

Transcendental Philosophy, Naturalism, and Hegel's Alternative Terry Pinkard

Transcendental philosophy and naturalism are fraternal twins. It is fair enough to say that Kant invented the very conception of transcendental philosophy as a way to preserve human freedom within a naturalistic worldview that looked increasingly inhabitable for such freedom. Unfortunately, Kant's own solution to the problem—which proposed a realm of unknowable things in themselves which was to preserve the possibility of the kind of freedom that we needed to presume in our practical lives—seems to have attracted only one firm adherent to the doctrine: Kant himself. To the extent that Kant's successors—the “post-Kantians”—wanted to improve on Kant while preserving him, it is fair to ask: What do they possibly add to this story? Here I am only going to look at one modification of the story, Hegel's own.

A good part of the energy that fueled the development of post-Kantian philosophy in fact concerned itself with how to use Kant to go beyond Kant, to keep the Kantian insights without having to accept one or other of the various dualisms in Kant's views. Starting with his earliest writings in Jena, Hegel responded by challenging the way in which the most basic distinction in Kant's first *Critique*, that between concept and intuition, was itself drawn by Kant. Unfortunately, the way he phrased his objections (and the fact that his own critique was in his own day almost instantly conflated with the related but very different critiques made by Fichte and Schelling) made it seem that, first, he was simply denying that intuition could be a source of knowledge at all and, second, that he was claiming that all cognitive content had to be derived from our concepts alone via a special procedure called “dialectic.” Hegel, of course, claimed no such thing; nonetheless, as Robert Pippin has recently argued, there remains the eternal temptation to misread Hegel as a holist gone mad, as perhaps the paradigm case of a conception of mind spinning frictionlessly in the void (to use John McDowell's now famous formulation, a version of which Hegel himself used in his 1807 *Phenomenology* to criticize much the same view McDowell is criticizing), and that is crucial to see that Hegel is not asserting anything like that if we are ever really to get a grip on what he really is claiming.¹

Instead of criticizing Kant from outside the Kantian system, Hegel was attempting to criticize Kant from within the standpoint of Kant's own claims. Kant himself, of course, famously stressed the great distinction between intuitions and concepts and even claimed that such a distinction was the basis for any genuine understanding of the critical philosophy; after claiming that concepts without intuitions were empty, Kant says,

These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise. But that is no reason for confounding the contribution of either with that of the other; rather is it a strong reason

for carefully separating and distinguishing the one from the other.

Kant later qualifies this hard and fast distinction by noting,

The same function which gives unity to the various representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations in an intuition, and this unity, in its most general expression, we entitle the pure concept of the understanding.²

Clearly, so Hegel was arguing, Kant distinguished both concepts and intuitions, but he also held that the function that gives unity to intuitions and to concepts was the *same* function (although the unities themselves were different), and he titled that function “the pure concept of the understanding” (which Hegel took to calling simply “the concept”). Already, the so-called dialectic of sameness and difference (the same function bringing together different unities) is at work in the distinction between concept and intuition, and as Pippin brings out in his article, this raises the stakes for both Hegel and Kant: What *could be* the nature of the claim that concepts and intuitions are distinct but nonetheless derive their respective unities from the same function?

To elucidate his own interpretation of the claim, Hegel fell back on the great metaphor that the Romantics put to use on virtually everything they touched, namely, that of the “organic” as opposed to the “mechanical.” Hegel did the same, accusing Kant of quite mistakenly holding that the unity between concept and intuition was only “mechanical,” when in fact the unity between them was more “organic.”

For the Romantics, the metaphor of the “organic” served, among other purposes, a way of distinguishing a holist approach from a reductionist approach to issues concerning knowledge and the world. It was widely held by many Romantics that all “mechanical” approaches are always in addition “reductionist”; all mechanical approaches, so the line of thought went, claim that the whole can be explained in terms of the parts, and that the parts can be independently identified apart from the whole of which they are the parts; in the mechanical model, one “builds up” the whole out of separately identifiable parts and the “mechanical” interactions among those parts. Kant’s own claim in the *Critique of Judgment* that teleological explanations, which were both not reducible to such “mechanical” explanations and were regulatively required to account for the shape and functioning of organisms was seized upon by the Romantics as a demonstration that the “organic” could not be “reduced” to a “mechanical aggregate”; moreover, Kant’s idea provided, so it was held, some basis for the idea that the universe itself was perhaps best understood itself as an organism writ large, such that the only proper explanation for the world as a whole would be in terms of some kind of organicist holism, that is, in terms of some explanation of the parts in terms of their role and function within the whole (instead of the Newtonian, “mechanical” model of explaining the whole out of the functioning of its independent parts).

Hegel’s criticism of the Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions was that—in spite of Kant’s claim that he was treating the function that gives unity to concepts and to intuition as the *same* function—Kant nonetheless lapsed into speaking of concepts and

intuitions as if they were two independent mental “things” which were brought into contact only through some kind of subjectively mechanical-psychological process. Hegel’s claim that we should view the relation between the two as organic rather than mechanical is thus illustrative of his claim that concepts and intuitions play their respective cognitive roles (which, keeping with Kant’s strictures, Hegel agrees are different) only within the whole of self-conscious *life*.³ Indeed, Hegel even goes so far as to credit Kant’s separation of concept and intuition as displaying what it means to call it an *idealist* philosophy at all.⁴

Of course, although such a move may serve to save Hegel from Kant’s specific problems about how “psychological” a story transcendental idealism is supposed to be, it nonetheless creates for him a variety of other problems, which he acknowledges in his introduction to the *Phenomenology* as being those of “skepticism.” The opening chapters of his 1807 *Phenomenology* pursue a line of thought that ends with a more or less deflationary stance towards the issues revolving around our awareness of singular items, and of our consciousness of the objects of perception. I take Hegel’s points there (to summarize them admittedly all too swiftly) to be that the so-called awareness of singular items in “sense-certainty” fails to show how it is a free-standing (or “absolute”) account of our consciousness of objects, since any account in terms of sense-certainty ends up employing general terms in a way that is incompatible with the claim that such awareness is, without mediation, awareness of logical “simples.” The more common-sense approach, which puts the conception of the perceptual object at center stage of the account, itself fails for very similar reasons. When an account is given of the direct awareness of the perceptual object, it relies on the idea of there being distinct perceptual objects which are differentiated from each other by virtue of some perceptual properties that each has; but the concept of an object of perception, divorced from any other context in which it is taken, flips back and forth between accounts of the object as a bundle of general properties, the object as a distinct, property-less “one” that is not an object therefore of *perception*, and various types of causal theories (which in Hegel’s day took John Dalton’s idea of the object as an enclosing surface with porous points for the properties to latch onto as its paradigm). The alleged solution to such problems—something like the claim that our perceptual experience itself already is “theory-laden” and thus contains at least implicitly claims within itself—itself collapses under the weight of all the different ways in which those kinds of implicit claims can be worked out in terms of the logic of appearance and reality. Indeed, taking the view that our experience of things is already at the level of direct experience itself inherently *conceptual* inevitably takes one down to the road to thinking of conscious experience itself as somehow containing within itself a *representation* of the world, and that move, once taken, leads to the view that we operate in the world in terms of a bright metaphysical dividing line between our “subjective” experience on one side of the line and the objects of the world being on the other side. However, any such view—always taken from what Hegel calls the “standpoint of consciousness”—can only resolve itself by positing either some kind of radical scheme/content distinction as absolute, such that one is compelled to adopt the “mechanical” view that our experience is fundamentally that of our imposing our conceptual structure on neutral deliverances of sense; or by positing that the world itself must consist of facts that are structured like judgments (i.e., like propositions) that we somehow just “take in” via some kind of purely mental insight (and that view leads in its

turn to various antinomies and tensions inherent in the idea that the world corresponds to the structure of our propositional languages).

The problem is that our way of articulating our encounters with the world necessarily suggests to us that our experience has a propositional form, and that form itself suggests to us (when we reflect on it) that our awareness of the world must take the shapes of the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* (of awareness of logical simples, singular objects of perception, or in some contradictory accounts of how singular objects of perception manifest themselves to us from behind the “curtain of appearance”). The way out of this is not through the construction of still more metaphysical theories of perception or the postulation of new natural forces to explain how the objects behind the “curtain of appearance” manifest themselves to us but through the acknowledgement that our capacities to identify and re-identify objects in our experience are themselves *psychological* capacities involved in the kind of bodily existence we have as self-conscious subjects; these capacities for identifying and re-identifying are indeed *informed* by our conceptual capacities, but they are not *exercises* of those capacities; indeed, our conceptual capacities serve to critique and correct our capacities for such identification and re-identification when they “misfire” (as when we mistakenly identify something as a such-and-such when it is really something else).⁵ Moreover, whereas our capacities to identify and re-identify things in experience are subject to naturalistic, psychological investigation, our conceptual capacities are fundamentally normative and are not subject to those same kinds of investigations. (This is, I think, Hegel’s own absorption and reworking of the Kantian first *Critique* doctrine of the triple syntheses of apprehension, reproduction, and judgment.)

These capacities for identification and re-identification form at least part of what Hegel calls “subjective spirit” in his *Encyclopedia* presentation of the issues. To mark this distinction, in his later systematic works he distinguishes “soul” (*Seele*) from “spirit” (*Geist*):

Spirit and soul must be essentially distinguished from one another. For soul is only this ideal simple being-for-itself of the bodily as *bodily*, whereas spirit is the being-for-itself of conscious and *self-conscious* life with all the feelings, ideas, and purposes of this conscious existent.”⁶

In his *Encyclopedia* treatment of the “soul,” he uses the term to demarcate that area of our life which forms a kind of “middle level of meaning” between our purely organic embodiment (our lives as animals) and the more reflective, propositional forms of meaning that are appropriate to self-conscious mindedness (which Hegel, starting with the 1807 *Phenomenology*, calls our *Geistigkeit*, our “mindedness”). In our perceptual and practical engagement with the world around us, we have a kind of inherently embodied and normed stance to objects. For example, as Sean Kelly has noted in his explications and defenses of Merleau-Ponty’s conception of perceptual experience, the phenomenon of color constancy and brightness constancy (among other things) shows how our very ordinary awareness of the world is not merely a non-normative mechanical reaction to causal stimuli—is not merely a reliable differential responsive disposition⁷—but rather involves a response to the world around us which, although not yet propositional, is

nonetheless meaningful and “normed.”⁸ The phenomenon consists in seeing, for example, the wall of a room as having the same color throughout, even though the light is falling on wall of the room in very different ways (and such that somebody who has taught him- or herself how to observe this, perhaps in order to paint a picture of it on a canvas, can self-consciously note the different shades of the color as specifiable in terms of distinct colors while also being appearances of the same colors). In our coping with the phenomenon itself, we seem to have a natural sense, as it were, for knowing where to place ourselves in order to observe the “true color” of the wall without being able necessarily to formulate how we do this or why we take it as the true color, and we also seem to have, again as it were, an intuitive sense for how the lighting would have to change for me to see the color as it “really is.” Seeing the color *better* from “here” as opposed to “over there” is a normative feature of this kind of experience, even though it is not (or at least usually not without a lot of training) a *propositionally* normative feature of experience.

It is from out of this kind of middle-level meaning and normativity that our fully self-conscious normative engagement with ourselves and the world emerges.⁹ The full story is, of course, more complicated, but the general point here is that to the extent that we read Hegel as noting and incorporating similar phenomena into his philosophy of subjective spirit, we must see Hegel as viewing the development of our fully normative, self-conscious life as something that emerges out of our natural bodily involvement with the world, certainly not as something to be explained in terms of our being made of different stuff from the physical world, nor is it equally certainly to be explained as being part of the unknowable intelligible world in which the causality of the natural world is somehow abrogated nor is it to be explained in terms of representations. This is Hegel’s way of cashing out the metaphor of the “organic” vis-à-vis concepts and intuitions: Our conceptual capacities are imagined as first being “sunken” in nature, such that we simply “carry on” as we do according to the positive rules set down by our sociality; but over the period of historical time, we have achieved a self-relation in which we have detached of our conceptual capacities from their original “sunkenness” in nature and only by having made that normative distinction are we in a position to distinguish the natural and the minded as itself a normative distinction. The two “organs” of our normative engagement with the world and each other gradually become more articulated and even take on the appearance (especially in modernity) of independence from each other; and this occurs because of the way in which we are self-aware in all those experiences where we are otherwise not exercising our conceptual capacities.

Hegel thus wants to have it both ways, and this puts quite a bit of strain on his theory. On the one hand, he wants to preserve the Kantian bifurcation of mind and nature as Kant did, that is, without falling into a substantialist, Cartesian dualism; as he says over and over again, mind is the “other” of nature, its “negation.” On the other hand, he wants to argue that our “mindedness” emerges out of our natural embodiment in such a manner that we do not have to postulate a practically unavoidable but theoretically indemonstrable realm of unknowable things in themselves to make room for it. Hegel’s own solution to this is to involve himself in what John McDowell rather infamously

called the “partial re-enchantment of nature.” In doing so, Hegel offers up a genuine alternative to a transcendental treatment of nature, but he also lands himself in quite a bit of trouble; but in order to see whether he can get himself out of the trouble he gets himself into, we have to first see what trouble he creates for himself in the first place.

The issue, of course, has to do with Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*, surely the least influential of all his works and the one still held in greatest suspicion. Fundamentally, Hegel’s philosophy of nature is his substitute for a philosophy of science (or, perhaps better put, it is his version of what a philosophy of science should really be, although to show what this exactly means is a topic for a whole book, not this paper). For Hegel, *Naturphilosophie* does not and cannot prescribe the appropriate methods for natural science, nor can it prescribe the form in which a natural scientific theories must be framed. This is because Hegel thinks that it is just as senseless for a *Naturphilosoph* to tell, for example, physicists what form their theories must take as it would be for the philosopher of art to tell painters how to paint. He simply takes it for granted that the project of natural science is empirical, and that it involves theory construction, and that theories are to be tested against empirical observation. In an often cited remark that prefaces his *Naturphilosophie*, Hegel in fact says, “Not only must philosophy be in agreement with the experience of nature, but the *origin* and *formation* of philosophical science has empirical physics as its presupposition and condition.”¹⁰ In fact, Hegel rejects almost all the standard philosophical moves that are generally used to establish the normative priority of philosophy over science. In his *Logic*, he rejects the a priori/ a posteriori distinction as some kind of base-level, absolute distinction, thus ruling out a Kantian style of a priori account of the *Anfangsgründe* of natural science.¹¹ He also criticized some ideas still current in the natural science of his time as being too metaphysical and non-empirical, such as the idea of there being some kind of caloric “stuff” which explains heat, which he explicitly criticized for its a priori, non-empirical status.¹²

Hegel’s point in saying these kinds of things rests on his conviction that one’s methodology in science is intimately linked to one’s metaphysics of nature.¹³ An “enchanted” nature—one that is understood as the expression of some divine purpose, or as the locus of unobservable potentials for perfection—is not one suitable for scientific investigation. Indeed, it was not philosophy *per se* that prepared the way for a disenchanted nature; it was natural science itself, which showed that much of what was considered to be an expression of the various perfections inherent in the natural order (such as the sharp distinction between movement in the sublunar and superlunar spheres) is in reality refuted by the construction of an adequate scientific theory that is confirmed by empirical evidence. The task of a *Naturphilosophie* thus consists in linking scientific methodology with metaphysics, that is, with demonstrating what nature must be like if it is indeed the kind of thing that is to be studied by empirical natural science, and *that* study—*Naturphilosophie* itself—is not itself empirical but interpretive and evaluative. It attempts to show whether, for example, the kind of law/event model of explanation that dominates post-Baconian and Galilean science (which supplanted the older rationalist model of explaining nature in terms of inherent properties accessible to pure reason alone) can in fact be taken to be a rational, that is, a *true*, account of nature. Thus, taking into account the success of Newtonian mechanics, Hegel argues that we must conceive of the nature explained by mechanics as “pure externality,” that is, as consisting of parts,

each of which is identifiable independently of each other and whose concatenation is thus subject to mechanistic explanation.¹⁴ As “pure externality,” it is subject to precise mathematical description and thus to reductionist, mechanistic explanations. On Hegel’s account, the “Philosophy of Nature” not only shows that this is what nature must be like for Newtonian mechanics to be true, it also shows that such a conception of nature is itself rational (that is, that it is not riddled with insoluble paradoxes when stated on its own terms and that it fits the overall picture of mind and world developed in the *Logic*.¹⁵)

Where Hegel gets into trouble has to do with his understanding of two different, but for him closely related matters. First of all, he thinks that what empirical natural science teaches is that there are three different types of explanation for what is really at work in the natural world: There are mechanical explanations, where we explain the whole in terms of the causal interactions of its parts (each of which is identifiable outside of its position in the whole); there are chemical explanations for how different substances have an affinity or lack of affinity for each other in combinations of them (and where the chemical “whole” thus plays an explanatory role different from what it does in mechanical explanation); and there are biological explanations which are teleological, where the parts cannot be identified *as* organic parts outside of their place and their function within the organic whole.

Second, and in large part because of this belief about where the empirical sciences of his day take him, Hegel thinks that the only rational position to take in biology is that of a form of metaphysical holism: Organic wholes are not analyzable into their parts as are mechanical wholes, and thus there can be no mechanical explanation of life.¹⁶ That of course puts constraints on what empirical biology can come up with, but, for Hegel, that is both because that is the way nature is—not because philosophy is imposing some kind of a priori restraints on what counts as biology—and because this is (according to Hegel) in fact what empirical biology has come up with in its own investigations (up until the 1820’s).

To the extent that Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* claims to take its lead from the actual findings within the natural sciences, it goes without saying that developments since Hegel’s time in the natural sciences have not merely rendered some of his claims less plausible than they used to be, they have actually completely invalidated his view that this tripartite division of types of explanation is necessary for the scientific explanation of the physical world. Even worse: In 1828, in Berlin, while Hegel was still alive and teaching (he died in 1831), Friedrich Wöhler accidentally synthesized urea in his laboratory, thus demonstrating (without his prior intention to do so) that organic chemistry was in principle possible (and thus also in principle demonstrating that organic matter was capable of being explained by inorganic chemical and mechanical models). If that were not enough, the invention of quantum chemistry in the twentieth century has invalidated Hegel’s rejection of mechanical models of explanation in chemistry, and evolutionary theory since Darwin has quite obviously shown that there are mechanisms at work in the origin of the species (natural selection and sexual selection) and therefore that mechanical explanations have a perfectly good place in biological explanations of the world. Indeed, one way of reading of Darwinian theory (notably by Robert Brandon) suggests that the equation of reductionism with mechanistic explanations (an implicit belief held both Hegel and his Romantic counterparts) is itself not true; it is, for example, an empirical question as to whether natural selection operates at the group level or the

individual level; strict reductionism, on the other hand, holds that any such group level mechanistic explanation *must* be reducible to lower level mechanistic workings and is thus an imposition of a priori standards on the practice of natural science (thus violating one of the strictures Hegel himself puts on such accounts, strictures which are manifest in, for example, his criticism of earlier theories of heat as a kind of “caloric stuff”).¹⁷

In one way, therefore, the post-Hegelian *science* of nature completely invalidates the basic structure of Hegel’s own account of the *philosophy* of nature, but, curiously, that development is in another way more neatly consistent with Hegel’s more general determination of the relation between *Geist* and nature. Nature is the “other” to *Geist* because we *make* nature into the “other” of *Geist*; we have come take nature as “meaningless,” as fully disenchanted, as the non-normative “other” confronting the normative order by virtue of it is by our own activity (which has an ineradicable historical and social dimension to itself). On the Hegelian account, nature as a whole has no overall teleology, it *aims at* nothing, even if on Hegel’s own invalidated account, it should be seen as being completed in the formation of animal life. It is this conception of nature as “externality” that that we *bring to* the investigation of nature and which guides our empirical investigation of its various mechanisms. (That the invalidation of the major portion of his *Naturphilosophie* leads to the validation of the overall picture of nature in his philosophy is the kind of contradiction that might have made Hegel smile, at least for a little while.)

Despite all of this, there is still much in Hegel’s account of organic life that is crucial for his conception of subjectivity. Just as Hegel makes it clear that animals have “souls” (thus distinguishing himself both from Christian thought and Cartesian dualism), “animal life,” so he holds, must be understood in terms of having a kind of subjectivity on its own, a mode of self-relation as self-maintenance; the animal organism, that is, has a kind of self-relation in that it regulates itself by a series of mechanisms so that it can accomplish what it is that it is appropriate for the animal to accomplish. As Hegel puts it,

An important step towards a true conception of the organism is the substitution of the concept of *stimulation* by *external potencies* for that of the *action of external causes*. Idealism begins at the point where the assertion is made that nothing whatever can have a positive relation to what is living if this latter is not in and for itself the possibility of this relation, i.e., if the relation were not determined by the concept and hence utterly immanent in the subject.¹⁸

Animals have subjectivity in that it makes sense to speak of an “inside” and an “outside” to them that is not merely that of “inside the skin” and “outside the skin”; the stimulation comes from outside, and the response comes from inside; the response is a manifestation of the structure of motives and the like operating within the animal’s subjectivity.

Since the animal has a teleological structure to itself—that is, there are some things (organs) in it which can be said to *work* well or badly given the animal’s needs—there are things that can be said to *be* good or bad for the animal. For this reason, the concept of *disease* enters into the accounts of animal (and also plant) life, since for each animal or

plant there is some way in which some organ or part of itself can be interfering with its achieving the goals proper to that life-form. Moreover, at the level of animal life, it is the species (the *Gattung*, the “universal” of the particular animal in Hegel’s language) that is the focus of what is good and bad for the animal.¹⁹ The animal does not mark the distinction between itself and its species; only we do that.

The subjectivity of animal life is, as we saw, what constitutes the soul, the middle level of embodied, normed meaning between the purely natural and the genuinely “minded” (*Geistigkeit*). Genuinely “minded” life, however, consists in moving away from the merely *natural* conception of the organism’s working properly to the more fully *normative* conception of mindedness. That in turn is possible only in terms of relations of mutual recognition in the sense of agents conferring normative status on each other such that each can be an agent only in the context of a shape of spirit, what Hegel also calls a “form of life.”²⁰ Hegel puts it in this way:

Just in such appearances lies the need of our time to *conceptually comprehend* the relation between spirit and nature. We assert the ground-level essence of spirit to be freedom, freedom *from* and *within* the natural, a freedom which, however, must not be interpreted as arbitrary choice (*Willkür*) but rather as law-like freedom.²¹

It is then all the more striking that Hegel, entirely unlike Kant, does not attribute this freedom of spirit to any kind of special causality; in fact, in discussing freedom, he never uses the language of causality at all.²² Instead, Hegel’s entire discussion of freedom is entirely centered around the *kind of relation* one has to oneself in free action or thought which Hegel consistently identifies as various versions “being in one’s own sphere” (*bei sich selbst*). This is also identified with *ideality* (and “idealism”), another stand-in for normativity of various sorts. That is, freedom is elucidated in the normative terms not merely in organic terms of something *working* as it should but in terms of the more robust normative conceptions of *truth* and falsity. To underline this point, Hegel consistently says things such as the following:

The determination of freedom is also what we call ideality: A determination is posited, but its self-sufficiency is at the same time sublated. I comport myself idealistically [in that] I intuit something, and vis-à-vis me, it is self-sufficient; but this entire representation (*Vorstellung*) is mine, I am the bearer of that representation, I am what is self-sufficient, [and] the object is ideal.²³

To be free is to be in possession of certain rational powers of self-determination, and those powers are clearly not to be construed as special forms of causality. In its Hegelian mode, freedom is a form of expressive action, an ability to have one’s actions and thoughts reflect one’s own values and for oneself to be able to exercise a form of self-control (that is not to be seen as equivalent to exercising a special form of causality) over what one does and thinks, and to maintain a kind of self-consciousness throughout one’s

actions no matter how absorbed one may be in them. Hegel also makes it clear that this kind of freedom is even to be found paradigmatically not in action (as normally conceived) but in *thought*, where we go beyond what we merely encounter in experience as a matter of recognition-identification in order to construct *accounts* of those objects we encounter—paradigmatically in the construction of scientific theories of nature. To idealize something in this Hegelian sense is thus to integrate it into an account constructed by us, which in its fully realized form, is also seen as an act of self-determination; this is itself possible, though, only in terms of Hegel’s prior rejection (argued in the *Phenomenology*) of any kind of scheme/content distinction and of the idea that our ordinary experience contains explicit propositional claims. Hegel expresses this by saying that,

“in finite mind, which places nature outside of it, this idealization has a one-sided shape; here the activity of our willing, as of our thinking, is confronted by an external material which is indifferent to the alteration which is imposed on it and suffers quite passively the idealization which thus falls to its lot.”²⁴

That is, only by taking a rather *deflationary* stance toward ordinary experience—by holding fast to the idea that we encounter objects, not our representations of objects, and thus that the ordinary philosophical problems of perception are to be seen as having been dissolved, *ausgelöst*—is Hegel able to claim that nonetheless our conceptual grappling with the world takes us *beyond* that ordinary encounter, and we can understand that only if we grasp that our own subjectivity emerges out of nature not as a metaphysical form of emanation but as a developmental and historical achievement of a normative independence from nature. In fact, *only* by undermining all forms of the view that the objects of nature are somehow constructs out of our subjective (or, for that matter, intersubjective) experience can we move to a fully idealist view at least in Hegel’s sense of “idealism.”

In this respect, as Hegel makes it abundantly clear, if we were forced to choose between a purely naturalist account of mindedness and a dualist account, we would have to opt for the naturalist account. As he put it in his lectures on the subject, the “point of view of materialism” is a view we should in fact “honor” as a way of articulating the unity of mind and nature and overcoming all the dualisms associated with it; Hegel notes that “this point of view of materialism is, more or less that of naturalism,” and he goes on to add that if we also had to choose between *subjective* idealism—the view that nature is somehow a construct out of our own subjective experience—and materialism, then we would have to choose naturalism (or even dualism) over the “belief in miracles” that subjective idealism seems to force on us. Indeed, as Hegel wryly puts it, “in order to avoid [such] miracles, to avoid this total lack of discipline (*Wildheit*), to avoid the dissolution of the steady course of nature’s laws, we would prefer to stick either with materialism or with inconsistent dualism.”²⁵

What looks like only Hegel’s idiosyncratic ordering of terms into sets of triples has its true significance here, and it gives us Hegel’s non-transcendental alternative to bald

naturalism. On this Hegelian alternative, there are three ways in which we must conceive of our mindedness as normative.

First, there is the natural way in which, like all other animals, we aim at our organic goods; in human *agents*, this becomes the middle level of meaning in our embodiment, in which our conceptual capacities, although not in use, nonetheless inform our embodied dealings with the world. To be sure, we learn to recognize certain things (like egrets) by virtue of our acquired conceptual capacities, but the straightforward, immediate recognition of something as an egret is not itself an exercise of our conceptual capacities; indeed, it can go wrong in various circumstances not by virtue of any conceptual fault on our part but because these capacities (such as those which enable a person to recognize egrets) can misfire in those cases where the world around oneself has changed (where, for example, because of the invasion of an alien species, the surrounding environment comes to be inhabited by birds that resemble egrets but are not egrets). Our conceptual capacities first make their proper appearance as genuinely conceptual – that is, when their conceptual character is more fully actualized – when they come on the scene in which we use them to criticize and correct the results of those acquired capacities for identifying and re-identifying.

Second, there is the more distanced stance on the world which Hegel calls the “standpoint of consciousness” in which we form and revise reflective judgments about the objects we encounter as the natural beings we are. At that point, the play between reflective judgment and our ordinary experience comes to light, and a recognizable set of classical philosophical problems (such as those of Cartesian skepticism, or problems about the ontology of perceptual objects) make their appearance because what is at work there is not a straightforward experience of the world but an interplay between the independence of the natural objects of perception and their determination by us in reflective judgments.

Third, the truth of both of these is Hegel’s *normative monism*, the realization that the distinction between the normative and the non-normative is itself a normative distinction (or that the distinction between subject and object is neither itself subjective nor objective but is itself an articulation of the “absolute”).²⁶ This is indeed a “monism of reason” as Rolf-Peter Horstmann has characterized it, but it is not, at least in the form delineated here, *committed* to any kind of neo-Platonic metaphysics of reason. It is indeed committed to a social view of normativity, that is, to the view that the kinds of norms which are *wirklich*, at work in our lives have to be given an account that is social and historical but which nonetheless do not rest in any way on appeal to social positivity which would shrugs off alternative accounts with its characteristic, “This is just what we do.”

There is a natural question for readers of Hegel to ask at this point: Yes, but did *Hegel* think that we needed such a metaphysically charged “monism of reason,” as Horstmann has kept insisting that we need to acknowledge if we are to come to grips with the “real” Hegel?²⁷ And the answer seems to be: Yes; Hegel seemed to think that the view that our fundamentally normative stance on matters was underwritten by an idea at first grasped only imaginatively (in *Vorstellungen*) by religion but finally given true shape by philosophy, namely, that the world is fundamentally intelligible to our minds, that there is no fundamental, deep and hidden mystery to it that cannot be undone by the powers of thought.²⁸ On Hegel’s view, the order of the logic of our thoughts meshes with the order

of the universe in that we are giving shape and expression to the rational *logos* that is at work in everything. (None of this, so Hegel thought, in any way made philosophy less self-justifying than the thesis of normative monism minus its religious interpretation would have it; but he thought that this kind of normative monism also naturally spilled over into a religious sensibility as it crafted its explanations of itself.) Now, it would be very surprising if Hegel got everything right; my suspicion here is that he got it wrong in thinking that he had supplied us with a convincing set of reasons to believe that we must underwrite his normative monism with that kind of metaphysical-religious underpinning. That, however, is another topic for another day.

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Notes

¹ See Robert Pippin, “Concept and Intuition: On Distinguishability and Separability.” On Hegel’s own use of the metaphor of spinning in the void, see *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶396, where he speaks of a deficient conception of mentality as having “the appearance of the movement of a circle, which, within a void, freely moves itself within itself, and which, unimpeded, now enlarges and now contracts, and is fully satisfied in playing a game within itself and with itself.”

² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A51-B75; and A79=B105. Pippin cites the first of these passages in the article just mentioned.

³ Hegel *Werke*, vol. 2, *Glauben und Wissen*, pp. 304-305: “Man erblickt diese Idee durch die Flachheit der Deduktion der Kategorien hindurch und in Beziehung auf Raum und Zeit nicht da, wo sie sein sollte, in der transzendentalen Erörterung dieser Formen, aber doch in der Folge, wo die ursprünglich synthetische Einheit der Apperzeption erst bei der Deduktion der Kategorien zum Vorschein kommt und auch als Prinzip der figürlichen Synthesis oder der Formen der Anschauung erkannt und Raum und Zeit selbst als synthetische Einheiten und die produktive Einbildungskraft, Spontaneität und absolute synthetische Tätigkeit als Prinzip der Sinnlichkeit begriffen wird, welche vorher nur als Rezeptivität charakterisiert worden war.”

⁴ Hegel *Werke*, vol. 2, *Glauben und Wissen*, p. 305: “Diese ursprüngliche synthetische Einheit, d. h. eine Einheit, die nicht als Produkt Entgegengesetzter begriffen werden muß, sondern als wahrhaft notwendige, absolute, ursprüngliche Identität Entgegengesetzter, ist sowohl Prinzip der produktiven Einbildungskraft, der blinden, d. h. in die Differenz versenkten, von ihr sich nicht abscheidenden, als der die Differenz identisch setzenden, aber von den Differenten sich unterscheidenden Einheit, als Verstand; woraus erhellt, daß die Kantischen Formen der Anschauung und die Formen des Denkens gar nicht als besondere isolierte Vermögen auseinanderliegen, wie man es sich gewöhnlich vorstellt. Eine und ebendieselbe synthetische Einheit - und was diese hier heißt, ist soeben bestimmt worden - ist das Prinzip des Anschauens und des Verstandes.”

⁵ I take much of this distinction from the work of Charles Travis, who makes it in the context of his discussion of Wittgenstein on the nature of our acquaintance with singular items. See Charles Travis, *Thought’s Footing: Themes in Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁶ Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 14, p. 367: “Geist und Seele nämlich sind wesentlich zu unterscheiden. Denn die Seele ist nur dieses ideelle einfache Fürsichsein des Leiblichen als *Leiblichen*, der Geist aber das Fürsichsein des bewußten und *selbstbewußten* Lebens mit allen Empfindungen, Vorstellungen und Zwecken dieses bewußten Daseins.”

⁷ The term “reliable differential responsive disposition” is employed by Robert Brandom to characterize the original, non-cognitive response to the world which is then taken up and made meaningful by becoming integrated into a normative pattern of inferential activity. Although Brandom identifies this view with Hegel’s, it is too mechanistic to serve as an account of Hegel’s view. In Brandom’s Davidson-inspired picture, there are two spheres which need to be merged with each other: The normative relations holding between concepts (or judgments) and the world’s causal impacts on human agents who operate within that social, normative sphere. For Hegel, there is a third level, that of

“embodied meaning” which is not fully propositional but is nonetheless also not that of a completely non-normative disposition to respond in certain ways to causal impacts.

⁸ See Sean Kelly, “Seeing Things.” Kelly especially stresses and brings out the normative element in Merleau-Ponty’s conception of perceptual experience.

⁹ See *Enzyklopädie, Werke*, vol. 10, §409: “Dieses abstrakte Fürsichsein der Seele in ihrer Leiblichkeit ist noch nicht Ich, nicht die Existenz des für das Allgemeine seienden Allgemeinen. Es ist die auf ihre reine Idealität zurückgesetzte Leiblichkeit, welche so der Seele als solcher zukommt... so ist jenes reine Sein, das, indem in ihm die Besonderheit der Leiblichkeit, d.i. die unmittelbare Leiblichkeit als solche aufgehoben worden, Fürsichsein ist, das ganz reine bewußtlose Anschauen, aber die Grundlage des Bewußtseins, zu welchem es in sich geht, indem es die Leiblichkeit, deren subjektive Substanz es [ist] und welche für dasselbe noch als Schranke ist, in sich aufgehoben hat und so als Subjekt für sich gesetzt ist.”

¹⁰ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Werke*, vol. 8, §246.

¹¹ Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik, Werke* 5, p. 62: Hegel notes that some post-Kantians—he means most likely J.F. Fries—take up Kantian ideas without asking “whether and how they [the ideas] are able to be determinations of the thing-in-itself (following the Kantian mode of expression), or rather to be determinations of what is rational,” to which he then immediately adds: “The objective logic is consequently the genuine critique of those determinations — a critique which considers them not in terms of the abstract form of apriority as opposed to the a posteriori, but rather considers them themselves in their particular content.”

¹² Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 9, §305: “Die spezifische Wärme-Kapazität, verbunden mit der Kategorie von Materie und Stoff, hat zur Vorstellung von latentem, unmerkbarem, gebundenem Wärmestoff geführt. Als ein nicht Wahrnehmbares hat solche Bestimmung nicht die Berechtigung der Beobachtung und Erfahrung, und als erschlossen beruht sie auf der Voraussetzung einer materiellen Selbständigkeit der Wärme (vgl. Anm. § 286). Diese Annahme dient auf ihre Weise, die Selbständigkeit der Wärme als einer Materie empirisch unwiderleglich zu machen, eben dadurch, daß die Annahme selbst nichts Empirisches ist. Wird das Verschwinden der Wärme oder ihr Erscheinen, wo sie vorher nicht vorhanden war, aufgezeigt, so wird jenes für ein bloßes Verbergen oder sich zur Unmerkbarkeit Binden, dieses für ein Hervortreten aus der bloßen Unmerkbarkeit erklärt; die Metaphysik von Selbständigkeit wird jener Erfahrung entgegengesetzt, ja a priori der Erfahrung vorausgesetzt.”

¹³ Of course one could have a disjunction; one might believe in a created nature while nonetheless methodologically holding that it is best investigated as a mechanism, as pure externality. But in philosophy, we cannot be satisfied with such a bifurcated view; it’s of course another question as to whether we *need* this philosophical satisfaction. Hegel clearly thinks we do, but that is another topic.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Werke*, vol. 8, §247: “Die Natur hat sich als die Idee in der Form des Andersseinsergeben. Da die Idee so als das Negative ihrer selbst oder sich äußerlich ist, so ist die Natur nicht äußerlich nur relativ gegen diese Idee (und gegen die subjektive Existenz derselben, den Geist), sondern die Äußerlichkeit macht die Bestimmung aus, in welcher sie als Natur ist.” In the *Zusatz* to the paragraph, Hegel is supposed to have said, “Indem nämlich die Metaphysik der Natur, als die wesentliche Gedankenbestimmtheit

ihres Unterschiedes, diese ist, daß die Natur die Idee in ihrem Anderssein ist, so liegt darin, daß sie wesentlich ein Ideelles ist oder das, was nur als relativ, nur in Verhältnis zu einem Ersten seine Bestimmtheit hat.”

¹⁵ In Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*, I develop the idea of the *Logic* as the study of “mind and world,” which starts by rejecting the a priori/ a posteriori distinction in favor of a unity of concept and intuition. The idea is that such a “logic” gives us a picture of what it is rational to assert quite generally, and the question for a *Naturphilosophie* has to do with whether what the natural sciences have to say about the world contradict the general prescriptions on how we conceive of mind and world and in terms of what they concretely have to say about nature.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Werke*, vol. 9, §337: Das Leben ist die Vereinigung von Gegensätzen überhaupt, nicht bloß vom Gegensatze des Begriffs und der Realität. Das Leben ist, wo Inneres und Äußeres, Ursache und Wirkung, Zweck und Mittel, Subjektivität und Objektivität usw. ein und dasselbe ist. Die wahrhafte Bestimmung des Lebens ist, daß bei der Einheit des Begriffs und der Realität diese Realität nicht mehr in unmittelbarer Weise, in Weise der Selbständigkeit sei, als Vielheit von existierenden Eigenschaften, die auseinander sind, sondern der Begriff schlechthin Idealität des gleichgültigen Bestehens sei. Indem die Idealität, die wir im chemischen Prozesse gehabt haben, hier gesetzt ist, so ist die Individualität in ihrer Freiheit gesetzt. Die subjektive, unendliche Form ist nun auch in ihrer Objektivität; was sie in der Gestalt noch nicht war, weil in dieser die Bestimmungen der unendlichen Form noch festes Dasein als Materien haben. Der abstrakte Begriff des Organismus ist dagegen, daß die Existenz der Besonderheiten, indem diese als vorübergehende Momente eines Subjekts gesetzt sind, der Einheit des Begriffes angemessen ist, während im System der himmlischen Körper alle besonderen Momente des Begriffs für sich frei existierende, selbständige Körper sind, die noch nicht unter die Einheit des Begriffs zurückgekehrt sind. Das Sonnensystem war der erste Organismus; er war aber nur an sich, noch keine organische Existenz. Diese Riesenglieder sind selbständige Gestalten und die Idealität ihrer Selbständigkeit nur ihre Bewegung; es ist nur ein Organismus des Mechanismus. Das Lebendige aber hat diese Riesenglieder der Natur in einem, indem alles Besondere als erscheinend gesetzt ist. Im Leben ist das Licht so über das Schwere vollkommen Meister; das Lebendige ist also die Individualität, welche die weiteren Besonderungen der Schwere in sich subigiert hat und tätig in sich selbst ist. Erst als sich aufhebende Realität ist das Sichselbsterhalten des Begriffes gesetzt. Der Individualität des chemischen Körpers kann sich eine fremde Macht bemächtigen; das Leben hat aber sein Anderes an ihm selbst, es ist eine abgerundete Totalität in sich, - oder es ist Selbstzweck. War der erste Teil der Naturphilosophie Mechanismus, das Zweite in seiner Spitze Chemismus, so ist dies Dritte Teleologie (s. § Zus.). Das Leben ist Mittel, aber nicht für ein Anderes, sondern für diesen Begriff; es bringt seine unendliche Form immer hervor. Schon Kant bestimmte das Lebendige als Zweck für sich selbst. Die Veränderung ist nur zum Behufe des Begriffes vorhanden, ist nur Veränderung des Andersseins des Begriffes, und in dieser Negation des Negativen, in dieser absoluten Negativität allein ist es, daß er bei sich bleiben kann. Das Organische ist schon an sich das, was es wirklich ist; es ist die Bewegung seines Werdens. Aber was das Resultat ist, ist auch das Vorhergehende, - der Anfang ist dasselbe, was das Ende ist; dies, was bisher nur unser Erkennen war, ist jetzt in die Existenz getreten. Weil das

Leben, als Idee, die Bewegung seiner selbst ist, wodurch es sich erst zum Subjekte macht, so macht das Leben sich selbst zu seinem Anderen, zum Gegenwurfe seiner selbst; es gibt sich die Form, als Objekt zu sein, um zu sich zurückzukehren und zurückgekehrt zu sein.

¹⁷ See Robert Brandon, *Concepts and Methods in Evolutionary Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Werke*, vol. 9, §359. “Daß für den Organismus die Bestimmung von *Erregtwerden* durch *Äußerliche Potenzen* an die Stelle des Einwirkens äußerlicher Ursachen gekommen ist, ist ein wichtiger Schritt in der wahrhaften Vorstellung desselben. Es beginnt darin der Idealismus, daß überhaupt nichts eine positive Beziehung zum Lebendigen haben kann, deren Möglichkeit dieses nicht an und für sich selbst, d. h. die nicht durch den Begriff bestimmt, somit dem Subjekte schlechthin immanent wäre.”

¹⁹ See Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Werke*, vol. 9, §322: “Im Organischen ist es die Gattung, das innere Allgemeine, wodurch das Einzelne zugrunde gerichtet wird.”

²⁰ In his early, pre-*Phenomenology* writings, Hegel often used “life” in contexts where he would later prefer the term, “spirit,” and he would speak of a “shape of life” in a way that foreshadowed his later preference for a shape of spirit. In “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” he even (more or less) equated a “shape of life” with a “form of life” (*Lebensform*): “und die Liebe mußte immer die Form der Liebe, des Glaubens an Gott behalten ohne lebendig zu werden und in Gestalten des Lebens sich darzustellen, weil jede Gestalt des Lebens entgegengesetzbar vom Verstand als sein Objekt, als eine Wirklichkeit, gefaßt werden kann; und das Verhältnis gegen die Welt mußte zu einer Ängstlichkeit vor ihren Berührungen werden, eine Furcht vor jeder Lebensform, weil in jeder sich, da sie Gestalt hat und nur **eine** Seite ist, ihr Mangel aufzeigen läßt und dies Mangelnde ein Anteil an der Welt ist.” *Werke*, I, p. 403. (Underlining added by me) In the later 1820 *Philosophy of Right*, he instead employed only the phrase, “Gestalt des Lebens,” to express the idea of a “form of life.”

²¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes: Berlin 1827/1828*, p. 19: Eben in solchen Erscheinungen liegt <auch> das Bedürfnis unserer Zeit, das Verhältnis des Geistes und der Materie zu *begreifen*. Es ist gesagt, daß wir als Grundwesen des Geistes die *Freiheit* behaupten, die Freiheit *vom* und *im* Natürlichen, die aber nicht aufgefaßt werden muß als Willkür, sondern als gesetzmäßige Freiheit.

²² On this topic, see the landmark article by Robert Pippin, “Naturalness and Mindedness: Hegel's Compatibilism,” in *The European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, n.2, (1999), pp. 194 - 212.

²³ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes: Berlin 1827/1828* *Nachgeschrieben von Johann Eduard Erdmann und Ferdinand Walter*, p. 15.

²⁴ ¶381 *Zusatz*; p. 13 English translation.

²⁵ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes: Berlin 1827/1828* *Nachgeschrieben von Johann Eduard Erdmann und Ferdinand Walter*, pp. 16, 20.

²⁶ This way of putting it, as most will recognize, comes from Robert Brandom: “Freedom and Constraint by Norms,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, April, 1977, pp. 187–196.

²⁷ See Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*.

²⁸ That this might actually invite the religious reading back into Hegel—into a metaphysical *Vernunftmonismus* (which Horstmann argues is always already there in

Hegel) instead of into the more normative monism to which I have argued Hegel is committed—is echoed by Thomas Nagel in a completely different context and completely divorced from any reading of Hegel. In discussing Peirce’s view of why our thoughts, once given scientific form, match up with the way the world is, Nagel notes: “If we can reason, it is because our thoughts can obey the order of the logical relations among propositions—so here again we depend on a Platonic harmony./ The reason I call this view alarming is that it is hard to know what world picture to associate it with, and difficult to avoid the suspicion that the picture will be religious, or quasi-religious. Rationalism has always had a more religious flavor than empiricism. Even without God, the idea of a natural sympathy between the deepest truths of nature and the deepest layers of the human mind, which can be exploited to allow the gradual development of a truer and truer conception of reality, makes us more *at home* in the universe than is secularly comfortable.” Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). pp. 129-130.