



## Desire, Recognition, and Freedom in Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*

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**Abstract:** The core of Robert Brandom's interpretation of Hegel in *A Spirit of Trust* is his detailed analysis of Hegel's dialectic of "recognition" (*Anerkennung*). I argue that, with this analysis, Brandom has effectively demonstrated the compelling character of Hegel's argument. However, I criticize Brandom's larger interpretation of Hegel for its failure to recognize the distinctive nature of what Hegel calls "the Freedom of Self-Consciousness." This, I argue, is closely aligned with the distinctive nature of reason (*Vernunft*), which is central to the experience of agency, but the weight of which is under-appreciated in Brandom's account of it.

**Keywords:** Brandom, Robert; Hegel, Georg W. F.; Kant, Immanuel; *Phenomenology of Spirit*; self-consciousness; reason; recognition; agency.

In everyday affairs, people commonly and easily say things such as, "Look at that thing over there," "Ok, ok, I understand," "You really should do that," and so on. And one would say these things, typically, with a world-centered attitude, that is, these expressions are mostly non-reflective, practical responses to one's situation, and one is generally not worrying about "employing concepts" when speaking. G. W. F. Hegel, on the contrary, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, investigates quite rigorously just what one is doing when using terms such as "thing," "understand," "you," or "should."<sup>1</sup> His studies document exactly how these concepts are responsive to the terms in which human experience actually unfolds,

and, in so doing, they show that, although these concepts are capable of coherent coordination, one typically puts on display various forms of dishonesty when using them, a cognitive dishonesty at the level of conceptual consistency that often underpins a moral dishonesty in one's intersubjective comportment.

In *A Spirit of Trust*, Robert Brandom attempts to lay out the precise conceptual parameters of many of Hegel's major demonstrations.<sup>2</sup> Hegel is, of course,

<sup>1</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, eds. Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont, Hamburg, DE: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1988. In English, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. Arnold V. Miller, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977. References to this work will be given to the page and paragraph number of the English translation (*PS*) followed by the pagination of the German text (*PG*).

<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019. [Henceforth cited as *ST*] Defining the project of this book, Brandom writes: "This book presents a rational reconstruction of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" (*ST* 1); and, "The defining subject that serves as both lens and filter for the present account is conceptual content" (*ST* 2). See *ST* 3-5 on the expressive understanding of concepts in Hegel and Kant, and *ST* 6-7 on the related notion of *Erfahrung* (experience) in Hegel; on Brandom's understanding of this expressivism see also *ST* 224-31.

notoriously compact in his presentation, requiring the reader to "do the math," so to speak, moving at lightning speed from premise to conclusion as he analyzes, in roughly 500 pages, virtually every facet of human experience, from the temporal flow of sensuous immediacy through the power dynamics of personal and interpersonal life to the history of five millennia of human political and religious life. Brandom's 800-page study takes the time to "do the math," working painstakingly through the logical and experiential intricacies that are implicit in many of Hegel's most important analyses to demonstrate that Hegel has, indeed, captured the dynamism that is distinctive and definitive of human agency.

Brandom's interpretation of a number of Hegel's core arguments has been criticized by some of the best contemporary interpreters of Hegel, especially focusing on his understanding of Hegel's overall philosophical project and his understanding of Hegel's epistemology.<sup>3</sup> My focus, instead, will be on Brandom's thematizing of the role and importance of what Hegel calls *Anerkennung* (recognition) in which context I think Brandom's analysis is helpfully illuminating. Hegel explicitly discusses recognition in only a few paragraphs of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—basically, the nineteen paragraphs that make up Part A, "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage," of Chapter IV, "The Truth of Self-Certainty"—but it is the central subject of the 220 pages that make up Part Two, "Normative Pragmatics," of Brandom's *A Spirit of Trust*, and the essential context for the whole of his study. Brandom offers what one might call a naturalistic reconstruction of Hegel's argument, documenting what is at play when an agent imputes agency to another, which means when a particular kind of organism—a particular kind of natural body—engages in a material practice that involves meaningfully responding to another body as a being that itself imputes agency to others. In his argument, Brandom carefully builds up the constitutive layers of this experience, ultimately to vindicate Hegel's

claim that such interpersonal recognition is always implicitly defined by a demand for reciprocity, with the consequence that one's behavior contradicts its own norm when one practices unequal recognition. I will first identify some of the helpful dimensions of Brandom's analysis of desire and recognition, before turning to a criticism of his account, which revolves around the notion of freedom. In what follows I argue that, although Brandom has correctly identified many parameters that are necessary conditions for ascribing agency to one another, his account is insufficient for it fails to recognize a crucial dimension of freedom that is integral to agency yet exceeds the terms of intersubjective recognition.

### The Ascription of Desire and Mutual Recognition

Brandom's discussion of Hegel's chapter on self-consciousness begins, as does Hegel's chapter, by focusing on desire. Brandom identifies what he calls the "triadic structure of orectic awareness (TSOA)," by which he means that desire involves a desiring "attitude" that is directed toward a potential means for fulfilling one's desire (a "significance") that is realized through a "responsive activity" (ST 248). For example, in hunger, there will be an activity of eating food, and it will be experienced as fulfilling (or failing to fulfill). This structuring is important as it allows one to recognize what is distinctive of the desire for recognition that Hegel identifies as being distinctive of explicitly self-conscious beings. The desire to be recognized has an object just as hunger has an object, but unlike the article seen as food toward which the hungry animal directs its action, the object to which one who desires recognition directs one's action is one that itself desires; in other words, for the desire for recognition, the relevant "significance" is an attitude. And, moreover, it desires that that other desiring being precisely desire itself (the first) as itself a desiring being. Brandom's point is that being a (self-consciousness) being that is desiring to be recognized, then, inherently involves ascribing an attitude to another, (indeed, precisely ascribing to the other the TSOA itself). And indeed, more specifically, it involves ascribing to that other the same attitude of ascribing attitudes, for it wants that other to ascribe to itself (the first) the attitude of ascribing attitudes (ST 248-50).

This analysis is accurate and helpful, and it shows well the reflexive or reciprocal character of the

<sup>3</sup> For the critique of Brandom's interpretation of Hegel's epistemology, see Stephen Houlgate, "Review: A Spirit of Trust," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (April 14, 2020), <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/a-spirit-of-trust-a-reading-of-hegels-phenomenology/>, accessed July 14, 2021. For the critique of his overall interpretation of Hegel's project, see Terry Pinkard, "Book review A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology," *Mind* 129/515 (July 2020), 990-999.

desire for recognition (ST 250-8). It thus illuminates a central aspect of the distinctive logic that is involved in the experience of self-consciousness as a desire for recognition, demonstrating why, more than the simple TSOA, it must be understood as a reflected version of desire. And this intrinsic structure of the desire for recognition (what it is in itself) clarifies why one's own sense of what one is doing (what one's attitude is for itself) can fail to live up to itself, for one can act in a way that does not recognize the commitments intrinsic to one's attitude. Brandom has here identified a necessary structure of human self-experience, and demonstrated how the reciprocal ascription of agency is integral to the very logic of self-consciousness.

Brandom then builds on this logic of ascription of attitudes to analyze *Anerkennung*, that is, the "dialectic of recognition" (ST 262-312). What is particularly helpful in his analysis is the explicit sorting out of a series of paired terms: first, he distinguishes normative attitudes from normative statuses; then, within normative attitudes he distinguishes attributing from acknowledging, and furthermore, within normative statuses he distinguishes responsibility from authority (ST 262-9). His analysis of the essential pairing of these practices shows that one's experience evinces an implicit commitment to reciprocity of recognition. For example, authority is a status, and it is a status that commands certain forms of response, such as obedience. One lives from such a status, exercising one's power over one's subordinates. The status itself, however, is dependent upon practical attitudes that ascribe it to the agent. The status can be exercised in a way that does or does not reflect its dependence upon such attitudes; and, indeed, such attitudes of ascription can be enacted with or without explicit awareness that they are being enacted. Indeed, it is common to act as if status were naturally given, or as if one were sufficient on one's own to determine one's status, but these are mystifications of the intersubjective practices in which status is truly rooted; in contrast to this, Brandom writes,

if we can fully understand in broadly naturalistic terms practices of taking or treating each other as responsible and authoritative, practices of adopting normative attitudes, the view is, there is nothing left to be mystified about regarding the normative statuses we thereby attribute and acknowledge. [ST 264]

The authority intrinsic to any status is enacted responsibly when it reflects an honest recognition of the intersubjective attitudes upon which it depends,

and Brandom sorts out logically how adequate or inadequate forms of such responsibility can be played out both between individuals and within social groups.<sup>4</sup>

I believe Brandom has successfully clarified, some of the core logic intrinsic to Hegel's argument that the very nature of self-conscious desire (what it is "in itself") implies intrinsically a norm of reciprocity, and thus that self-conscious, human nature is properly realized only in practices of reciprocal recognition. This I consider to be a powerful and worthy accomplishment, and arguably warrants the attention of scholars of Hegel and of philosophers more broadly.

However, Brandom makes a further claim that I think is mistaken. Although the claim itself is a scholarly, textual matter, nonetheless it reflects, I believe, a matter of deeper philosophical significance. Brandom maintains that it is practices of reciprocal recognition that are what Hegel means by *Freiheit* (freedom); he writes,

"Freedom" is Hegel's term for the symmetrical cognitive constellation that integrates immediacy, as the actuality of attitudes, with their social mediation, through the requirement of suitable complementation of attitudes for their institutional authority. [ST 285]

Or, again,

This constitutive constellation of reciprocal authority and responsibility, normative independence and dependence, Hegel calls "freedom." [ST 295]

Brandom is here responding to the shift in Hegel's language from Chapter IV, Part A, "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage" to Chapter IV, Part B, "Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness," and assimilating this to the fact that, as he has shown, Part A demonstrates that self-consciousness is only properly realized in situations of reciprocal recognition.<sup>5</sup> It is here that I have

<sup>4</sup> The metaphysical error Hegel identifies in his concept of Mastery (*Herrschaft*) that construes its independence as unmediated by dependence is addressed at ST 275-7; the detailed working out of the structure of responsibility in its interpersonal and social forms is discussed at ST 277-98.

<sup>5</sup> Brandom wrongly claims that Hegel uses the terms *Unabhängigkeit* and *Abhängigkeit* for "independence" and "dependence" (ST 266). Hegel's terms are *Selbstständigkeit* and *Unselbstständigkeit*.

a challenge to Brandom's interpretation of Hegel and, correspondingly, with his analysis of human experience, for, 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. To make this point, I will first revisit Hegel's description of desire.

### Freedom and Reason

Both Kant and Hegel are distinctively and definitively focused on the human beings' ability—to deal with unconditioned forms of meaning.<sup>6</sup> In other words, humans ask questions pertaining to an "as such" or "in itself." Most famously, this is the hallmark of the distinctive capacity of reason. Kant says as much:

the principle peculiar to reason in general, in its logical employment, is:—to find for the conditioned knowledge obtained through the understanding the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to completion. [CPuR 306, A307/B364]

Both Kant and Hegel study rigorously the conditions for the possibility of such rational experience; in other words, their phenomenological descriptions show precisely what is intrinsically involved in the experience of reason and thus why it cannot genuinely be confused or conflated with various other forms of experience. The important point to be retained here is that the ability to engage with an unconditioned or absolute significance should not be taken for granted in one's analysis, but it needs to be recognized and explained as such.

Now the very thesis of the attitude of self-consciousness as desire—the definitive sense of this attitude as analyzed by Hegel—is that it is the unconditional source of meaning. The being that is for itself desiring is the being that posits itself—its desire or itself as desire—as what is universally and necessarily the truth of any and all determinacy; as Hegel writes, describing the attitude of desire,

Certain of the nothingness of this other, it [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. [PS 109 §174; PG 125]

<sup>6</sup> For instance, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. Kemp Smith, New York, NY: Palgrave 2003, p. 472, A546-7/B574-5. [Henceforth cited as CPuR]

His more precise description of the logical structure of this attitude brings out clearly the unconditional significance intrinsic to this attitude:

Self-consciousness is, to begin with, simple being-for-self [*einfaches Fürsichsein*], self-equal through the exclusion from itself of everything [other]. For it, its essence and absolute object [*absoluter Gegenstand*] is "I"; and in this immediacy, or in this...being, of its being-for-self, it is [a *single*] [*Einzelnes*]. What is "other" for it is an unessential, negatively characterized object. [PS 113, §186; PG 129-30]

As Hegel's language makes clear, the sense of self that is intrinsic to this attitude is one of simplicity ("simple being-for-self") and negative universality ("exclusion...of everything"); indeed, as Hegel writes, "I" is its absolute object. Intrinsic to the self-conscious experience of desire, then, is the significance of "I versus other"—an absolute distinction; in other words, self-consciousness as desire constitutively interprets whatever specific empirical conditions it encounters in terms of the absolute opposition of self ("I") and other. The continuation of the above quotation from Hegel's text underlines the essentiality of this significance:

But the "other" is also a self-consciousness; one individual is confronted by another individual. As thus immediately occurring they are for one another in this way common objects; *independent* shapes, consciousness sunk in the being...of life, for the object has here its being determined as "life"—which for one another have not yet accomplished the movement of absolute abstraction [*absoluter Abstraktion*], of rooting-out all immediate being, and of being merely the purely negative being [*rein negative Sein*] of self-identical consciousness; in other words, they have not as yet exposed themselves to each other in the form of pure being-for-self [*reines Fürsichsein*], or as self-consciousness. Each is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other.<sup>7</sup> [PS 113, §186; PG 130]

<sup>7</sup> Miller's translation of this passage reads: "But the 'other' is also a self-consciousness; one individual is confronted by another individual. Appearing thus immediately on the scene, they are for one another like ordinary objects, *independent* shapes, individuals submerged in the being...of *Life*—for the object in its immediacy is here determined as *Life*. They are, *for each other*, shapes of consciousness which have not yet accomplished the movement of absolute abstraction, of rooting-out all immediate being, and of being merely the purely negative being of self-identical consciousness; in other words, they have not as yet exposed themselves to each other in the form of pure

It is the very meaning of the attitude of self-consciousness as desire to accomplish the absolute abstraction, and thus to be pure [*rein*] being-for-self, and precisely what is at issue here is whether each one will recognize that precise feature about the other one. To recognize this disposition about the other being—the other desire—is precisely to posit the truth of the object it encounters (*qua* object) as an infinite, non-empirical source, of which the determinacies are the "show" (*Schein*) or appearance. It operates, that is, at the very least, within the terms of what Hegel calls the logic of essence or what Kant called the dynamical categories or categories of existence. Only a being that can understand can do this. And, inasmuch as the essence thus recognized is infinite and unconditioned, only a rational being could make this recognition; indeed, the recognition of such a self-determining being is a matter of what Hegel calls the logic of the concept.

What this interpretation shows is that, intrinsic to the attitude of self-consciousness as desire that Brandom is analyzing is its constitutive relationship to the significance of "the unconditioned" or "the absolute." In my view, though, Brandom takes this meaning as given, rather than thematizing it in his analysis of the fine structure of desire and recognition. This taking for granted is displayed, for example, when Brandom discusses the Japanese code of Bushido in order to illuminate Hegel's analysis of the struggle to the death. Brandom writes, "to be samurai was to identify oneself with that ideal code of conduct" (*ST* 238); this is surely correct, but the unexplained issue in this context is what must be constitutive of an agent such that it can engage with ideals. It is precisely this significance, I contend, that is the subject of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Section B, Chapter IV B, "Freedom of Self-Consciousness."

Brandom generally ignores this section of Hegel's study and, when he does refer to it, his interpretation echoes Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of stoicism, skepticism, and unhappy consciousness as "slave ideologies." Brandom writes that these are the forms "of the ideology of Mastery that become available to the subordinates in traditional recognitively asymmetrical constellations of power and normativity" (*ST* 347).

Like many other contemporary Hegel scholars, I have argued against Kojève's interpretation for I believe he fails to grasp both the structure of Hegel's argument and to appreciate the experiential

weight of the phenomena Hegel is studying in this section. Rather I am much more sympathetic to the interpretive path of Jean Hyppolite, who follows Jean Wahl in identifying "unhappy consciousness" as the decisive figure for Hegel's interpretation of self-consciousness. In this context, Joseph Flay justifiably remarks, "Kojève's influence is unfortunate, for seldom has more violence been done by a commentator to the original."<sup>8</sup> Scholarly matters of textual interpretation aside, this issue is important for it is a matter (a) of the accurate description of the form experience takes and hence an *explanandum*, and, consequently, (b) crucial to determining what is—and what is not—satisfactory as the *explanans*. Basically, I believe, these forms of experience make apparent an experience of meaning that is integral to—indeed, definitive of—agency and yet is neither reducible to nor explicable in terms of recognition.

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

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph C. Flay, *Hegel's Quest for Certainty*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1985, p. 299. As has been noticed by other reviewers, one of the most striking weaknesses of Brandom's appropriation of Hegel is that it ignores the vast learning that already exists about Hegel's philosophy. Indeed, with the exception of a few and rather old works by his teachers and friends, there are virtually no works of scholarship on Hegel cited or otherwise engaged with in *A Spirit of Trust*. While it is no doubt laudable that Brandom tries to figure things out for himself, the product ends up being only the expression of the bright ideas of a single individual, rather than a marshalling of the collective work of generations to understand these important issues. In response, Brandom claims that his concern is with the ideas, not with historical textual interpretation; but in that case he seems to want to have his cake and eat it too inasmuch as he regularly invokes his interpretations of the history of philosophy—which he treats as facts, rather than interpretations—as essential elements of his argument.

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being-for-self, or as self-consciousness. Each is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other."

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*). In fact, however, freedom is a phenomenon and what Hegel calls stoicism, skepticism, and unhappy consciousness are its different forms of realization even in a world in which universal, reciprocal recognition does not (and, I believe, in principle cannot) exist. Hence, I maintain, one must not conflate the idiomatic use of the word "freedom" in political contexts (that is, in the contexts of *Recht*) with its use in ontological contexts, when one analyzes agency or, indeed, morality. Indeed, this distinction between freedom as an ontological and as a practical notion is already presented by Kant (*CPuR* 464-5, A533-4/B561-2).

To my mind, H. S. Harris correctly captures the fundamental meaning of "freedom" in Hegel's thought. He writes that what Hegel addresses is

how there can be (as there evidently is) an "eternal"... standpoint within time. We *know* intuitively that this "absolute" standpoint exists.<sup>9</sup>

Agents have the experience of recognizing other agents, and it is the practical and epistemic conditions implied by the fact of this experience that Hegel, and also Brandom, articulate in the study of the independence and dependence of self-consciousness. As I have also noted, though, in my remarks about reason, 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—and it is the "fine structure" of this experience that Hegel studies in the aforementioned section "Freedom of Self-Consciousness" (and, I maintain, in the subsequent chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*).<sup>10</sup>

When making moral or mathematical claims, for example, it is integral to the meaning of these claims that they apply infinitely—thus beyond the limits of one's own, finite experience—and this is in part what it means that one experiences these claims as necessary.

<sup>9</sup> H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder, Volume I: The Pilgrimage of Reason*, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett 1997, p 14.

<sup>10</sup> John Russon, *Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel's Science of Experience*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 2016, pp. 126-42. [Henceforth cited as *IP*]

As Kant and René Descartes respectively showed, the condition for one's experience of the necessity of these universal claims is freedom. What is crucial here is that one does have this experience of necessity, and that means one's freedom is attested to oneself whether or not others acknowledge it. That is why the stoicism of Epictetus, for example, can be a phenomenon of freedom: even though Epictetus himself was a slave, that is, his equality in principle with all others was not recognized in practice, he nonetheless has his own status as irreducible to how others take him attested for himself. Skepticism and what Hegel calls "Unhappy Consciousness" are, as I understand them, further developments within this non-recognitive, non-interpersonal domain of autonomy.

Skepticism recognizes the fundamental fact that the natural world appears to an experiencing subject, and is, as such, a phenomenon; but inasmuch as it is a phenomenon, the natural world is insufficient to account for the experience of it, for it would beg the question to explain the cause by its effect. Unhappy Consciousness is Hegel's name for the experience one has, within the parameters of this skeptical recognition of the irreducible autonomy of experience as such, of compelling imperatives—imperatives that come not from the external reality of the natural world but from within one's experience of subjectivity itself. To have mathematical experience is to recognize the imperative, which is intrinsic to one's free subjectivity, that, for example, one hold equals to the equal. This mathematical imperative, like the categorical imperative of morality, is, however, not deducible from anything empirical—it is, on the contrary, a norm to which the empirical is held; nor, strictly speaking, is it realizable empirically, inasmuch as there are ultimately no unambiguous empirical examples of equality. In other words, the mathematical ideal, or imperative, of equality is an absolute or unequivocal meaning—the "eternal" standpoint to which Harris refers—that informs an always equivocal, inherently relative experience. It is thus a form of experience that in principle is irreducible to, and hence inexplicable by, the terms of empirical or natural life. This, I believe, is the meaning of *Freiheit* (freedom) in Hegel's phenomenology: it is precisely the fact, definitive of our human experience—of our human reality—that the form one's experience takes can never be adequately explained "from the ground up" in terms of one's empirical participation in nature or even one's engagement with other self-consciousnesses.

This is relevant to Brandom's account, for this ability to engage with unconditional meanings—meanings that define but cannot be derived from empirical life—is integral to being an agent. This means both that one must oneself have this capacity in order to be an agent but also that one must ascribe this capacity to another if one is to recognize that other as an agent. Integral to the constitutive terms of agency, then, and thus integral to the constitutive terms of reciprocal recognition, is the imperative that one recognize another as being precisely not reducible to the terms of recognition but, on the contrary, as being in principle defined by a kind of autonomy that exceeds any natural and social terms.

Contrary, then, to Brandom's claim that Hegel's model of recognitive self-consciousness is the corrective *Aufhebung* of Kant's conception of moral autonomy, I believe that Hegel demonstrates precisely that the dialectic of recognition points to its own *Aufhebung* in morality.<sup>11</sup> However, before explaining more exactly how I understand that relationship, I need first to discuss how, I believe, Brandom significantly misrepresents Kant.

Brandom often refers to "Kantian autonomy"; it is the central subject of sections II and III of Chapter 9 (*ST* 269-85). In a way that is characteristic of his interpretation, Brandom writes,

Kant's construal of normativity in terms of autonomy is at base the idea that rational beings can *make* themselves responsible (institute a normative stance) just by *taking* themselves to be responsible (adopting an attitude). [*ST* 269]

For clarification, Brandom turns to the umpire in a baseball game who says, "Till I calls 'em, they ain't"; the umpire, in other words, who "asserts the authority of his attitudes to institute the statuses that are their objects," that is, "he takes his calls to be *constitutive* of whether the pitches they classify actually are strikes or balls" (*ST* 270). Brandom construes the umpire's attitude as the extreme form of the basic idea of modernity, of which Kant's position is "the final, most enlightened" form (*ST* 273). This, I believe, is a significant misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Kant's understanding of autonomy.

<sup>11</sup> Brandom claims that the autonomous self as construed by Kant is superseded by the social relationship of recognition as construed by Hegel (*ST* 262, 269, 277-80).

The fundamental phenomenon recognized by Kant is command.<sup>12</sup> Autonomy, as Kant understands it, is not a matter of deciding something for oneself, but is a matter of finding oneself commanded: the command is intrinsic to one's very experience of "I." It is for that reason that, though one is subject to the command, one is nonetheless autonomous—precisely free—for it is not a command that has come from someone or something else, from which one could therefore distance oneself. Although this is, thus, a matter of autonomy, precisely what it reveals is that "I"—the "auto" of autonomy—is equivocal: the "I" as which I experience myself—the empirical I—must be distinguished from a non-empirical I that is experienced only in and as its products—in and as its commands. The "I" that I live—the empirical I—is always intrinsically defined by a call, an intrinsic normativity, to which it answers but of which it cannot claim authorship. In its very nature, then, the I is divided: it finds itself answering to nothing other than itself, and yet it cannot occupy the position of generating those commands (*PS* 126-8, 139, §§206-7, 210, 231; *PG* 143-4, 145-6, 157). Brandom's interpretation of Kant, on the contrary, ignores the equivocity that is ontologically intrinsic to the concept of "I"—the defining characteristic of a rational being—and thus conflates moral autonomy, which Hegel identifies as a form of reason (*Vernunft*) with stoicism. Indeed, this constitutes an error that Hegel flags in his explanation of why modernity (*Kultur*) should not be confused with the Roman world of "legal status."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon is the subject of Hegel's section entitled, "Reason as Lawgiver," (*PS* 252-6, §§419-28; *PG* 277-81). In this section, Hegel shows (negatively) the insufficiency of reason understood abstractly (that is, independently of contingent relations of social recognition) to account for morality; his parallel discussion in "Spirit certain of itself. Morality" (*PS* 364-409, §§596-671; *PG* 394-442) works out (positively) the relationship between the unconditional imperatives of moral reason and the conditioned terms of social recognition. This latter point is addressed by Shannon Hoff, *The Laws of the Spirit: A Hegelian Theory of Justice*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 2014, Chapter 5.

<sup>13</sup> *PS* 298, §489; *PG* 324: "Although here the self knows itself as this self, yet its actuality consists solely in the setting-aside of its natural self"; and "The self knows itself as actual only as a transcended self" (*PS* 299, §491; *PG* 326).

Brandom's defense of the ultimacy of relations of recognition is correct insofar as it will always be the case that the terms of one's self-interpretation will be socially defined; in other words, the culture of recognition in which one lives will always set the parameters for how one makes sense of things. But although this is necessary, it is not sufficient to account for the meanings of one's world. Along with this horizontal axis, as it were, stretching from person to person, one must also recognize a vertical axis, stretching from one's empirical ego to whatever the meaning-giving powers are that are intrinsic to one's subjectivity. It is always true that the "I" that answers to those intrinsic imperatives is already constituted by relationships of recognition, and thus, even as one answers to them privately, one nonetheless stands in an interpretive relationship to this, one's own self in a manner that is intersubjective. As an individual subject, one is thus always defined by the intersection of reason (in the rich sense Hegel gives to the term *Vernunft*) and recognition, and thus by the imperative that the conditioned terms of recognition need to be made to accommodate the unconditional demands of reason. And this is ultimately the point of Hegel's analysis of conscience, the conclusion of which, regarding confession and forgiveness, is the capstone of Brandom's account of recognition (ST 1-2, 30-1, 583-635, 744-57).

I agree with Brandom that the discussion of confession and forgiveness at the end of Section (BB.) Spirit is effectively "the punchline of the *Phenomenology*" (ST 615). Brandom expresses this punchline in these terms:

semantic self-consciousness, awareness of the transcendental conditions of the intelligibility of determinately contentful attitudes, of thinking, believing, meaning, or intending anything, consists in explicitly acknowledging an always-already implicit commitment to adopt generous cognitive attitudes of reciprocal confession and recollective forgiveness. [ST 615]

I think Brandom's account of Hegel's point here is correct as far as it goes, but also that it does not go far enough. The discussion of confession and forgiveness is the conclusion of Hegel's study of the phenomenon of conscience (*das Gewissen*), which is itself the fullest development of morality or, in Hegel's more precise language, it is "spirit that is certain of itself"

(*der sich seiner selbst gewisse Geist*).<sup>14</sup> As a "self-certain" spirit one experiences oneself to be able—indeed, to be commanded—personally to intervene in a specific circumstance on the basis of one's direct, individual insight into what the good commands: "This self of conscience...is directly aware of itself as absolute truth and being" (PS 384, §633; PG 416). This is the very meaning of conscience—to have a sense of personal insight into what is to be done—and this attitude is the culminating shape of spirit. What Hegel's analysis shows—and what Brandom recognizes—is that the internal demands of the attitude of conscience require ultimately that, as a conscientious agent, one recognize the limited condition one's own perspective—that is, the limitations that preclude one in principle from being an adequate interpreter of the unconditioned good—while also recognizing the legitimacy of the conscientious perspectives of others who do not recognize the truth of one's own perspective. It is these recognitions that are accomplished in the dialogue of confession and forgiveness, a dialogue that is precisely one in which the agents must recognize each other as conscientious, that is, as each one answering to an unconditional imperative that is not defined by but always necessarily interpreted by the terms of recognition. Thus, the punchline of the *Phenomenology*, as I understand it, is the need to reconcile the experience of recognition and the experience of freedom.

### Coda: The History of Spirit

Finally, my challenge to Brandom's interpretation of freedom in terms of recognition also leads me to challenge one more claim in *A Spirit of Trust*; it is too big a portion of Brandom's book for me to engage with in detail, yet based on what I have said about freedom above, I am able to provide a simple, summary statement. Brandom's interpretation centrally revolves around a distinction between the modern and the traditional interpretation of normativity that he imputes to Hegel (ST 29-31, 262-4, 469-77). I believe Brandom is right to assert that there is such a distinction and that he is also right in asserting that Hegel's argument pivots

<sup>14</sup> The structure of Hegel's text makes it clear that this is the third and concluding form of *Geist*, and it is precisely not a further development of social and political institutions, which were definitive of the first two forms. Brandom, however, understands "the envisaged third phase of *Geist*," of which Hegel is a "prophet," to be a further society, not yet realized (ST 31, 470).



around it, but my understanding of the distinction differs from his (*IP* 162-75). Brandom, relying on the notion of recognition as *explanans*, interprets ancient or traditional culture as recognizing the commanding authority of norms without acknowledging the weight of the (subordinate) perspective that attributes authority to those norms and he interprets modern culture as recognizing the authoritative power of (individualistic) practices of positing norms without sufficiently acknowledging the sense in which that individuality is itself dependent upon the recognition of norms (*ST* 263). I think that Brandom's point is

fine as far as it goes, but I believe Hegel's analysis depends as much or more on the notion of freedom as *explanans*, and his point, I think, is that modern culture has recognized, not that individuals "make" norms (Brandom's verb, *ST* 264), but that individuals are the kind of beings for whom absolute norms are meaningful and compelling. The failing of ancient culture, I believe, is that it (like Brandom) does not recognize the irreducible autonomy of free self-consciousness, whereas the failing of modern culture, I believe, is that it does not recognize the essentiality of recognition.