mature, it would not be possible that it would fail to be mature. So, it would not be potentially mature—it would be actually mature, and it would not relate itself to its environment in a process of becoming mature. As merely potentially mature, the immature organism lacks that which it needs to be mature: that is why it must become mature, in an activity of acquiring that which it needs. But this means there are distinct enabling conditions on growth: whatever those conditions are which enable the organism to acquire what it needs to become mature.

So, I have shown that organic growth rests on enabling conditions by the presence of which the organism can mature. Now let's see what happens if we apply this thought to the "maturation" of the forms of thought in the *Logic*. The need to appeal to something external to the mere notion of thought, the appeal

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle 1984: *Metaphysics*  $\theta 8$  1050b8-15.

to an enabling condition, means that the account of thought we start with is not by itself enough to secure the objective validity of the various forms of thought that are developed within the *Logic*. The acorn needs the soil and the sun to grow, and the acorn is not sufficient to secure these for itself. And so, applying this model to the *Logic*, the form of thought requires something analogous to the soil and the sun, some enabling conditions that the form of thought cannot secure for itself. It follows that on this model it is in some sense accidental to the notion of the form of thought that it is actually objectively valid: accidental, because thought does not suffice of itself to explain its objective validity. So for all we know from the bare notion of thought alone it might not be objectively valid, and that means an explanation of it does not suffice to ensure that it can yield knowledge. Hence, it is parochial.

To spell this out a bit: if thought had to rely on something external to itself, which it does not supply, to secure its objective validity, then the mere notion of thought would be compatible with not being able to be objectively valid. To claim this is to claim that the world might well be unthinkable, at least so far as we can tell from the notion of thought as such. We are forced to conclude this from the organic growth model of the development of thought: for if the enabling conditions are absent, then the form of thought cannot come to maturity and so cannot develop those forms requisite to think about the world in general (perhaps we could think only about some aspects of the world). But we cannot actually conclude in that fashion: we cannot so much as think of the possibility of an unthinkable world (or an unthinkable aspect of the world)—that is simply nonsense, since we cannot think of what is unthinkable. And yet we cannot really claim that it is nonsense, or anyway we cannot secure our right to dismissing it as nonsense. Rather, we have to conclude that it is merely a limitation on thought: thought is *unable* to think of an unthinkable world. We are forced to think as though the only way the world could be was by being thinkable, when in fact (but we cannot think this fact) it is only contingently thinkable. It follows that our account of thought makes it parochial: we think as we do only because of the nature of thought and not because of the way the world is. For all we know, for all we are able justifiably to conclude, the world is not thinkable, since we cannot explain or ground or justify its thinkability. And yet we are forced to take up the world as thinkable. This is an unstable cognitive position, to be sure, but it is the one we are forced into insofar as we accept that speculative knowledge essentially requires appealing to something not provided for by the mere notion of thought (some matter to be worked on).

The idea of incorporating matter central to the model of organic growth cannot capture the nature of speculative knowledge. And Hegel describes speculative knowledge in a way which reveals that he would reject the organic growth model: its progression is “unstoppable, pure, taking in nothing from outside” (5.49/21.38). As unstoppable, the non-final stages of the progression are not merely potentially mature (for potentiality implies possibly not, and so it implies that the progression can be stopped). As taking in nothing from the outside, they must rely on no external matter to develop further. The non-final stages must contain within them everything they need to be the final stage.

I think we can see Hegel relying on exactly this point in his discussion of the limits of thinking about life as a model for thinking about the absolute. In the course of discussing arguments for the existence of God, he notes that the “truthful [*wahrhafte*] *determination* of the idea of God” cannot be grasped from

“merely living nature” for “God is more than living, he is spirit. The *spiritual* nature is alone the most worthy and truest *origin* for the thought of the absolute” (EL §50A). His argument for this conclusion is that our observation of the ends of “living nature” “can be contaminated” by “insignificance” (EL §50A). That is, the ends that living beings set cannot demand as their explanation the absolute, because those ends are insignificant enough that something less than the absolute would suffice to explain them. Why? I suggest that these ends are insignificant because they are conditioned by that which they take as their matter. Hegel notes specifically about animals that they do not transform that which they perceive and intuit into anything absolute, but relate to the sensible world as what conditions them (for this reason, Hegel claims, animals “have no religion”) (EL §50A). He must have a similar point in mind for all merely living nature: all of it is conditioned, in its capacity to set ends, by the world which it relates to.

Hegel says that we, on the other hand, are not conditioned by that which we think: we “transform [*verwandeln*]” the “empirical world” in thinking about it by raising it up “into the infinite”, that which is without conditions, the absolute, God (EL §50A). It is hard to understand how we do this in thinking about the sensible world, especially if we take seriously traditional notions of God.<sup>13</sup> But, even without clarifying that connection, we can see that Hegel's claim provides textual evidence for attributing to Hegel the argument against the organic growth model I presented above.

So, the organic growth model breaks down because it involves the idea of external matter, or something not provided for by that which grows, and, with it, potentiality.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the evidence cited at the outset of this section remains: we need to retain from the idea of organic growth that the logical pro-

<sup>13</sup> Hegel's argument should be compared to Kant's discussion of physicotheology and ethicotheology in §§85-6 of the third critique: Kant, like Hegel, notes that we cannot arrive at the concept of God merely from the idea of a natural end, or a living being, because we could conceive of an author of that being which lacked the infinite, unconditioned attributes of God (a being that is relatively more powerful than us, but not omnipotent). Further, Kant, like Hegel, notes that we should instead start with rational nature. Unlike Hegel, however, Kant thinks that the aspect of our rational nature which grounds theology is our moral nature: we must posit God as that which enables us to realize the highest good, a world in which happiness is proportioned to virtue. Hegel rejects this argument from Kant, arguing that we cannot arrive at the absolute from within practical reason in this way but must instead advance to speculative knowledge, thereby grounding (and, even more radically, realizing) God: this is one consequence of his argument about the Idea of the Good at 6.547-8/12.235.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that what makes the organic growth model inadequate is not the bare fact that it involves an appeal to something external to thought; it is that what is external to the organism is not able to be fully provided for by the organism itself. (I try to convey this by noting that what is external serves as material for growth, implicitly referencing the fact that form is dependent upon and does not provide for the matter that it informs, as well as Hegel's claim that the form/content distinction breaks down for speculative knowledge precisely because there is nothing not provided for by the form itself: cf. 6.549-550/12.236-7). There may well be a sense in which speculative knowledge is related to what is external to it, so long as it is sufficient to provide for itself that which is external to it. Perhaps this is involved in Hegel's idea that freedom consists in “being with oneself in one's other”. (My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this.)

gression involves a realization of thought, and also that this realization involves thought's own activity. But we need to think of a kind of realization which has no enabling conditions on its realization, such that it is genuinely unstoppable and such that it takes in nothing from outside.

Before moving on to consider the next organic model, I want to note one respect in which my argument in this section is incompatible with some of what Karen Ng says in her recent work on Hegel and life. In particular, if I am right, then her claim that the logical concept of life provides the "formal outlines" for the absolute idea is at least in part wrong (cf. Ng 2016: 10). As she rightly notes, life-form activity is characterized by a relation to what is external to it: "living activity relates itself to an external world to which it stands in opposition" (Ng 2016: 8). But she also claims life-form activity provides us with part of "an understanding of the logical Idea as a philosophical method", that it "shap[es] all our modes of knowledge" (Ng 2016: 10), and that it provides part of a description of "a form of activity that captures reason *in toto*, describing the fundamental shape of reason in *all* of its functioning and development" (Ng 2016: 6). Each of these claims goes too far, because each of them saddles thought in all of its forms—including the form it takes in speculative knowledge—with a dependence on some external matter. Part of her point in claiming that life is central to thought or reason is to note that thinking beings must be living beings. That is an important insight into Hegel's account of life. But we can accept that insight without committing Hegel to the further claim that speculative knowledge is a kind of life-form activity that inherits the traits of life-form activities—including the trait of requiring some external matter. This, I have tried to show, is not how Hegel understood speculative knowledge, because he recognized that this view would entail that our forms of thinking are parochial.

#### 4. Organic Unity

A different model which also invokes the idea of an organism appeals not to organic growth but to the organic unity that binds different organs together in an organism. On this view of the *Logic*, we advance from an account of one part of an organic whole to an account of the entire organic whole. This idea is typically connected to the Aristotelian and Kantian idea that we can only understand a part of an organism through relating it to the whole organism. From this idea, it follows that an account of the part will necessarily lead to an account of the whole.

This model goes back at least to John McTaggart (cf. 1896: §122). More recently, it has been adopted by Christian Martin in his excellent book on the *Logic*, *Ontologie der Selbstbestimmung*. After noting that the parts of an organic whole are dependent on the whole, he argues that

Knowledge of such a whole is [...] won if one of its aspects is initially so observed as if it were constituted independently from the whole. If such a determination really has its existence only in its connection with others, this must show itself in a (performative) contradiction between its self-standing appearance [*Auf-treten*] and the hidden relations essential for its determinacy—a contradiction that can be corrected [*behoben*] only through the explicit inclusion of further determinations, whereby the starting determination is lowered to an un-self-standing aspect of an overarching connection (Martin 2012: 27-28; my translation).



According to Martin, in speculative knowledge we start with a part of thought and recognize a contradiction in our account of it that drives us forward to an ever richer account that eventually captures the whole of thought. This works, on his view, because the parts are dependent upon the whole in the way that the parts of an organism are dependent upon the whole organism.

So, on this model, we advance from, say, quality to quantity or from concept to judgment as we would advance either from one organ to another, or possibly as we would from an account of one organ to a larger system of organs. Just as I cannot grasp the liver or the heart in isolation from the rest of the body (on this Aristotelian and Kantian view of the organism), so too I cannot grasp one form of thought in isolation from the other forms of thought.

The starting point for these claims might be taken from Kant's account of natural ends in the Critique of the Power of Judgment, in particular §65. In a body judged as a natural end "each part is conceived as if it exists only through all the others, thus as if existing *for the sake of the others* and *on account of* the whole, i.e., as an instrument (organ)" and each part "must be thought of as an organ that *produces* the other parts (consequently each produces the others reciprocally)" (Kant 5:373-4; Guyer-Matthews translation). So, the parts depend on the nature of the whole, such that we can grasp their natures only in grasping the way in which they contribute to producing or sustaining the organism and thereby themselves. Thus, a grasp of the nature of the whole is required to make sense of the activity or functioning of the parts, as the whole is that which the parts produce or sustain in their activity. So, the characteristic activity or functioning of quality is in some sense to produce or sustain thought as a whole.

Within life, there are a multiplicity of organs in an organism and these organs are all interdependent on one another. This interdependence licenses the claim that the nature of the many organs is determined by the nature of the organism, because they all belong to the one organism.<sup>15</sup> This claim in turn requires a contrast between the nature of the organism and the natures of the organs that make up that organism: no organ is identical with the organism, each is merely a part (or "member", in Hegel's terms) of it (6.476-7/12.184). The simplest way to bring out this contrast is to note that there is only one organism, while there are many organs.

The contrast between the organism and its organs makes sense, within life, only because the nature of the organism does not fully and completely determine the nature of the organs. There is something in the organs that is "external" to the nature of the organism, and this externality is essentially appealed to as the only possible grounds for distinguishing one organ from another. If the nature of the whole fully determined the organs, then there could be only one organ: there would be absolutely no difference between the whole and the organ that made it up, and so there could be no sense in saying that one thing, the part, is determined by another at least notionally distinguishable thing, the whole. (What is external or not fully determined by the nature of the organism? As we will see, it is the manner in which each organ sustains the whole.)

Hegel puts this in his own complicated way. He describes the nature of the organism or what he calls the "soul" of the living being as a kind of "being for itself" that is "the identity": that is, it provides the unity such that each organ is

<sup>15</sup> In addition, of course, each organ is determined by the nature of the other organs, but that determination is less germane for my present purpose.

a member of the same, identical organism. And there is nothing that qualifies as part of the living being that isn't informed by the soul. But the identity, or nature of the organism, is "sunken in its objectivity" and it is "the inhering [*inwohnende*] substantial form" (6.487/12.192). That is, the organism "dwells" (*wohnen*) within each of the organs, it is their form, but it is not identical with the organs: the organs provide the matter. That is, there is and must be a contrast between the organism considered as the substantial form, and the organs considered as matter or that which the soul informs.

This point is really quite obvious when we reflect on the kind of progress that can be made within biology. Consider that even after we know what activities characterize an organism we do not yet know how it performs those activities.<sup>16</sup> We might know that a cow eats grass without knowing that it does so by processing the grass through four stomachs. Or we might observe a dog feeding, say, or chasing prey, or breaking down food with saliva. We can then ask how it does these things. We do not know, simply from knowing that it performs these activities, how it does so—figuring that out takes a great deal of scientific inquiry. We might find out that saliva breaks the food down because it contains an enzyme that breaks down certain kinds of chemicals found in the food. We might in turn ask how this enzyme is able to break down these chemicals, and appeal to the relative strength of various chemical bonds, and so on. At each level we have identified a certain kind of activity, and at each level we can ask again how this activity is performed. When we answer that question, we will have uncovered yet another activity (another level) about which we can ask the same question.

Moreover, on the organic model we are considering, each "lower" level of explanation will itself be organic. For example, I might first identify the tongue as an organ of the dog, but then the tongue will serve as a kind of "organism" or whole that is essential for explaining the "organs" or parts that are involved in the tongue's activities. The enzyme in the tongue will have the nature that it does only in its dependence on the nature of the tongue, just as the tongue has the nature it does in its dependence on the nature of the dog. (This is why there can be no Newton for a blade of grass on this way of thinking about organisms: at no point in explaining an organism by its parts (and sub-parts, etc.) do we reach parts that are intelligible independently of the whole they make up.) But despite the manner in which the parts always depend on the whole, we must still investigate the parts to understand how the whole performs its activities. And we do not know the nature of those parts just in knowing the nature of the whole—otherwise we would already know how the dog ate just in knowing that it ate. The fact that we do not reveals that the dependence of the organs on the whole involves an aspect of independence.

Now let's try to apply this model to speculative knowledge. In the *Logic*, the whole would be thought and the parts would be forms of thought—quantitative thoughts as opposed to qualitative thoughts, judgments as opposed to syllogisms. On this model, the nature of thought would not suffice to explain the different forms of thought. Whatever is in those forms of thought that is not explained by thought as such must have a different explanation or basis. This means that the nature of thought does not exclude the possibility of other, possibly incompatible forms of thought—forms of thought that we do not possess,

<sup>16</sup> I owe this consideration to Sebastian Rödl.

that would be alien to or even incompatible with the ones we do possess, but that would be compatible with the very idea of thought. Again, this is obvious, for the fact that a dog runs leaves open many different possible “hows”, corresponding perhaps to different organizations of the bones, muscles and ligaments, about which we have no idea just knowing that the dog runs. Similarly, just knowing what thought is would not in any way rule out the possibility that there are many forms of thought different from the ones we happen to possess; and it would not be sufficient to generate or account for the multiplicity of forms of thought contained in the *Logic*. This makes it impossible for us to know the legitimacy of the forms of thought that we employ, to know that they are ways of arriving at the truth and of knowing the world. For while it is no threat to a science of the dog that there might be other bodies similar in some respects but different in others, the idea of a science of thought (as Hegel understands it) would be ruined if it did not, simply as a science of thought, contain all forms of thought.

So, the model fails because the nature of the whole is distinguished from the natures of the parts, such that it cannot fully explain them. The failure of the model lies again in the parochialism that results from its application: my forms of thought are merely mine, and I cannot exclude the idea and equal legitimacy of other, different forms of thought that I do not possess. Of course, I cannot think of these other forms of thought (for if I could, then they would be available to me, which means they would be mine). But, on this view, that reflects my inability, and the same cognitive instability articulated in the previous section results.<sup>17</sup>

Despite its failure as an adequate model, we need to retain certain features of it in an account of speculative knowledge. In particular, we need to retain the idea that the stages are dependent upon the whole. But we have to reject the externality of the parts from the whole—in particular, we have to abandon the idea that the whole does not suffice to explain the parts.<sup>18</sup>

On the organic unity model, identifying something as one stage rather than another is like identifying something as the heart and not the liver. Properly speaking, however, speculative knowledge does not advance from the part to the whole, for there is no nature to the part different from the nature of the whole, nor is there a nature to the whole that is different from the nature of the part. That is, one stage is not like the heart while the next stage is like the liver; ra-

<sup>17</sup> The failure of the organic unity model does not lie in the fact that, according to it, there could be heretofore undiscovered forms of thought. Hegel's understanding of philosophy involves some appeal to development and philosophical progress. As such, it might well involve the idea of a development in the form of thought itself. I neither want to rule that out nor endorse it. With respect to such a development, were it to be possible for Hegel, my point would be that it must be fully explained by the very idea of thought; it must not admit the possibility of other developments. (Thanks again to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to be clearer about this.)

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, McTaggart foreshadows this idea when he invokes the organic unity model, because he claims that the relation of the parts to the whole in the *Logic* is “still more close and intimate” than that found in organism (McTaggart 1896: §122). His elaboration on this claim gives up on the idea of parts, however. He recognizes that the parts are crucial in Hegel's account, but cannot see how that can be. The result is an account of speculative knowledge on which there is really no kind of multiplicity that remains within the whole (a monistic understanding of Hegel's absolute).

ther, each stage is the whole, even and precisely in its difference from the other stage. (Of course, at this point it might be best to abandon talk of “part” and “whole”, as the conditions for their application seem to have fallen away.)

The inadequacy of the organic unity model comes out fairly explicitly at one point when Hegel is describing the special character of the progression of the *Logic*. Unlike other conceptual progressions (for instance, unlike the conceptual progressions we effect when engaged in biology), in the *Logic* there can be no appeal to anything external to the starting point or whole. That is true even though the progression involves a kind of division, or multiplicity. As Hegel puts it, “the *division* must hang together with the *concept* or much more lie in it itself. The concept is not undetermined, but rather *determined* in it itself” (5.56/21.44). So, in the *Logic*, the determinations—the different forms of thought—must not come from “elsewhere” (5.56/21.44). They must rather already lie in the concept—the nature of thought in general—being further determined. That is, jettisoning the appeal to life, we have to say that the principle that unites the forms of thought (their soul) is the same principle that differentiates them (their matter). That is the apparently boggling character of speculative knowledge. Perhaps we can make sense of that. Indeed, I think we can. But here I have only tried to argue that we cannot hope to make sense of that unless we carefully note the ways in which speculative knowledge is unlike life.

## 5. Conclusion

In this essay, I have explained why and how the appeal to the organic falls short as a model for thinking about speculative knowledge (“the dialectical method”). Both the organic growth model and the organic unity model fail in that they require an appeal to something outside of the organism as part of the ground for the growth and as part of the ground of the unity. Absent the right environment, an organism cannot grow, and an organism does not by itself suffice to explain the presence of the right environment. Absent some particular manner in which it performs its characteristic activities, an organism cannot live, and the nature of the organism does not by itself suffice to explain that manner (the organs). In each case, the appeal to something external which the organism depends on and does not fully ground is fine for the case of life, but if applied to the forms of thought renders those forms parochial. Hegel, I have further argued, was aware of the respect in which each organic model falls short of providing an adequate model for speculative knowledge. He saw that organic models require an appeal to something not fully provided for by the organism, and that no such appeal can be made within speculative knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay, I would like to thank Robert Pippin, Paul Franks, Wolfram Gobsch, the audience at the conference on German Classical Philosophy and Naturalism at Georgetown University, and the two anonymous reviewers for this journal.

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