Précis of *A Spirit of Trust*

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Abstract: Robert Brandom presents a short summary of his book on Hegel's *Phenomenology* and responds to five commentators. Three increasingly committive idealist theses are distinguished, beginning with the unboundedness of the conceptual. Other important themes are Hegel's social account of discursive normativity as synthesized by reciprocal recognition, and his radically original notion of recollective rationality as structuring the historical dimension of discourse.

Keywords: Idealism; language; concepts; normativity; recognition; history; rationality.

A Spirit of Trust deciphers the philosophical meta-vocabulary G. W. F. Hegel develops in the *Phenomenology*: the language he deploys to enable one to talk and think about discursive practice, the use of ground-level empirical and practical concepts. *Sprache* (language), he explains, is the *Dasein* (the concrete existence) of *Geist* (what his book is a phenomenology of).[1] I read him as offering a broadly pragmatist theory of meaning in terms of use. Hegel's pragmatics of rationality is structured by dual social and historical axes. He understands the normativity of discursive practice as instituted socially by practical attitudes of reciprocal recognition. He understands the (semantic) determinate contentfulness of concepts in terms of the (pragmatic) activity of retrospectively recollectively rationally reconstructing their actual applications so as to give such contingent sequences of doings the shape of expressively progressive traditions (turning a past into a history). That is revealing them as the gradual

emergence into explicitness of norms that show up as having all along implicitly governed the process of applying the concepts.

On the ground floor of Hegel's intellectual edifice is a non-psychological conception of the conceptual. This is the idea that to be conceptually contentful is to stand in relations of material incompatibility and consequence (his "determinate negation" and "mediation") to other such contentful items. The relations of incompatibility and consequence are denominated "material," a term used to indicate that they articulate the contents rather than form of what stands in those relations. This is his first and most basic semantic idea: an understanding of conceptual content in terms of modally robust relations of exclusion and inclusion by some conceptually contentful items of other conceptually contentful items.

This understanding of the conceptual is hylomorphic. Conceptual contents, understood as roles with respect to relations of material incompatibility and consequence, are amphibious: they show up in two different forms. They have a subjective form and an objective form. The subjective form articulates

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[1] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. A. V. Miller, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 1977, p. 405, §666. [Henceforth cited as *PG*]

what things are or can be for consciousness, and the objective form articulates what things are or can be in themselves. The second is the form of empirical reality; the first is the form in which that empirical reality appears to knowing subjects. On the side of thought, these are deontic normative constraints: a subject ought not to have incompatible empirical and practical commitments and ought to acknowledge the consequences of one's commitments. On the side of being, these are alethic modal constraints: one object cannot have incompatible properties and necessarily has the properties that follow from its other properties.

Subjective and objective form are related as the two poles of the intentional nexus: what can be known and one's attempted knowing of it, noumena and phenomena. Subjectivity and objectivity are both conceptually articulated, and the same conceptual content can show up both in the subjective normative form of thoughts and in the objective modal form of states of affairs. Genuine knowledge occurs when one and the same content shows up in both different forms: the subjective form of thought and the objective form of fact. I call this view "bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism."[2]

Conceptual contents of the two forms stand in a broadly representational relation to one another, as subjective "representings" of reality (that is, thoughts) and the objective realities being represented. Hegel's second semantic idea is this consequence of the hylomorphic development of the first: the two forms of conceptual content stand to one another in representational relations. These two dimensions of semantic contentfulness, the conceptual and the representational, can be thought of as Hegelian versions of the Fregean metaconcepts of "sense" and "reference" (*Sinn* and *Bedeutung*): of thoughts and what thoughts are about, what can be expressed and what can be represented.

Hegel's semantic explanatory strategy is to explain the second, representational dimension of conceptual contentfulness in terms of the first, namely, the expressive dimension. What it is to represent something is to be understood in terms of relations among conceptual contents. The idea of a noumenal reality is to be explained in terms of how phenomenal appearances point beyond themselves, in virtue of

their relations to one another. (This, too, is a sense in which his book counts as a "phenomenology.") The semantic relations between these two forms of conceptual content are understood in the pragmatic context of processes and practices of intentional action. Hegel writes: "Reason is *purposive activity*" (*PG* 12, §22). When regarded prospectively, practical agency is the experience of coping with cognitive error and practical failure. When regarded retrospectively, practical agency is reconstructed by the exercise of recollective rationality as the actualization and determination of a governing intention, which in my reading both provides standards for assessments of correctness and success (on the deontic normative side of the knowing subject) and to which the process is subjunctively sensitive (on the alethic modal side of the known object).

Hegel explains the representational semantic dimension of conceptual content (relations between thought and things, phenomena and noumena, appearance and reality) in terms of this essentially temporally biperspectival pragmatics of rational agency. The historical process by which conceptual contents are determined (prospectively made and retrospectively found) exhibits the structure of co-ordinate, reciprocal authority and responsibility characteristic of the institution of normative statuses by mutual recognitive attitudes among community members. It is a social, recognitive process. The normative pragmatics explains the interrelations among the inferential, social, and historical holisms characteristic of Hegel's semantics.

Recollective rationality is also the key both to understanding the history of *Geist*—that is, all of human beings' norm-governed practices and performances, and the statuses, selves, and institutions they produce and are produced by—and to envisaging its next development. For Hegel the turning point of history so far has been the gradual, still incomplete transition from traditional to modern forms of life. This was a shift in the practical metaphysics of normativity from a form of life that is structured by the status-dependence of normative attitudes to one structured by the attitude-dependence of normative statuses. The mistake characteristic of the first is fetishism: mistaking what are in fact the products of human beings' activities for objective features of the world. Modernity is the advent of a distinctive kind of normative self-consciousness of one's role in instituting norms. The pathology characteristic of modernity is alienation from the norms that make humans what they are: failure to understand norms practically as rationally constraining. When

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2 Robert B. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2019, p. 84. [Henceforth cited as *ST*]

recognition takes the form of retrospective rational reconstructive recollection, the insights gained from traditional practical and modern theoretical normative self-consciousness will be reconciled and their failures will be overcome. Hegel opens up the intoxicating prospect that humanity will move decisively beyond both the traditional and the modern normative structures of subordination and obedience to genuine self-conscious freedom. In the envisaged post-modern phase, agents recognize each other as each confessing their failure fully to adhere to the norms, and trust each other to forgive that failure recollectively. In this new form of agency and community, all take responsibility for fulfilling the obligations of each, and the sense in which every act is the act of one individual is complemented by a sense in which every act is the act of everyone. This is *Geist* structured by trust.

Comments on Mark Alznauer: "Hegel, Brandom, and Semantic Descent"

This thoughtful essay is very welcome—I could not ask for a better introduction to and framing of our extended discussion.[3]

I particularly admire the opening paragraphs making the Mark Twain analogy. They show that Alznauer appreciates some of the formal aspirations of *A Spirit of Trust* as it does something different to Hegel's text than others have sought to do. It is indeed a *de re* reading, as I use that term in the opening chapters of *Tales of the Mighty Dead*. But recollecting Hegel's book as a contribution to a contemporary discussion about discursive practice and conceptual content is a substantial artistic undertaking of a quite distinctive kind. It is intended as a contribution to a peculiar literary genre whose closest antecedents might be in Martin Heidegger. As we shall see, in his wonderful essay, Andrew Cutrofello uses William Wordsworth as the basis for initial reflections on what I am trying to do with Hegel here. I hope others will take up from different perspectives the task of understanding the distinctive sort of hermeneutic project the book pursues.

Alznauer has picked out the big idea that distinguishes my reading of Hegel from prior ones: the identification of the topic, the set of concerns that motivate Hegel's (meta)conceptual innovations. The key

to understanding what thematically distinguishes my approach is indeed what I call the "strategy of semantic descent" (*ST* 4-8). This is reading the *Phenomenology* as principally aimed at understanding the semantics and pragmatics of ground-level empirical and practical concepts. One excuse for my lack of engagement with the massive extant secondary literature is that on my story what Hegel is doing, the very topic he is addressing, is understood so differently that it is hard so much as to make contact with previous readings.

On my view, traditional Hegel scholarship has gone radically wrong at least in overlooking one of his principal organizing themes. How could such a thing happen? He left no first-rate students mainly interested in the logic and metaphysics (the core that I read in terms of a pragmatist semantics). For wholly understandable reasons, what they cared about was his social, and especially, political theory. Hegel was eclipsed in the middle years of the nineteenth century, by a neo-Kantianism preaching "back to Kant" precisely against what his successors had made of him—a neo-Kantianism that at once completely misunderstood Hegel and (a fact that stands at least partly as proof of the previous contention) re-inventing some of his most central claims as they followed some parallel paths in reading Kant. Here I mean the emphasis on normativity, a socially naturalized, historicized reading of discursive norms and the contents of the concepts they articulate, and an emphasis on the context of social practices that institute conceptual contents by using the concepts in question, applying them in concrete circumstances.

And in the brief compass allowed to him in this forum, Alznauer has offered the outlines of a genealogy of my reading. It is concise, telling, and cuts at important metaconceptual joints, each of which introduces a theme that plays an important role in my story:

- Kuno Fischer emphasizes how Hegel's own version of pure concepts is recognizably a successor-notion to Kant's categories. It is perhaps not surprising that the founder of the late nineteenth century German neo-Kantian revival—coiner of the phrase "*Zurück zu Kant!*" and incidentally, Gottlob Frege's teacher—should accentuate this important commonality.

- F. H. Bradley sees Hegel as teaching a semantic holist lesson. He thinks of holism as a metaphysical rather than a semantic issue. The rule relating these two renderings of holism is described by Willard van Orman Quine: "Meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and

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3 Mark V. Alznauer, "Hegel, Brandom, and Semantic Descent: Comments on *A Spirit of Trust* by Robert B. Brandom (Harvard, 2019)," *Existenz* 15/1 (Spring 2020), 42-45.

wedded to the word."[4] Hegel views semantics and metaphysics as two sides of one coin, and in the book I am much concerned to fill in the details of their relationship, as he gives us the clues to reconstruct it.

- John Findlay (incidentally, one of my undergraduate teachers at Yale) offers a broadly metalinguistic account of the function of Hegel's philosophical or speculative concepts, relative to the ground-level ones.

On each of these points there are also crucial differences between the significance these Hegel- readers attach to them and how I read Hegel as developing them.

- Fischer does not understand Kant's categories, as I do, namely, as pragmatic metaconcepts. I take Kant to have discovered that in addition to the concepts one uses to describe and explain ordinary empirical goings-on there are also concepts whose distinctive expressive role it is to make explicit structural features of the framework of practices, what one must be able to do, in order to describe and explain anything.

- Bradley thinks the holist lesson is a skeptical one—that it shows the radical defectiveness of one's ordinary engagements with things.

- Findlay is closest to my reading. Inspired by ordinary-language philosophy, and perhaps recoiling from Bradley, what he does not do is read Hegel's lessons back into the understanding of ground-level concepts. He does not use those lessons to address the conceptual difficulties one can encounter when attempting to understand ground-level contents: issues that have become clear through the engagement of analytic philosophy of language and mind with this topic over the past 140 years. Rather, Findlay sees Hegel's story as a license to ignore these concerns. My aim is precisely to articulate Hegel's contribution to this conversation.

Comments on Andrew Cutrofello: "'Was it for this?' Brandom, Hegel, Wordsworth, Žižek, and the Terror"

Andrew Cutrofello's essay is a beautifully written, intricately conceived tour de force. He masterfully interweaves learned and thoughtful accounts of the contemporaries Hegel and Wordsworth on the French Revolution, examines comparisons and contrasts between their paired massive *Bildungsromane*, the *Phenomenology* and the *Prelude*, and, astonishingly, builds out of these materials a judicious assessment of the relations between Žižek's and my contrasting attitudes toward all of these.[5] The resulting *de re* and *de traditione* reading of Žižek and of my own *de re* and *de traditione* readings must be marveled at and admired. It is in many ways a shame to sully it by responding with a pedestrian redescription couched in ordinary academic prose, but I must confess that that is all I have to offer, and count on his and other readers' constructive forgiveness.

Žižek sees my foregrounding of Hegel's discernment of a commitment to and trust in forgiveness—which in the final form of self-consciousness as Absolute Knowing Hegel rehearses and recollects, subjects become aware of as always-already implicit in their discursive activity—as being naïve, Pollyanna-ish, and hopelessly Utopian. His Hegel is a Cassandra-like prophet of doom and a somber spokesman for a darker vision, in which inevitable conflict, cognitive error, and practical failure take center stage.

Cutrofello sees that the account I attribute to Hegel of the process of determining conceptual contents provides a detailed context in which Žižek's and my readings become visible not as incompatible, conflicting interpretations, but as the result of different emphases on essential constitutive aspects of that process—aspects that show up from reciprocal recognitive retrospective and prospective temporal-historical perspectives on it. What Žižek sees in Hegel is the view looking forward on a process that is driven by the experience of error and failure. That is human beings are finding themselves with commitments that by their own lights are incompatible, ones to which they cannot be jointly entitled. These are commitments that, once exposed as colliding with each other, by the norms they embody and which are being endorsed, oblige them practically to acknowledge the inadequacy of that current constellation of commitments by doing something, namely changing those commitments, refining some and relinquishing others.

I explicitly and wholeheartedly acknowledge this crucial dimension of the process of determining

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[4] Willard van Orman Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review* 60/1 (January 1951) 20-43, here p. 22.

[5] Andrew Cutrofello, "'Was it for this?': Brandom, Hegel, Wordsworth, Žižek, and the Terror," *Existenz* 15/1 (Spring 2020), 46-60.

the content of concepts—including the categorial metaconcepts, which can also show themselves inadequate in the process of applying them. From my point of view, Žižek's appreciation of this failure-prone aspect of Hegel's perspective is one-sided. He seems to me insufficiently appreciative that this is only one half of the story, one side of the coin. Its temporal recognitive dual is Hegel's retrospective perspective adopted in response to the acknowledgment of disruption. What subjects are obliged to do when being confronted by the incoherence of their current stances is to repair them, by rationally reconstructing a selective trajectory through their past commitments that presents them as the latest phase in an expressively progressive history or tradition. At the core of this phase of experience is Hegel's radically original conception of recollective rationality. The activity of recollection is redescribing the development of a constellation of commitments as the gradual, cumulative making explicit of what is recollectively revealed as having been all along implicit, a norm that is governing one's past attitudes in the dual sense of providing a standard for assessments of their correctness or incorrectness, and to which they are presented as having been all along subjunctively sensitive. This positive, constructive activity is marked by rational forgiveness of the errors and failures confessed in the negative, critical phase of each episode of experience. The structure of co-ordinate responsibility and authority displayed by the whole process is that of reciprocal recognition in its distinctive temporal, historical form.

So although one must, and I do, acknowledge the inevitability of conflicts that normatively demand of subjects an acknowledgment of their current commitments as, at least partially, incorrect— as appearances for consciousness rather than as presentations of how things really are, in themselves—I take that as being balanced by an account of what one needs to do in order to see which ones have revealed themselves to be not merely appearances, but as progressively more adequate appearances of an underlying reality. I am concerned with underlining the novelty and importance of the notion of recollective rationality that defines the progressive, retrospective perspective upon the process of experience. That might give the impression that my picture is also one-sided, in the same way I have suggested Žižek's interpretation can appear to be. And it might be tempting to see these two contrasting readings as expressions of different personalities: the sunny, glass-half-full, hopeful

optimist and the gloomy, glass-half-empty, pessimist. I am sure that there is something to that thought. But the balanced, biperspectival character of the process utilized in my book is prospectively a determining in the sense of making of the concepts more precise and adequate and is retrospectively a determining in the sense of finding them to be progressive, norm-governed, and revelatory of how things actually are, both of which are deeply embedded in the conception I attribute to Hegel. And the emphasis on the retrospective, forgiving, recollective phase of experience (the flight of the Owl of Minerva) is not an idiosyncracy of mine foisted onto a Hegel to whom it is foreign. After all, he closes the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*, triumphantly titled "Absolute Knowing" by highlighting just this feature of this ultimate, finally expressively adequate form of self-consciousness. It lines up with his ringing pronouncement that "The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind" (*PG* 407, §669).

Comments on Pierre Keller: "Brandom's Hegel—Between Conceptual Realism, Pragmatism, and Idealism"

The first half of this rich essay is replete with useful pointers to the complexity of the views to be found in Kant's massive corpus—a learned implicit reminder of the dangers of attempting to epitomize them as briefly as I often do.[6] I cannot here enter into these worthwhile debates. But in general I would plead that at least many of the divergences underlined here are a matter of how Hegel reads (or misreads) Kant, rather than specifically of how I do so—as I take it, largely by following him. A case in point is my understanding of one of the large structures of the *Phenomenology* as recommending a metacategorial shift between constellations of categorial metaconcepts with the structure Hegel denominates *Verstand* and those with the structure he calls *Vernunft*. Although he has self-consciously adopted and adapted these terms from Kant, Hegel nonetheless identifies Kant as in many ways the purest avatar of the deprecated *Verstand* metaconception of concepts as static and sharp-boundaried, by contrast to the dynamic, evolving *Vernunft* conception Hegel articulates as its more expressively adequate successor. Although Hegel always portrays himself as developing

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6   Pierre Keller, "Brandom's Hegel—Between Conceptual Realism, Pragmatism, and Idealism," *Existenz* 15/1 (Spring 2020), 61-74. [Henceforth cited as *PK*]

Kant's better wisdom, this picture might well be unfair to Kant. But if so, it seems to me that it is Hegel's account that is sacrificing fidelity to Kant's texts in the service of the punch and clarity of his own formulations, rather than my rendering of that account.

The principal issue Keller addresses is the centrally important question of how to understand the idealism that Hegel develops under the heading of "Absolute Idealism"—in order to distinguish it not only from Berkeleyan subjective idealism, but also from Kant's transcendental idealism. Keller judiciously rehearses the three concentric explanatory commitments into which I analyze Hegel's idealism. The central one is what I call conceptual realism. At its core is what John McDowell puts forward as the "unboundedness of the conceptual."[7] This is the idea that conceptual articulation is no less a structural feature of the objective world that is known and acted upon than it is of the subjective and intersubjective discursive activity of knowers of and agents in it. Keller accepts and applauds this thought—both as conveying one of Hegel's axial ideas and, if I understand him correctly, also *in propria persona*. Endorsing the idea that objective reality itself is conceptually structured already puts Keller on the less-populated side of an important philosophical dividing line, albeit one whose other distinguished denizens include Hegel and McDowell.

Keller speaks for many when he subsequently frames the issue about idealism as whether, once one acknowledges the unboundedness of the conceptual, one should understand the conceptually structured objective world as independent of or dependent upon the discursive activity of subjects. It is in response to this question that he finds grounds for suspicion and skepticism concerning my reading of Hegel. He accuses me of a residual "semantic realism" (*PK* 66). The specific kind of conceptual realism that I attribute to Hegel is what I call "bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism" (*ST* 84). This begins, crucially, with a non-psychological conception of the conceptual. It is non-psychological in not being tied essentially to the activities of subjects who apply concepts in judgment and action. It appeals to one of the central aspects Hegel means by "determinate negation." In this sense, determinate negation is Aristotelian contrariety: the sort of material incompatibility exhibited by pairs of different planar shapes, such as circular and triangular, or animal kinds

such as rodent and reptile. Because properties and facts can exclude one another in a modally robust way—it is impossible for a plane figure to be both circular and triangular, or for one and the same creature to be both rodent and reptile—and also because they stand in lawful, subjunctively so robust consequential relations (which Hegel talks about in terms of "mediation") whereby it is necessary that whatever is triangular is polygonal and that whatever is a rodent is a vertebrate, the world of lawfully related facts about the properties and relations of objects counts as conceptually structured, according to this non-psychological conception of the conceptual.

The conceptual realism I attribute to Hegel is bimodal because the exclusions and inclusions that articulate conceptual contents are not only objective alethic modal relations of incompatibility and necessitation. They also have a subjective, deontic normative species. It is not impossible for a subject to be committed to one and the same creature being both a rodent and a reptile. It is just that the subject cannot be entitled to both those commitments. They are jointly inappropriate or normatively precluded. And it is possible for me to deny that what I take to be a reptile is a vertebrate, but I am nonetheless committed to that consequence, so that it is incorrect for me to adopt that understanding. I call the position "hylomorphic" conceptual realism because the idea is that, when things go right in cognition and action, the very same conceptual content takes both forms: an objective alethic modal form in the fact that the animal is a rodent and a subjective deontic normative form in the thought that the animal is a rodent. As Ludwig Wittgenstein says,

> When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this-is-so*.[8]

Keller understands all this, and does not, I think, so far object. But he wants to press the question whether I think that Hegel views the conceptual structure of the objective world as being "completely independent" of the discursive activity of at least possible subjects (*PK* 73). And it is indeed here that we part company. For I reject the question. I claim that this way of putting things simply does not cut fine enough. There are many sorts of possible dependence, and talk of independence

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7 John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1994, pp. 24-45.

8 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, transl. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers 1997, p. 44e, §95.

makes sense only if relativized to a parameter: the sense of dependence being denied.

In particular, the next phase beyond bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism that I articulate in unpacking the complex constellation of views that Hegel's idealism comprises is what I call "objective idealism" (*ST* 204-17). Here I make a crucial distinction. There is an important sense in which the objective and subjective forms of conceptual content are dependent on one another, and also an important sense in which the objective conceptual articulation of the world is not dependent on the conceptual articulation of discursive practice. The two forms of conceptual content are reciprocally sense-dependent on one another. But the objective form is not reference-dependent on the activity, or even the existence of knowing and acting subjects. This is to say, in more traditional, pre-Fregean terms, that there is a dependence in the order of understanding, but not in the order of being. One cannot understand the conceptual structure of the world, what it means to say that it consists of objects exhibiting properties and standing in relations to one another that are determinate just insofar as they are articulated by laws mandating their subjunctively robust exclusions and necessitations of one another except in a context in which one also understands the discursive activities of referring, predicating, asserting, and inferring. And also the other way around: one cannot understand those discursive activities without understanding what they imply about the world's conceptual structure. But there would still be, would still have been, lawfully related facts about objects and their properties even if there were, had never been, discursive practices of referring, predicating, asserting, and inferring. (And not the other way around; that is, discursive practices would not occur without the facts of the world.)

Keller understands that I want to make this distinction, but persists in formulating the issue in terms of whether I take Hegel to think that objective reality is completely independent of thought:

> It is unclear to me what an objective world is that is *completely independent* of subjects for whom it is objective and for whom the laws governing the world are objective. [*PK* 69, emphasis added]

> Brandom is committed to two mutually and fundamentally inconsistent conceptions of conceptual content. One notion of conceptual content, the pragmatist one, is *fundamentally dependent* on the role that content plays in the story of human beings, in their history and in what humans are doing. The other

conception is *completely independent* of any such roles and indeed of the very existence of thinking beings of all kinds…However, he still wishes to ground such practices in objects and concepts that are *completely independent* of human beings' practices. [*PK* 73, emphasis added]

> I would argue that Hegel rejects the intelligibility of the very idea that there might be a conceptual reality *completely independent* of and divorced from what humans do together. [*PK* 74, emphasis added]

I just reject the notion of complete independence in play in these complaints. I can only understand it as meaning "independent in all respects," that is, not dependent in any respect. But no one thinks that objective facts are independent of subjective goings-on in all respects. The objective world is different than it otherwise would be because there are subjects in it. The challenge is to articulate clearly the different respects in which the subjective and objective poles of the intentional nexus are independent (the kind of dependencies that do not hold) and the sense in which dependencies hold in one direction or the other. I claim, and hold that Hegel agrees, that the objective world would have been determinate and law-governed even if there never had been discursive creatures and their practices. Copper would still have conducted electricity, being an electron would have been incompatible with simultaneously being a proton, and physical objects would still have attracted one another proportionally to the product of their masses and inversely proportionate to the square of their distances. This should not be controversial. What is controversial, and needs to be carefully characterized, is the various senses in which objectivity is dependent on discursive practices.

On this topic, as far I understand him, and as far as it was possible for him to express his own views in the short compass of this brief review of mine, Keller is skeptical that I can be entitled to attribute to Hegel versions of the sense/reference distinction that would underwrite the sense-dependence without reference-dependence view I call "objective idealism" as well as doubting that even if it could be made out it would constitute a sufficiently robust characterization of the sense in which Hegel is an idealist. Further, he thinks that the third layer of my triadic dissection of Hegel's idealism, what I call "conceptual idealism," when properly understood, mandates an idealism incompatible with the reference-independence portion of objective idealism to which he objects. This is the arena and the terms in which I think productive debate

can proceed, once the imprecise and confusing rhetoric of "complete independence" has been put aside.

At the core both of the non-Fregean version of the sense/reference distinction that I attribute to Hegel and of the conceptual idealism that develops and clarifies both bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism and objective idealism is Hegel's radically original idea of recollective rationality, as invoked at the end of my previous comment. Keller longs for a nonperspectival answer to the question: is the conceptual structure of objective reality fixed (completely) independently of the activities of knowing and acting subjects? But it is of the essence of the conceptual idealist stratum of Hegel's absolute idealism, as I understand it, to deny that a univocal, nonperspectival answer can be given. From the retrospective temporal perspective, recollective rational reconstruction of the past record of attitudes actually adopted, and the repeated eruption of conflicts among them, turns that past into a comprehended history. It reveals within it a cumulative, expressively progressive trajectory that is the revelation of how it is objectively with things as they are, and have been all along, in themselves: the represented reality of which the attitudes that present them as appearances for consciousness are representations. From that point of view, objective reality is independent of and authoritative over subjects' attitudes towards it. (Indeed, it is a core premise of my reading of Hegel that the terms "independence" and "dependence," when applied on the subjective side of discursive activity should be understood normatively as ways of talking about relations of authority and responsibility.) The prospective temporal perspective, however, makes visible what Hegel takes to be a deep metaphysical feature of the relations between immediacy and conceptual mediation: that there is in principle no set of determinate empirical and practical concepts whose correct application to immediate particulars will not eventually lead to commitments that are incompatible according to the norms articulating the contents of those very concepts. Every expressively progressive way-station that recollective rationality achieves (to heal the wounds inflicted by past conflicts) also contains within it the seeds of its own destruction in the form of critical self-consciousness of its own inadequacy. The greatest challenge for and measure of the genius of the metaconceptual structure that Hegel offers is not only to hold onto the truth revealed by both these perspectives, but to recognize them as two mutually supporting sides of one truth.

Comments on John Russon: "Desire, Recognition, and Freedom in Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*"

Let me briefly address what I take to be the central critical claim of Russon's comments.[9] He says:

> In my view, Hegel's point in his phenomenological study of what he calls "freedom" is that there is a further dimension to human experience beyond that which is identified in his analysis of—and hence irreducible to—recognition. [*JR* 78]

> The recognition of one agent by another is always a matter of practice: an individual either does or does not do it—or, more exactly, one's practice does or does not measure up to the recognition of the other that is already implicit in one's practice. If mutual recognition is thus always a particular and contingent practice, however, the universal ("we") that is established in recognition is itself always a conditioned or relative universal. While every particular practice of reciprocal recognition may "intend" universality—in the phenomenological (Husserlian) sense of holding on the horizon as its own projected conditions of fulfilment—the communities of mutual recognition actually enacted will always fall far short of including all agents. If accomplished universality were the condition of freedom, then, freedom would be a dream, a mere "ought," as Hegel likes to say, rather than something actual (*wirklich*). [*JR* 79-80]

I agree that on my account mutual recognition is "always a particular and contingent practice." It depends on the attitudes practitioners actually adopt. And I agree that this means, "the communities of mutual recognition actually enacted will always fall far short of including all agents." Yet I disagree with the interpretation that real universality is not achieved and so remains only ideal, a mere "ought." On the contrary, the dependence on actual recognitive attitudes is what actualizes the universal—in the form of each recognitive community—and so makes genuine self-conscious individuals out of the recognizing-recognized particular practitioners whose attitudes institute their normative statuses.

And it is of the essence of the account of the source and nature of determinate conceptual contentfulness that I attribute to Hegel that it is precisely by incorporating the attitudes contingently

9 John Russon, "Desire, Recognition, and Freedom in Brandom, A Spirit of Trust," *Existenz* 15/1 (Spring 2020), 75-83. [Henceforth cited as *JR*]

adopted by concept-users in applying ground-level concepts in some concrete circumstances and not in others that the contents of those concepts are determined. That is the process by which conceptual norms are instituted by virtue of being applied. In the end, it is how universals can be understood as not being mere abstract forms, but inseparable from their concrete contents. So, I want to say, as Russon points to the consequence of my version of Hegel's story about how recognitive attitudes institute normative statuses, that is not a bothersome bug but a crucial feature of that story about the social institution of norms.

However, there is more to be said about the global recognitive community of all discursive creatures. That comes into play at a different, higher level, that is built on the plurality of local concrete communities of, what I call, "actually recognizing-recognized." It involves the sort of social recognitive self-consciousness and community institution that scholars require the tutelage of the *Phenomenology* first to conceive and then to achieve. Readers of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, but eventually, all discursive beings, once raised to the level of absolute self-consciousness — can come to see the recognitive commitments that are implicit in discursiveness as such, in making judgments and performing intentional actions at all. These discursive beings will then see how they have implicitly committed themselves to treating any and all others who are normative subjects in that sense, simply by themselves actually applying any concepts and actually adopting any recognitive attitudes. By adopting those implicit recognitive attitudes, discursive beings will have actualized universal freedom. That will be a transformation and transition beyond modernity as momentous as that from traditional forms of life to modern ones, which is recollected in the *Phenomenology*. The alienation of modernity will be overcome once the postmodern recollective form of recognition as confession and forgiveness is achieved. A central manifestation of that alienation is precisely in not seeing how commitment to universal recognition is implicit in, rather than in conflict with, the dependence of normative statuses, including that of community membership, on what recognitive attitudes people actually adopt toward one another.

Russon offers as his most serious criticism of my reading of the *Phenomenology* that it makes nothing of the fact that

humans have the experience of recognizing truths, the

meaning of which by definition exceeds any possible experience. This is what Harris calls the "eternal standpoint." [*JR* 80]

I do not really understand this. I would say that the meaning of every episode of *Erfahrung* depends on and points to things outside of itself — for instance, experiences that are materially incompatible with each other. And Hegel does think that sensuous immediacy overflows any particular conceptualization of it — though he understands this not in terms of the inexhaustibility of the deliverances of sense by empirical judgments, as it is seen by Kant and the empiricists, but rather in terms of the necessary instability of any set of determinate empirical and practical concepts, where the inevitability of their application leads to the experience of error and failure. This instability is manifest in the forward-looking perspective from which each recollective repair shows up as fragile, temporary, and doomed to erupt into internal self-contradiction. But I suspect that Russon, following H. S. Harris, means something altogether loftier by the dimension of freedom as direction toward "the 'unconditioned' or the 'absolute'" (*JR* 79) that he finds missing in my reading. He is right. For better or for worse, such a notion plays no role in my understanding of Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology*.

Comments on Sebastian Stein: "Truth and Its Appearance — A Comment on Robert Brandom's *A Spirit of Trust*"

Stein epitomizes his complaint like this:

Since *Geist*'s overarching unity is grounding the entire project of the *Phenomenology* and the relationship between consciousness and its world, it is *Geist* that is ultimately required for an explanation of why mutual recognition occurs, why trust is ever warranted, why recognitive and ascriptive behavior are successful, and why education and self-reconciliation through art, religion, and philosophy succeed. Against Brandom's reading, it is thus the fundamentality of *Geist* that establishes that mutual recognition by particular subjects is not the foundation of a successful ethical and religious community.[10]

There is a certain justice to the claim that I privilege the point of view of individual consciousness and

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[10] Sebastian Stein, "Truth and its Appearance: A Comment on Robert Brandom's *A Spirit of Trust*," *Existenz* 15/1 (Spring 2020), 84-87, here p. 85.

self-consciousness in telling the story that arrives at the even-handed reciprocal dependence of *Geist* and individuals. But so does Hegel. I do so, because I am following him in his expository strategy. He, after all, begins with the Consciousness chapters, which address cognition from the point of view of individual knowers. As one advances into the Self-Consciousness chapters, the essentially social character of those self-conscious individuals comes into view. It is not until the Spirit chapter that *Geist* itself comes on the scene, for the readers, the phenomenological consciousness whose education Hegel is conducting, and for the phenomenal consciousness whose progress to full self-consciousness—of itself as the certainty whose truth is the whole of *Geist*—one is following.

Hegel's complaint about others is always *Einseitigkeit*: one-sidedness. That is what Stein accuses me of, and what I in turn diagnose as his mistake in so objecting. Everything he says about *Geist* is correct—except for his claim that the descriptions of the role of *Geist* that he properly rehearses are incompatible with the recognitive story I tell. *Geist* is indeed what self-conscious subjects truly are. It is their truth. And what they are is constituted by their recognizing one another. That is their certainty. Hegel's Introduction puts one on notice that he wants the reader to understand self-consciousness' truth and its certainty as aspects of one unitary phenomenon. In one sense, *Geist* is prior to the recognized and recognizing individuals: there is always already an up-and-running recognitive community into which each individual enters. The particular living organism becomes a normative subject by partaking in that community, in *Geist*. But as the sum total of norm-governed activities and institutions, *Geist* is also produced by what those individuals do, by their recognitive attitudes toward one another. Apart from such attitudes, there is no *Geist*. This reciprocal dependence is just what one should expect Hegel to claim.

In a slogan of central importance to me, Hegel writes—in a phrase so nice, he uses it twice— that *Sprache ist das Dasein von Geist*, that is, language is the concrete existence of *Geist* (*PG* 395 §652; 405 §666). And language is the medium of recognition. In one sense, it is prior to individual speakers and their actual utterances, attitudes, and practices. For it is by coming into a community of speakers that young humans are acculturated and become self-conscious normative subjects: that is, selves. On the other hand, it is the practices, practical attitudes, and actual performances of individual speakers that institute discursive norms, determine conceptual contents, confer conceptual content on expressions by applying them and assessing the applications of others in concrete circumstances. Langue and parole stand in relations of reciprocal presupposition that are the model for the relations of reciprocal presupposition between *Geist* and the actual recognitive attitudes of discursive practitioners who become what they are by instituting it.

Hegel takes up Kant's picture of human beings as creatures who live, and move, and have their being in what is an essentially normative realm, because and insofar as it is an essentially discursive realm. And Hegel is the poet and the prophet of that normative discursive realm, *Geist*, as irreducibly socially and (so) historically articulated. So he puts great emphasis on his insight into how the shared culture is prior to one's individual self-consciousness. But he is also a champion of the insight gained in the Enlightenment that norms are ultimately the products of practical normative attitudes—that there are no commitments or entitlements, no responsibility or authority, apart from one's normative attitudes of attributing those statuses, one's practices of taking or treating the other as responsible or authoritative.

One of Hegel's triumphs is the way he uses language, the medium of culture, to articulate the reconciliation of these different perspectives about self-conscious individual normative subjects: by means of *Anerkennung* from below, from particular desiring organisms up to universality in the form of recognitive communities, and by means of *Bildung* from above; from universality as *Geist*, by acculturation, to confer normative statuses on those particular organisms by their participation in communal discursive practices. The model of language shows how constraint by discursive norms, far from being incompatible with freedom can show up as the very form of positive, expressive freedom. For it makes it possible for each person to say things no one has ever said before, to consider alternatives and to formulate plans that are radically novel, and thereby to shape and transform the very norms into which one was acculturated. That process of practically determining the contents of discursive norms going forward is the motor driving the history of *Geist*—shaping its self-consciousness, which is our human self-consciousness.