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Spirit's Embeddedness in Nature: Hegel's Decentring of Self-Legislation

Heikki Ikäheimo

Abstract

A recently widely accepted view has it that the nature-spirit distinction in Hegel is to be understood as a distinction between a space or realm that is not normative, or does not involve norms, and one that is or does. Notwithstanding the merits of this view, it has tended to create a separation between nature and spirit which is both philosophically troubling and difficult to reconcile with the picture of Hegel as the arch enemy of abstract or unreconciled dualisms. In this paper I aim to show that the defining phenomenon for this view—collective self-government by norms—is on Hegel's account both dependent on living nature that involves normativity broadly conceived all the way down and also subject to the ultimate normative or evaluative principle of Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit —concrete freedom—the essence of spirit according to him. This is to say that for Hegel the normativity of collectively administered norms is neither the most basic nor the highest form of normativity.

I. Introduction

The view according to which *Geist* or 'spirit' in Hegel stands for some metaphysically suspicious, spooky entity, transcendent principle behind the appearing world, or a neo-Platonic One whose emanation the world is, has been out of favour for quite some time now. The recently widely accepted view, one that has demarcated itself against the first mentioned one, is that 'spirit' in fact stands for the Sellarsian 'space of reasons', or as it is often put the 'space or realm of norms' or the 'normative realm'. The nature-spirit distinction in Hegel has thus become understood as a distinction between a space or realm that is not normative, or does not involve reasons or norms, and one that is, or does. The merits of the new readings in rescuing Hegel's heritage from quick rejections of alleged wild metaphysical adventure or uncritical allegiance to theology, and in introducing Hegel as a serious inspiration in various fields of contemporary philosophy cannot be overstated. Yet, at the same time, they have given birth to a discourse on Hegel that introduces or involves other problems. Most importantly, the broadly Sellarsian, Kant-leaning

approach to Hegel has tended to create a dualism or separation between nature and spirit, something which is both philosophically troubling and difficult to reconcile with the picture of Hegel as the arch enemy of abstract or unreconciled dualisms.

A particularly poignant example of the dualism in question is represented by Robert Brandom's way, in his earlier writings, of running together the rusting of chunks of iron and the behaviour of animals in the former realm as examples of non-normative 'natural responses' to the environment, and insulating the human normative 'conceptual responses' embedded in intersubjective practices of norm-administration as the defining activity of spirit from nature.[1] Not only is this a highly reductive picture of animal life, it has also raised worries in McDowell and others of 'frictionless spinning' in the space of reasons or norms. Though Brandom's interest has always been systematic rather that exegetic, his self-declared Hegelianism and his way of drawing on Hegel's ideas on recognition (*Anerkennung*) as fundamental to spirit *qua* the normative realm have suggested that this strict dualism between nature and spirit would also be Hegel's way of seeing things.

Importantly—and at first sight seeming to address the obvious worry of contradicting the image of Hegel as an enemy of unreconciled dualisms—Brandom, as well as other main contributors to the Kantian-Sellarsian reading of Hegel such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, have emphasized that on their account the divide between the non-normative realm of nature and the normative realm of spirit is, in fact, not an ontological divide between two realms of being, but itself a normative distinction or a distinction made by us. This approach—analogical to the move by Strawson and others from the 'two-worlds' reading of Kant to the 'two-aspects' reading—allows for some variations, such as a Dennettian 'stance-stance' according to which it is up to us to treat or take entities or events as belonging to one or the other realm,[2] the idea that we draw the distinction by deciding for, or, and more importantly, *against* treating or 'making nature normative for ourselves',[3] or combinations of these.

But similarly to the way in which the two-aspects interpretation of Kant inevitably raises questions about the subject *for* whom the aspects appear, this move inevitably raises questions about the nature of that distinction-drawing, of the subject that does it, and the capacities needed for doing it. On the Dennettian formulation: is taking a 'stance' itself an event in a causal chain, or is it rather a free act? Or on the latter formulation: what is required for a subject or subjects to be capable of deciding whether or not to treat or 'make nature normative' for them? For long the (explicit or implicit) standard response by the Sellarsian interpretations was to say that the capacity or capacities in question is or are a collective 'historical achievement', a response which of course as such does not really address the question: what is the constitution of a subject or subjects—us, that is—capable of the stance-taking, or the deciding? Unless one is happy to strike a defensive pose, whether a quietist Wittgensteinian or a transcendental

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Kantian one, in which these kinds of questions are supposed to lose their urgency or vanish, the need for an ontological account of the subject looms large.

There are now many signs that the winds in Hegel-reception are turning again, and perhaps for several reasons: (a) the eventual impossibility of avoiding ontological questions in making sense of the nature-spirit-distinction in Hegel, (b) the general rehabilitation of and growing interest in ontology and metaphysics in Anglophone philosophy since the heydays of constructivism and historicism in the 80s and early 90s when the Sellarsian readings made their mark, and (c) the urgency of the environmental crisis which makes vocabularies such as us deciding whether or not to treat nature as normative for us sound uncomfortably hubristic, and the image of frictionless spinning worrying in ways that are not merely theoretical. Whatever the motivations of particular authors, there is currently a steadily growing interest in Hegel's account of nature in general and his account of animal life in particular, and in the textually obvious suggestions of a continuity or overlap, rather than a simple break, between living nature and 'spirit' in his work.[4] This reorientation of interest in Hegel goes together with a shift in textual focus from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with its broadly speaking historical approach and introductory aim to the 'Realphilosophien' of the *Encyclopaedia* with their non-historical or ontological approach. After a long neglect, a growing number of authors are now interested in those parts of Hegel's work where he actually systematically deals with nature, spirit and their relationship.

Interestingly, and to the merit of the author, one of the relatively early examples of attempts to think of the nature-spirit-relation in terms of a continuum rather than an abstract separation is Brandom's own 2007 article 'The Structure of Desire and Recognition: Self-Consciousness and Self-Constitution'.[5] In this article Brandom elaborates on an emergence of 'normativity' in animal life by means of Hegel's famous imagery of primitive 'desire'-driven subjects and the coming about of a relationship of 'recognition' between them. Brandom now tries to rationally reconstruct a transition from animality to a state of mutual recognition as attribution of authority which for him is the foundation of spirit *qua* the space of norms. His textual reference is still the *Phenomenology of Spirit* rather than the *Encyclopaedia*, and his way of connecting with the text impressionistic rather than exegetical, something which of course makes the choice of textual reference of lesser importance, and is perfectly acceptable if one's intent is systematic rather than scholarly. In any case, Brandom is not drawing on Hegel's own extensive treatment of animal life in the *Encyclopaedia*, but rather working in the imaginary landscape of the confrontation of primitive desire-driven subjects familiar to the readers of Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology*.[6]

What is striking in light of Brandom's earlier stark divide between the causal realm of rusting iron and living beings on the one hand and the recognitively constituted realm of normativity on the other, is that in this article Brandom allows for

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a primitive form of normativity arising in animal life, and presents recognition as central in a gradual transition from animality to spirit, or from animal life to 'spiritual' life.[7] Hence, in place of a stark divide between the two there is now a continuum or a development from the former to the latter. Furthermore, and importantly, there is no suggestion in the article that the description of animal life in it would merely describe the contents of a stance by us, instead of independent ontological features of the world. Put in terms of Kant-interpretations, we are thus back to the two-worlds interpretation, and, furthermore, abandoning a strict separation between the worlds.

Another text that is—or should be—seminal for the contemporary wave of reading Hegel from the point of view of a connection rather than disconnection between nature and spirit is an article by Barbara Merker, 'Embodied Normativity: Revitalizing Hegel's Account of the Human Organism', published originally in German in 2004, and in English in a slightly shortened version in 2012.[8] In contrast to Brandom, Merker's textual reference is Hegel's actual systematic treatment of animal and human life in the Philosophy of Nature and the Subjective and Objective Spirit-sections of his *Encyclopaedia*, and her contact with the text more exegetical, yet thereby no less philosophically insightful. Merker discerns several levels of normativity or evaluation in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature as constitutive already of vegetative and animal life and discusses some of the connections of these primitive or lower levels with those constitutive of or present in human life and human societies. On Merker's reconstruction of what Hegel actually has to say about the relevant issues, a stark dualism between nature and spirit as a dualism between an absence of normativity and normativity seems well and truly out of touch with Hegel's actual views. This does not mean, as such, that the insights of the Kantian-Sellarsian readings would not apply to Hegel at all, but it does suggest that if one is to do justice to his thinking, they need to be put in a context that goes well beyond the abstract dualism.

In this article, I will proceed as follows. First (in section II), partly drawing on Merker, I will reconstruct several forms of normativity in Hegel's account of plant and animal life in the *Encyclopaedia*. As for animal life, I utilize a parallel reading of the sections Phenomenology and Psychology, a reading which allows for seeing a number of details in Hegel's account of animal forms of normativity which go missing in linear readings, and which also shows that Hegel has no qualms with integrating them in his account of human subjectivity. Secondly (in section III), I will reconstruct Hegel's idealized transition from animality to 'spiritual' life in the *Encyclopaedia*, and show that Hegel's actual account is richer than Brandom's reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* suggests. Crucially, it involves a distinctively human, intersubjectively mediated form of axiological normativity which is as much constitutive of human subjectivity as collectively self-administered norms are, and without which collective self-government by norms would never

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take place. Finally (in section IV), I will argue that on Hegel's account self-government by norms is subject to the normative or evaluative super-principle of his Philosophy of Spirit—concrete freedom—the essence of spirit according to him. All in all, for Hegel the normativity of collectively administered norms is neither the most basic nor the highest form of normativity. It stands on the shoulders of several levels or forms of normativity constitutive of vegetative and animal life, and thought in abstraction from these it amounts to something to which Hegel's account is fundamentally opposed: the folly of abstract freedom.

II. Levels of natural normativity and evaluation

Where does normativity begin, or what are its most primitive forms? If one limits the meaning of the term to the normativity of collectively administered norms, this is what the question solely concerns. But as both Brandom and Merker now agree,[9] that is not a necessary limitation. As living beings, various forms of 'normativity' or evaluation are constitutive of our existence in ways that precede or are originally independent of administered norms. To clarify the terminology, 'normativity' covers in this context both the 'axiological normativity' of goodness and badness, and the 'deontological normativity' of norms, or of rightness and wrongness or correctness and incorrectness. As we shall see in section III, the axiological-deontological-duality applies also to the concept of recognition.

Understood in this broad sense, the simplest form of (axiological) normativity is a feature of all life, constitutive of the existence of any living being. Merker speaks, in reference to Hegel's description of vegetative life, of the 'homeostasis of the organism as a natural form […] of normativity' (Merker 2012: 164). Living is maintaining homeostasis in a metabolic relation with the environment, and this means that something is good for the living being to the extent that it is supportive of its homeostasis, and bad for it to the extent that it is the opposite. Say, the appropriate amount of water in the soil is good for a particular plant, and drought or flooding bad.[10] In short, normativity in this 'vegetative' sense means the goodness of what is supportive of the life and flourishing of an organism, and the badness of what is contrary to these. Understanding the homeodynamic process of a plant includes understanding the content of the 'norm' of its life in this axiological sense.[11]

A new sense of 'for' of something *appearing for an organism* comes on the scene with sentience, one of the *differentia specifica* of animal life. Whereas in plants assimilation of elements from the environment happens immediately, in animals it is mediated through an appearance of a 'lack' in sensation (*Empfindung*).[12] To fully appreciate the significance of this theme introduced by Hegel first in his discussion of animal life in the Philosophy of Nature, I propose a detour that will help us

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comprehend what is actually going on in his Philosophy of Subjective Spirit and how it relates to that discussion. It turns out that there is a thematic continuity beginning in Hegel's discussion of the 'theoretical' and 'practical process' in animals[13] in the Philosophy of Nature, through his discussion of 'external' and 'internal sensation' in the Anthropology,[14] and his discussion of theoretical and practical intentionality in the chapters 'Consciousness of such' and 'Self-consciousness' of the Phenomenology,[15] all the way to the chapters 'Theoretical' and 'Practical spirit' of the Psychology. This thematic continuity is difficult to follow—and hence largely overlooked in the literature—unless one sees beyond the surface impression of a simply linear thematic development created either by the linearity of the written form, or by an erroneous projection of the method of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* onto the Philosophy of Spirit. In short, as I have argued elsewhere, the thematic development of the Phenomenology and Psychology sections of Subjective Spirit is not linear, but parallel in a way shown in Table 1.[16]

Also, unlike the chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, those of the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit do not describe 'forms of consciousness' as philosophical positions trying to verify themselves and failing, the failure then leading to the next form.[17] Rather, they describe real phenomena or real structures of spirit. This still says relatively little unless one has some sense of what 'spirit' means, and it makes relatively little sense if one thinks it means something as abstract as the space of reasons or norms, or the normative realm (or, for that matter, 'mindedness', another favoured term of the Sellarsian readings). What I take to be the best short

Table 1. The Parallel Architectonics of Phenomenology and Psychology

Theoretical Moment		*Practical Moment*	
Intentionality	*Mental Activity*	*Intentionality*	*Mental Activity*
B. Phenomenology	C. Psychology	B. Phenomenology	C. Psychology
a. Consciousness as such	a. Theoretical spirit	b. Self-consciousness	b. Practical spirit
α. Sensuous consciousness	α. Intuition	α. Desire	α. Practical feeling
β. Perception	β. Presentation	β. Recognitive s.-c.	β. Drives and wilfulness
γ. Understanding	γ. Thinking	γ. Universal s.-c.	γ. Happiness
		c. Reason/c. Free spirit	
		Or	
Intentionality		*Mental activity*	
B. Phenomenology		C. Psychology	
Theoretical Moment	*Practical Moment*	*Theoretical Moment*	*Practical Moment*
a. Consciousness as such	b. Self-consciousness	a. Theoretical spirit	b. Practical spirit
α. Sensuous consciousness	α. Desire	α. Intuition	α. Practical feeling
β. Perception	β. Recognitive s.-c.	β. Representation	β. Drives and wilfulness
γ. Understanding	γ. Universal s.-c.	γ. Thinking	γ. Happiness
c. Reason		c. Free spirit	

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characterization of what *Geist* or 'spirit' stands for in the title of Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit—indeed the only one I can think of that is fitting to the actual content of the Philosophy of Spirit as a whole—is the human life-form.[18]

In light of this characterization we can now say that Subjective Spirit discusses the phenomena or structures constitutive of the human individual (in abstraction from the social and institutional structures discussed in Objective Spirit), all of which are internally interconnected. This goes also for the themes that belong to the thematic continuity just mentioned. Just as the theoretical and practical processes of animal life in relation to the environment (a topic of the Philosophy of Nature) imply each other, so too do the external and internal sensations in humans (a topic of the Anthropology), as well as the theoretical and practical forms of intentionality (the general topic of the Phenomenology), and the theoretical and practical forms of psychological processes or activities that organize the sensations into the object-related or intentional form (the general topic of the Psychology). Furthermore, as I will argue below, there is no internal difference, on Hegel's account, between the animal and the human at the simplest levels of sensation, intentionality, and psychological process—the two last mentioned discussed in the α.-sub-chapters of the chapters Consciousness as such and Self-consciousness in the Phenomenology and in the α.-sub-chapters of the chapters Theoretical Spirit and Practical Spirit in the Psychology respectively (see Table 1).[19] Where there is a significant difference in the description, and in reality, is in the environment: a non-human (undomesticated) animal lives in a natural environment, whereas a human being lives in a world which to a large extent is that of 'objective spirit', or in other words of human institutions, social relations, culture and artefacts,[20] the topic of the second part of Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit.

Let me now return to sensation. Analogically with the brief discussion of external and internal sensations in the Anthropology (*PM*: §401, and more extensively in §401Z), Hegel thus analytically divides his discussion of animal 'assimilation' of the environment into, on the one hand, the 'theoretical process' including the external senses and their relation to the environment (*PM*: §§357a–58), and, on the other hand, the 'practical process' including the givenness of the body's internal states in sensations, the givenness of the environment for the animal from the point of view of satisfying its physiological needs, and the concrete activity and process of satisfying them. The practical process begins, as Hegel puts it, 'with a feeling of lack and the drive to sublate it' (*PN*: §359).[21] Sensations can feel or have the quality of 'pleasant or unpleasant' (*PM*: §401, §472) and the feeling of lack clearly has the latter: it is 'an unpleasant feeling of need' (*PN*: §359Z). The suggestion is clear: it is the unpleasantness of the feeling of lack, which in the normal case is an appearance of a need that moves the animal to 'sublating' the feeling, or provides the 'drive' for doing so. What we have here is hence a new level of axiological

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normativity, call it 'sentient normativity', something feeling good or bad in the sense of pleasant or unpleasant.

But a third, quite different form of normativity is now also in the picture, one to do with the fact that the biological function of the pleasantness and unpleasantness of inner sensations is to move the animal to behaving in ways that are good for it in terms of vegetative normativity, or in other words in ways that are actually supportive of its life and flourishing or well-being. As Merker puts it,

> [p]ositive and negative feelings are basic evaluations that indicate the correspondence or lack thereof between the organism's being and its normative ought, and they should bring about particular ways of acting; yet they are in no way 'infallible' but themselves subject to the normative disjunction. (Merker 2012: 167)

In other words, a sensation may fail to reflect appropriately what is actually good or bad for the animal in the vegetative sense and thus to move it to appropriate behaviour: a state that is bad for the animal may feel good to it, or the other way around.[22] This is a primitive form of deontological normativity, or of correctness and incorrectness; let us call it 'informative normativity'. If all goes well, the drive to sublate the unpleasant sensation of lack moves the animal then to action which is of a kind that actually sublates or does away with both the sensation and the physiological need that it is an appearance of. From here on things get complicated, both in textual and in real terms. Textually, to get a full picture of the animal process of assimilation, or in other words consumption of vital nutrients, we need to draw connections between what Hegel discusses in the Philosophy of Nature and what he discusses in the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit in the already mentioned α.-sub-chapters of Phenomenology—'Sensuous consciousness' (*PM*: §§418–19) and 'Desire' (*PM*: §§426–29)—and of Psychology—'Intuition' (*PM*: §§426–50) and 'Practical feeling' (*PM*: §§471–72).

In addition to the possibility of being hypnotized by the linearity of the written form, or of erroneously projecting the method of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* onto the Philosophy of Spirit, there is a third possible obstruction in the way of seeing this connection, namely Hegel's apparent denial of 'consciousness' or in other words the intentional or subject-object-form of awareness from animals. Consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) is an explicit theme only in Subjective spirit, and here and there in the Philosophy of Nature Hegel seems to suggest that animals lack consciousness or are 'unconscious'.[23] There are two ways to interpret this, one incorrect and the other correct, and these have to do with an important feature of the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, namely that Hegel devised the text in such a way that most themes in it can be read equally well from two opposite perspectives: *bottom up* and *top down*. Most relevantly for our topic, from the bottom-up perspective the α.-sub-chapters describe a primitive structure of intentionality that

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exists—in non-human animals and in human infants—without the more elaborate forms. From the top-down perspective they describe moments of a cultivated consciousness in which the more primitive and the more elaborate levels mediate each other, forming a system of internally interrelated moments.[24]

What does this mean with regard to Hegel's apparent denial of consciousness from animals? It means, I believe, that the denial only concerns the fully developed consciousness, and thus also the 'α-level' looked from the top-down perspective, as mediated by the more elaborate levels of intentionality and psychological processes of a cultivated human subject. But it does not concern the α-level looked at from the bottom-up perspective, or in other words the most primitive structures of theoretical and practical intentionality as such. What Hegel describes in the α-sub-chapters of Phenomenology and Psychology—read from the bottom-up perspective—is exactly what animals need for the 'practical process' of assimilation, or in other words for maintaining their life by extracting nutriments from their environment by seizing, devouring and digesting objects that are food for them.

As Hegel puts it, the animal mode of assimilation, or 'intermittent intussusception'—unlike the 'continuous flow' (*PN*: §344) of unindividuated matter (water, minerals and so on) in plants—takes place by 'individuali[zing] inorganic things' (*PN*: §344, §362). It involves a 'mechanical seizure of the external object' (*PN*: §363), which requires that the animal is able to grasp the spatio-temporal structure of its environment including individual objects, and orientate in this environment, which in the case of carnivores involves the complex process of tracking and following moving prey. This grasping is on Hegel's account purely egocentric, involving no transcendence of the animal's perspective through mediation by other perspectives—something which, as we shall see, comes about through 'recognition'. As Hegel says in the Philosophy of Nature, objectivity is for the animal structured in terms of 'all of the determinations of singularity [*Einzelheit*] (this place, this time etc.)' (*PN*: §362). In light of the bottom-up perspective to the Phenomenology and Psychology, it is then unsurprising that this is exactly what Hegel is talking about in Sensuous Consciousness, the α.-sub-chapter of the chapter 'Consciousness as such'. The object of the primitive or uncultivated sensuous consciousness is 'determined as singular', or has only the logical structures of 'a being, something, existing thing, singular and so forth' (*PM*: §418). Unlike the object of perception (*Wahrnehmung*), it is not differentiated for the subject as a thing with various properties, but is for it identical with a relevant property.[25] What Hegel is characterizing here is a subjective viewpoint to the world in which attention is focused solely on objects with features promising the abolishment of the disagreeable sensation of lack. The Addition to §361 in the Philosophy of Nature provides useful illustrations: only 'this specific determinacy of the grass, and moreover this grass, this corn etc. is present in [or for, H.I.] the animal and nothing else'. The animal is drawn each time to one particular object

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identical with whatever sensuous quality of it (smell, feel, sound, colour) attracts it. The object is for the animal in the formulation of Erdmann's notes from Hegel's 1827–28 lectures on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit '[t]he lack in me appear [ing] as an external object',[26] in the formulation of the α.-sub-chapter 'Desire' '[an] object, which […] corresponds to the drive' (*PM*: §427), or in the formulation of the Introduction to the chapter 'Practical spirit' in Psychology, the 'ought' (*Sollen*) of the unpleasant sensation 'developed in consciousness' into a 'relation towards [an] outer object' (*PM*: §470). In short, what is at issue is the object of primitive or uncultivated desire.[27]

How does objectivity with such structure get synthetized for the animal? Hegel does not present a full-blown theory of this process, but some of the outlines can be discerned. The synthesis is basically a matter of tracking a desirable sensory quality (or perhaps a bundle of qualities) as an object in space and time, which together with appropriate movement (another one of the *differentia specifica* of animal life) allows the object's 'mechanical seizure' (*PN*: §363). The tracking is the function of primitive intuition, the topic of the α.-sub-chapter of 'Theoretical Spirit', and more exactly that of attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*). As Hegel puts it, attention 'posits the determinacy of feeling as a being, but as a negative, as an abstract otherness of its own self': it 'determines the content of sensation as a being that is outside itself, casts it out into space and time' (*PM*: §448), as a distinct spatiotemporal object in some location ('this place, this time') seen from the egocentric perspective of the animal. What then provides orientation for the organizing or reifying attention? Hegel's answer is unsurprising: instinct. The animal 'must seek [what it needs] by instinct from its complex environment' (*PN*: §361Z). The reference to instinct is of course not as such terribly informative, but one important point it conveys is that at this primitive level attention is not under the voluntary control of the subject. Note what the above means in architectonic terms: Hegel's account of animal life does not end where the Philosophy of Nature ends. It continues within the Philosophy of Spirit.[28]

With the complex practical process of animal life, new forms of normativity now come into the picture. Firstly, there is an epistemic form of normativity, namely the correctness or incorrectness of the instinctive identification of something as an object the devouring of which will sublate the unpleasant feeling of lack and satisfy the need. As Hegel puts it in the lectures, 'the instinct of animals is not infallible' (*LPS*: 119). Secondly, there is a practical form of axiological normativity, the instrumental appropriateness or inappropriateness of the animal's behaviour for reaching the goal of 'mechanically seizing' the object, whether it be a plant growing at a particular spot, or prey escaping and defending. Given the complexity of the coordination of senses and movement required, there are infinite ways in which behaviour can be more or less appropriate or successful in this regard.[29] These are crucial for understanding animal life, because they

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Table 2. The forms of normativity distinguished in this article.

1. The 'vegetative' (axiological): the goodness of what is supportive of the life and flourishing of an organism and the badness of what is contrary to these.
2. The 'sentient' (axiological): something feeling good or bad in the sense of pleasant or unpleasant.
3. The 'informative' (deontological): the success or failure of sensation or feeling in reflecting what is good or bad for the animal in the vegetative sense.
4. The 'epistemic' (deontological): correctness or incorrectness of the instinctive identification of something as an object the assimilation of which would sublate the unpleasant feeling of lack and satisfy the need.
5. The 'instrumental' (axiological): instrumental appropriateness or inappropriateness of behaviour for 'mechanically seizing' the object.
6. The 'futural' (axiological): goodness and badness of something in light of concern for future well-being (of oneself or others).
7. The 'self-legislated' (deontological): rightness or wrongness of something according to human-made norms.
8. The 'ontological' (axiological): success or failure of something in light of the super-principle of reconciliation with necessarily determining otherness.

(and the other forms of normativity discussed so far, see Table 2) are constitutive of the 'practical process' of actually living it.

III. From nature to spirit

It is at this level that Brandom's discussion of normativity in animal life begins. He conceives of it in terms of the 'tripartite structure' of hunger, eating and food, or of the correctness or incorrectness of an animal's taking something as food on the criterion of it satisfying hunger and thus actually being food (Brandom 2007: 32–34). What Brandom is after is semantic content or significance for a subject, taking something as something and the possibility of experiencing it either being or not being what one takes it to be, in this most primitive context food. This would be the first form of normativity involving a commitment by the subject. Brandom then moves on to the question of what it would take for a subject to take something not as food (or predator), but as another self or subject, 'something things can be something for' (2007: 34). This introduces the theme of recognition.

Brandom distinguishes two kinds or levels of recognition in the article. The first one is 'simple recognition' or treating the other as a subject of the tripartite structure, as a being that takes something as food by eating it and thereby commits itself to it actually being food (2007: 38). What recognition means here is treating as food what the other treats as food, or in other words taking the other as an

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epistemic authority on the matter. The second level is 'robust recognition' or taking the other as a recognizer, a subject who recognizes others in the sense of taking them as authorities on what is food. Brandom's point is that when subject A recognizes subject B as recognizing subject A*, this means that A recognizes itself*, or in other words takes itself to be a subject of commitments and authority.[30] This reflective conception of oneself is what Brandom calls 'simple self-consciousness'. 'Robust self-consciousness' is then consciousness of oneself as conscious of others as subjects of commitments and authority (2007: 48–49).

Whether or not Brandom's account works for his own purpose of tracing a possible emergence of semantic content, consciousness of oneself as a subject of commitments and authority, a relationship of co-authority, and thus the possibility of collective norm-governance in animal life, as a reconstruction of Hegel it is arguably misleading. For one general problem, it is unclear why a desiring animal would ever develop a desire for recognition, or want to be recognized by another desiring animal, if being recognized means being taken as a reliable informant on what is food. An encounter of the kind described by Brandom is actually not one that Hegel discusses anywhere in his Philosophy of Nature or Philosophy of Subjective Spirit. Instead, he deals with three other kinds of inter-animal encounter, one of which he utilizes for conceiving the transition from the animal level of existence to an intersubjectively mediated level specific to humans: firstly, an encounter of a carnivore with its prey which in the normal case is an encounter of animals of different species;[31] secondly, an encounter of animals of the same species but of opposite sexes, 'which begins with need' or a 'feeling of […] lack', and leads to copulation in which the 'urge to attain one's self-feeling in the other' is satisfied (*PN*: §368); and thirdly, an encounter with what he calls 'a free object' (*PM*: §429), a competitor that can offer 'resistance'.[32] Neither an encounter with a prey (unless, that is, it offers significant resistance) nor one with a mating partner (with the same proviso) challenges the solipsistic or unmediated desire-orientation, whereas this is exactly what happens in the encounter with the 'free object', another subject that resists being reduced to the significances in light of which the desire-driven subject sees the world.

This encounter, or the challenge it presents, leads in Hegel's highly idealized account to transcending the solipsistic animal perspective with the object-structure described above. We can think of this in terms of three interrelated moments: (A) conflict of perspectives, (B) transcending the immediacy of desire-orientation, and (C) transcending solipsism through concern for the other.

Firstly (A), the subject 'sublates' its 'singularity' (*Einzelheit*) by 'beholding' its 'own self' in the encountered other, and is thereby 'determined […] as particular' (*PM*: §430). I interpret Hegel meaning here that the subject becomes conscious of itself as a subject with a perspective. It is this realization of having a perspective and being 'resisted' by another similar subject with a perspective that 'provides the urge

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to show itself as a free self' (*PM*: §430). Just as the other subject resists being reduced to the significances of the first subject's desire-driven perspective, the first subject resists the resistance, or insists on the absoluteness of its perspective. Whereas on Brandom's account it is unclear where a desire or demand for recognition would stem from, on what I take to be Hegel's actual account this is clearer: from the reluctance to accept that one's perspective is a particular perspective next to another and limited by it.[33] The demand for recognition is hence at this point the demand for the other to accept the absoluteness of one's perspective. This is what it means, at this point, to be recognized 'as a free self': free in the sense of free from limitation or determination by anything other to oneself. What is at stake is of course freedom according to the 'abstract' notion of freedom, the self-defeating nature of which Hegel never tires emphasizing. Since the relevant kind of other subject has the same motivations, the result is a 'life and death struggle' as both subjects try to prove that they are determined by nothing and yet are in fact inevitably determined by each other. The 'crude' way (*PM*: §432) in which this encounter may end is one subject perishing and thereby ceasing to 'resist' the other subject's claim to absoluteness. This solution is however irrelevant for Hegel in this thematic context as it does not lead to animality transcending itself, which is what is at issue explicitly in the transition from the α.-sub-chapter 'Desire' to the β.-sub-chapter 'Recognitive Self-Consciousness', and implicitly in the other three α.-β.-transitions in Phenomenology and Psychology, read from the bottom-up perspective.

The solution that does take the development further is famously one in which one subject yields to the practical perspective of the other: 'the relationship of mastery and bondage' (*PM*: §433), the topic of the β.-sub-chapter 'Recognitive Self-Consciousness'. In this relationship the abstract freedom that the combatants insisted on turns out to be a folly, and so in two ways: firstly, though the bondsman's obedient service gives the master the next best thing to complete lack of challenge to his absoluteness, he nevertheless remains a particular subject related to another subject and thus determined by the other. Secondly, because a dead subject is not a free subject, or as Hegel puts it, 'since life is as essential as freedom' (*PM*: §433), meaningful freedom cannot mean abstraction from the determinations that come with existence as a finite living being.[34] Freedom for human beings as essentially social and essentially embodied beings cannot be abstract freedom from these determinations; it can only be 'concrete freedom' as reconciliation with or consciousness of oneself in them.

(B) Secondly, both subjects develop a motivational structure that transcends the unmediated first-order desire-orientation. This involves both a 'self-directed' and an 'other-directed' aspect. The self-directed aspect Hegel thematizes through the theme of the fear of death: becoming conscious of and concerned for one's life as a whole as something to 'prefer' (*PM*: §433) or care about, an experience made by the one who ends up as the bondsman. This is a return of the first 'vegetative' form

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of normativity, only now in a reflective form. For a plant to exist, which is to say live, the homeodynamic process guided by vegetative normativity must be ongoing, whereas for a human person to live or flourish her actions must be guided by concern (whether explicit or implicit) for her own life beyond the immediacy, or by an experience of goodness of what supports it and of badness of what dangers it. This opens a temporally extended future-directed axiological perspective or motivational structure involving second- or higher-order levels, the topic of the parallel β.-sub-chapter 'Drives and Wilfulness'. It thereby also frees attention from the instinct-guided one-track nature described earlier, opens up the possibility of attending to multiple features of objects not relevant for the immediate need, and thus makes possible the differentiated, universality-involving structure of objectivity that Hegel discusses in the β.-sub-chapter 'Perception', as well as the corresponding cognitive activities that he discusses in the β.-sub-chapter 'Presentation' (*Vorstellung*).[35]

(C) The other-directed aspect is concern for the life of the other and it is internally interconnected with the self-directed aspect. Hegel discusses this in the β.-sub-chapter 'Recognitive Self-Consciousness' in terms of the bondsman who must care about the life and well-being of the master to avoid punishment, and the master who must care about the life and adequate well-being of the bondsman whose service his own well-being depends on. He describes their relationship as a 'community of need and of care for its satisfaction', the function of which is the 'acquisition, preservation, and formation' of objects needed for 'tak[ing] care and secur[ing] the future' (*PM*: §434). Transcending the primitive desire-orientation thus includes a substantial mediation of the subject's axiological perspective through the other perspective(s) in that one becomes concerned, not only for one's own life as a whole, but also for the life or adequate well-being of the other(s) that one depends on. This is the axiological dimension of recognition: concern for the life or well-being of the other(s)—and it is a necessary element of the distinctively human form of the 'practical process' of living.[36]

IV. Self-government by norms in context

Note now that the collective nature of the human form of the 'practical process' of living, and the mediation of axiological perspectives that it involves, is of direct relevance to collective norm-governance and thus the space of administered norms with which the Sellarsian readings identify spirit. Those readings are misleading in two interrelated ways: firstly, in their exclusive focus on deontology, and, secondly, by projecting a truncated Kantian concept of freedom onto Hegel, without properly consulting his own view and as a consequence failing to think through how that particular concept fits with what Hegel actually says about freedom.

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Firstly, none of the deontological business would get off the ground without the axiological dimension. Without life having the collective future-directed structure there would be nothing to govern by collectively authorized norms, and without the motivation driving such life—a motivation which transcends the mere first-order 'desire' of animals yet affirms the value of life—there would be no motivation for the kinds of efforts that norm-governance requires. This dependence of the deontological dimension on the axiological applies also to semantic or conceptual norms—a core theme for Brandom—whereby objectivity is structured in perception: norms cannot establish shared conceptual carvings of the world independently of shared concerns, and thus shared relevances and saliences.[37] As original and philosophically insightful as Brandom's version of the transition from animality to spirit is in depicting the relationship of recognition as originally one between subjects who are driven only by desire for individual satisfaction, it abstracts from this axiological dimension of the mediation of subjectivities, which is no less important than the deontological dimension of mediation through mutual attribution of authority, and no less a dimension involving normativity broadly conceived.

Secondly, the Sellarsian readings, by subscribing to the Kantian idea of freedom as subjection to self-authorized norms, conceive of spirit *qua* the space of norms as a space of freedom in this sense. But when Hegel explicitly discusses the normative or evaluative essence of spirit in the Introduction to the Philosophy of Spirit, this is not what he is talking about. Instead, he defines that essence as 'concrete freedom',[38] which is to say reconciliation with or overcoming the alienness (but not otherness) of necessarily determining otherness, such as other humans and nature—both determinants with regard to which the master and bondsman learned abstract freedom to be a constitutive impossibility. The telos of Hegel's account in the Self-Consciousness chapter which realizes the essence is accordingly mutual recognition and thus mutual 'affirmative consciousness of oneself in the other' (*PM*: §436) who recognizes one. This is a relationship in which difference, relationality and thus finitude of the relata is affirmed, but their mutual alienness or hostility with regard to each other overcome. The deontological dimension of this can indeed be interpreted as mutual recognition in the sense of mutual attribution of authority, and thus mutual consciousness of oneself recognized as an authority by the other—the ideal relationship of co-authority of the norms of shared life realizing both individual and collective autonomy. This ideal kind of relation of co-authority of norms is indeed one—*but it is only one*—of the components of the realization of concrete freedom, the evaluative essence of spirit or the human life-form according to Hegel.

Importantly, this normative or evaluative ultimate principle—'the ontologically good, […] the norm of freedom' (Merker 2012: 163)—does not only apply to relations internal to the life-form, but also, and crucially, in the relationship of what

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is distinctively human to what is not distinctively human, but determines human life necessarily, namely the natural determinations of human life. This, crucially, also applies to collective norm creation, authorization and administration. When philosophical imagination is beholden to a dualistic Kantian imaginary, this activity itself may be imagined as abstractly free from nature and the natural levels of normativity, either by definition—the image of frictionless spinning—or ideally—the thought of a historical achievement of a standpoint from which we can decide whether or not to treat nature as normative for us.[39]

Yet, as I have tried to show, on the Hegelian picture this too is a folly since in fact the activity takes place in a context of collective concern for and effort to secure life and well-being beyond the immediacy—the specifically human form of the 'practical process' of life subjected to vegetative normativity in a metabolic relationship with external nature. Though abstracting from life is also a distinctively human capacity according to Hegel, and though it is perfectly possible for humans to create norms, normative orders and institutions that abstract from the normative pressures of nature, such orders do not serve what they depend on and what their purpose is to serve: life.[40] At the end of the day, we do not get to choose whether nature *is* normative for us, and trying to live as if we did is living in denial of what for Hegel is our essence, the ultimate normative principle against which reality judges the goodness of life with the form specific to us: reconciliation with what necessarily determines us, and what we eventually abstract from only at our peril.

Heikki Ikäheimo
UNSW Sydney, Australia
h.ikaheimo@unsw.edu.au

Notes

[1] See for example Brandom (2000: 48).
[2] See Brandom (1979: 190–91).
[3] Pinkard (2005: 23).
[4] See the special issue 'Nature in Spirit' of *Critical Horizons* (2012, 13:2), Pinkard (2012), Testa (2013), Lumsden (2013), Padui (2013), Peters (2016), Alznauer (2016), Khurana (2017), Ng (2020), Gambarotto & Illetterati (2020), Ferrini (forthcoming), to mention just some recent examples. On the Sellarsian influence in reading Hegel, see Corti (2018).
[5] Brandom (2007).
[6] The article is subsequently included in Brandom (2019: 235–61).
[7] On recognition in animal nature, see also Testa (2012).
[8] Merker (2012).
[9] Also Pinkard (2012: 25–30) now agrees.

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[10] See *PN*: §347 on assimilation in vegetative life.

Abbreviations used:

LPS = Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1827–8)*, trans. R. R. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes Berlin 1827/1828* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1994).

PM = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind,* trans. B. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

PN = Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. M. J. Petry (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

SL = Hegel, G. W. F. (2010) *Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)/Wissenschaft der Logik (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986, 2 vols.).

Translations occasionally modified.

[11] '[E]ach organism is determined by the concept or the norm of its "nature". This determines how an individual ought to be inasmuch as it belongs to a particular genus, and thereby also how the inner and outer world of the organism ought to be constituted and what it ought to do in order to fulfil its norm and thus not to lose its health and life prematurely' (Merker 2012: 164). How does this differ from, say, a temperature above 0° Celsius being 'good' for ice-water to melt, where 'good' is clearly meant only metaphorically? 'Normativity' in the sense used here requires, at minimum, the homeodynamic process of a living being. I thank an anonymous reviewer for the question.

[12] See *PN*: §§357–66 on assimilation in animal life.

[13] *PN*: §§357Z–358 and §§359–66.

[14] *PM*: §401 and §401Z.

[15] *PM*: §§418–23 and §§424–37.

[16] For details, see Ikäheimo (2004) and (2017).

[17] Pinkard's (2012: 50) insightful treatment of animal and human life in the *Encyclopaedia* suffers somewhat from this common mistake in its reading of the Phenomenology and Psychology.

[18] I take the idea, with some modifications, from Stekeler-Weithofer (2011). I use 'the human life-form' here deliberately in a theoretically low-key sense, merely as a general term for what Hegel actually discusses in the Philosophy of Spirit.

[19] Merker (2012: 160) too notes this continuity.

[20] Even in this regard the distinction is not absolute: see *PN*: §362 on 'building nests and other resting-places', and §365Z, p. 167 on 'the instinctive building of nests, lairs, shelters, in order to make the general totality of the animal's environment, even though only in respect of form, its own'. Note also that though institutions, culture and the rest can be assumed as given from an ontogenetic perspective to the human individual, from a phylogenetic perspective they cannot.

[21] Rand's (2013: 77–78) translation of '*Mangel*' in the original '*Gefühl des Mangels*' as 'defect' to cover both 'damage and need' seems too broad for the particular topic at issue here. See note 22, and Alznauer's (2016: 204) explanation of the difference between damage and need. On the essential role of feeling of lack in animal life, see Gambarotto & Illetterati (2020: 13–14).

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[22] Since feeling or sensation can be defective in this sense, the translation 'feeling of defect' is potentially confusing for my purposes. See note 21. Note also that I am not talking about Mills's (2020: 15) question: 'in judging a current animal organism sound or defective, in what way is our judgment internal and not based on some standard imposed upon it from the outside?' At issue here is normativity as constitutive of animal subjectivity, not our normative judgments concerning animals.

[23] See for example *PN*: §360R: 'Instinct is a purposive activity operating in an unconscious manner'. There is no fully explicit reference to consciousness in Hegel's discussion of animal life in the Philosophy of Nature, nor in his discussion of the idea of life in the Science of Logic (*SL*: 676–88). I discuss this theme at more length in Ikäheimo (2010).

[24] For details, see Ikäheimo (2017).

[25] See Redding (1996 104–10).

[26] *LPS*: 185.

[27] Animal life of course requires also attention to what appears threatening or dangerous, but this is not in Hegel's focus in his discussion of the practical process in animals. Another significant complication to the picture, one which he does discuss, is the theme of the *Bildungstrieb* and *Kunsttrieb*. See note 20.

[28] Here the distinction between the bottom-up and top-down perspectives is however important: the latter only applies to the human individual.

[29] See for example in *PN*: §364Z: **'**The spider weaves its web in order to catch its food […]'; *PN*: §370: 'the animal's whole system of motor organs must enable it to pursue and overtake other animals […]'; and Hegel's citation of Cuvier in *PN*: §370: 'In order that the animal may be able to carry away its prey […]'.

[30] One might simply stipulate that genuine normativity requires consciousness of oneself as committed to a norm (or perhaps value) and hence insist that none of the levels of 'normativity' below that level discussed in this paper count as genuine normativity. Whatever one thinks of this move philosophically, it is not how Hegel uses his closest terminological equivalent: '*Sollen*'. See *PM*: §470 on the primitive 'ought' (*Sollen*) of the unpleasant sensation 'developed in consciousness' into a 'relation towards [an] outer object'. It also does not accord with Pinkard's (2012) revised and due to the revision more genuinely Hegelian vocabulary.

[31] See note 29.

[32] In *PM*: §427 Hegel characterizes the object of desire as one 'that can offer no resistance'.

[33] Pinkard's version of the motivation for the struggle arguably presupposes too much of the combatants: a particular 'type of good the agent chooses as his final end (whether a single, monistic good or a pluralist conception of competing goods)' (2012: 60), or 'conception of what makes life worth choosing' (2012: 61). The distance from desiring animality to such issues of *Lebensanschauung* is too great for this to be a helpful reconstruction. Benjamin's (1988) psychoanalytic account of the infant's reluctance to give up the illusion of omnipotence and the ensuing struggle for recognition with the mother is in my view closer to what Hegel is after.

[34] See also Ng (2020: 109–19).

[35] For details, see Ikäheimo (2017).

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[36] For details, see Ikäheimo (2014).

[37] Why? Firstly, because relevance-structures and saliences for subjects have to be sufficiently shared for subjects to share a meaningful world to carve up conceptually in the first place. Secondly, because they have to be sufficiently shared for these rather than those carving to be adequately motivated for both (or all) subjects.

[38] See *PM*: §382, *LPS*: 67. For details, see Gleeson & Ikäheimo (2020). I have profited from Loughlin Gleeson's extensive work on the theme of concrete freedom in his doctoral dissertation *Reconstructions of Hegel's Concept of Freedom: Towards a Holistic and Universalist Reading of Concrete Freedom* (2020). See also Gleeson 2018.

[39] See also Ng (2020: 13–14).

[40] Does this commit Hegel to the 'myth of the given'? Not in the sense of reducing the normativity of human-made norms to commands of nature. But yes in the sense of subjecting that level of normativity to the normative check of liveability. But then that subjection surely is a fact of life rather than a myth.

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