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COUNTERING POSTMODERN GENEALOGIES: BRANDOM, HEGEL AND THE LOGIC OF SELF-DETERMINATION

ABSTRACT
In his recent *A Spirit of Trust*, Robert Brandom interprets Hegel as proposing a conception of normativity that overcomes the shortcomings of both modernity and its critics. Brandom's Hegel asks for a "hermeneutics of magnanimity", in opposition to what Paul Ricœur labelled the "hermeneutics of suspicion". According to Brandom, "great unmaskers" of modern normativity like Nietzsche or Foucault make use of the delegitimizing force that characterizes genealogical explanation. Their suspicion is that what is thought to be normative is conditioned by contingencies that undermine that very normativity. In this paper, while raising objections against Brandom's reading, I want to hold on to his idea that Hegelian philosophy counters those subversive postmodern genealogies. Instead of focusing, as Brandom does, on the end of the "Spirit" chapter in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, I draw on Hegel's logic of self-determination. Contrary to the "great unmaskers", for Hegel, explanation of something through reference to some external or contingent factor is parasitic on explanation that explains something through itself.

Introduction

In his recent monumental commentary on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* titled *A Spirit of Trust*, Robert Brandom proposes the idea of a conception of normativity with "an edifying intent" (Brandom 2019: 636) to be found in Hegel. He ascribes the term "postmodern" to this conception not in order to bring Hegel closer to the representatives of the 20th-century postmodern movement. On the contrary, this "postmodern structure of normativity", which he also labels as the "hermeneutics of magnanimity" (ibid.: 30, 635), is precisely meant as an antidote not just to flaws of modern normativity but also to subversive criticisms of modernity by the "masters of suspicion" (Ricœur 2008: 33) or "the

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great unmaskers" (Brandom 2019: 561), as Brandom calls them. According to Brandom, these unmaskers make use of genealogical explanation, that is, a form of explanation that undercuts the normative force of that which is explained. After an overly substantial ethical life in antiquity and overly subjective modernity paired with its genealogical critics, Brandom imagines "recognitive practices of a hypothetical future third age of Spirit" (ibid.: 560).

In the following, I first lay out the analysis of genealogical explanation and the response to it, as Brandom finds them in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Then, referring to various criticisms that have been made of Brandom's reading, I put forward another way to understand Hegelian philosophy as countering genealogy that draws instead from Hegel's logic of self-determination.

In contrast to Brandom, I will speak of those genealogies that seek to subvert modern normativity as postmodern. These genealogies do not exhaust what is meant by postmodern philosophy.[1] Yet given that the genealogical tradition extends at least from Nietzsche to Foucault, it can certainly be characterized as postmodern in spirit. The idea that the production of knowledge is entangled with regimes of power, the suspicion of reason both in its capacity to cognize what is universally true and in its capacity to liberate from dogmatism are undoubtedly crucial postmodern moments in the genealogical tradition. What is more, genealogy traces not continuity but contingency, the countless little accidents and errors that arise in the history of events. In the words of Foucault,

> if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. [...] What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity (Foucault 1971: 142–143).

> [W]e want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference (ibid.: 155).

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1   Lyotard defined postmodernism influentially as an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard 1984: xxiv), in particular, metanarratives about emancipation, universality and scientific progress. As the term itself already indicates, postmodernism is a historical product. It is a condition of knowledge which "designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts" (ibid.: xxiii). According to Gary Aylesworth, postmodernism "can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning" (Aylesworth 2015).

Brandom's Hegel on Postmodern Genealogies

The problem of both modern subjectivity and its genealogical critics is alienation from the actuality of norms. "[T]he attitude-dependence of norms", arising with modernity, "may be seen to undercut the authority they claim over attitudes" (Brandom 2019: 561). In both modern subjectivity and genealogical explanation, normativity is, though in two distinctive forms, conceived as a product of us. In the first case, normativity stems from our autonomy, from the self-commanding subject. In the second case, it stems from some particular contingent feature of us.

Towards the end of the "Spirit" chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel presents the allegory of the valet to express the partiality of judging consciousness when it finds acting consciousness not living up to its moral aspirations. Brandom reads the valet as a figure who "epitomizes for Hegel the reductive naturalism" or "the alienated displacement of reasons in favor of causes (the normative in favor of the natural)". As described by the allegory, the "alienated ironic detachment" that genealogical explanation results in "may treat normative discourse as ... the expression of particular, private attitudes, interests, and inclinations" (ibid.: 560).

Hegel's short allegory reads as follows:

> No man is a hero to his valet, but not because that man is not a hero, but rather because the latter is—a valet, a person with whom the hero deals not as a hero but as someone who eats, drinks, gets dressed, in general in the [particularity] of the hero's needs and ideas. For that kind of judgmental assessment, there is no action for which such judgmental assessment cannot oppose the aspect of the [particularity] of individuality to the action's universal aspect, and there is no action in which it cannot play the part of the moral valet towards the actor (Hegel 2018: §665).

The valet judges that the hero is not a hero after all. By seeing through the hero's partiality, he (the valet) himself rises up to the universality that the hero had professed to act out. The tables have turned. The valet knows universality on his side, while he sees only particularity actualized outside of him. By virtue of this asymmetry between judging and acting consciousness, the allegory of the valet transitions into the allegory of the hard heart. Hegel states that "judging consciousness [...] is the hard heart which is for itself and which rejects any continuity with the other" (ibid.: §667). What is more,

> it is *hypocrisy* because he pretends that such judgment is not only *another manner* of being evil but is rather itself the *rightful consciousness* of action. In his non-actuality and in the vanity he has in being such a faultfinder, he places himself far above the deeds it excoriates, and he wants to know that his speech, which is utterly devoid of any deeds, is to be taken as a superior *actuality* (ibid.: §666).

The hard heart takes its judgment to be conclusive without the need to act. It is only seeing without being seen. It wants only authority without responsibility.

Acting consciousness will not change judging consciousness by any further action, for the problem is not that the hero "is not a hero but rather [that] the [valet] is—a valet" (ibid.: §665). There is nothing acting consciousness can do, for judging consciousness has stopped being responsive to anything else than particularity. In this attitude, the hard heart precisely interrupts the process through which universality is engendered.

Describing the basic character of subversive genealogies, Brandom states that "the possibility of offering a certain kind of *genealogical* account of the process by which a conceptual content developed or was determined can seem to undercut the *rational* bindingness of the norms that have that content" (Brandom 2019: 561) or, more simply, that "a genealogy of content can undercut normative force" (ibid.: 564). Following Brandom's interpretation, we can understand the valet or judging consciousness as applying a hermeneutics of suspicion which does not see the normativity instituted by acting consciousness but only its partiality. It is like explaining a judge's judgment by reference to "what the judge had for breakfast" (ibid.: 564–565).[2] Moreover,

> such a genealogical explanation might invoke the nature of the judge's training, the prejudices of his teachers, the opinions of his culture circle, his career ambitions, the political emphases, issues, and pressures of the day, and so on. Playing the moral valet to the judge is offering such a genealogical account of a judgment: revealing it as not a response to reasons properly provided by precedent and principle, not a matter of acknowledging as binding the content of an antecedent norm, but as the product of extrajudicial, rationally extraneous motives and considerations (ibid.: 565).

In such an explanation, there is no space for normativity in its emphatic sense, only for ideology. Importantly, Brandom's and, in fact, Hegel's point is not that action cannot be subjected to partiality, for any action is, by definition, something particular as well. Yet judging consciousness does not see that it itself can be subjected to such partiality, and that its conscientiousness is no more secure than that of acting consciousness. Judging consciousness claims partiality to be out there in the other but, in doing so, professes its own universality. Judging consciousness thinks itself to have seen through the false claims of morality and universality and to have found only particularities beneath, and this is how Brandom describes genealogical explanation: "The genealogy tells us what is *really* going on, by presenting the underlying mechanism actually responsible for our taking this rather than that as appropriate, fitting, or correct" (ibid.: 562).

Brandom explicitly tells us who he has in mind when problematizing this form of explanation. The genealogical tradition does not exhaust itself in what Ricœur labelled the "masters of suspicion", the "great unmaskers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud" (ibid.:

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2   This ironic remark is not just a common slogan but has been tested and corroborated in scientific study (see Danziger, Levav and Avnaim-Pesso 2011).

656), but extends to "Foucault at the end of the twentieth" (ibid.: 565). According to Brandom, even

> [a] great deal of the later Wittgenstein's writing can be read as pointing out genealogical antecedents of our reason-giving and reason-assessing practices. … The norms implicit in our most basic discursive practices accordingly show up as deeply *parochial,* in that their specific content depends on contingent features of our embodiment and natural history, and of antecedently established practices and institutions. That is why he thinks that if the lion could speak, we would not be able to understand him (ibid.: 562).

These various thinkers certainly do not speak of the same underlying mechanisms, and they need not think of mechanical causation or linear development, for instance, at all.[3] What matters is that they all take for granted a certain way of genealogical explanation in which something is explained by its origin or function without this origin or function being normatively meaningful, that is, without this explanation giving evidence for the truth or normativity of what is explained. Genealogy, in "[e]xhibiting the contingent features of things, not addressed by a conceptual content or commitment, that caused it to be as it is, unmasks talk of reasons as irrelevant mystification. *Niederträchtig* [pusillanimous or base] explanations take precedence over *edelmütig* [magnanimous] ones" (ibid.: 565). This character pervades all sorts of genealogical stories we may tell. Hinting humorously at the three masters of suspicion, Brandom writes:

> If one's approval of treating labor as a commodity is due to one's bourgeois upbringing, if one's Christian humility is the result of *ressentiment,* if one's authoritarianism should be understood as stemming from unresolved conflicts left over from the Family Romance, then the justifiability and hence the normative force, the authority, of those commitments is challenged. For being raised in bourgeois circumstances is not evidence for the justice of labor markets, being riven with *ressentiment* does not provide reasons for esteeming humility, and Oedipal rivalry with one's father does not justify the contents of authoritarian attitudes (ibid.: 657).

We may deny that those philosophers mentioned by Brandom can be grouped together under the label of reductive naturalism. Nevertheless, Brandom is right in detecting a crucial genealogical character in their philosophies and in his description of that genealogical character. Postmodern genealogies prioritize particularity over universality. By excavating the contingent structures lurking beneath our normative attitudes and commitments, these genealogies disenchant what first seemed to have universal appeal and reveal it to have detectable roots in a particular setting which itself has no normative force.

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3   As mentioned in the beginning, in good postmodern fashion, Foucault explicitly rejects any such linear development, for instance, in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History" (1971).

Genealogists seek to reveal how a "specific content depends on contingent features of our embodiment and natural history, [or] of antecedently established practices and institutions" (ibid.: 562). Their stories use "the structure that underlies the delegitimizing force of genealogical explanations generally" (ibid.: 656).[4] In this sense, they speak indeed with the voice of Hegel's valet who puts into question the conscientiousness of the hero by revealing that the latter's aspiration to universality amounts to something rather particular. What is more, unmasking how we have become what we are by way of genealogical explanation does not leave the normative force of our attitudes or commitments untouched. The "ironic distance" (ibid.: 560), quoted at the beginning of this section, which reveals alienation from what has previously been taken as normative or true, is certainly not alien to the postmodern condition.[5]

Brandom concludes that "[a] foreseeable consequence of appreciating these contingencies conditioning our practices is a delegitimizing of the norms whose contingency has been revealed. This undercutting of the rational bindingness of the norms is alienation in Hegel's sense" (ibid.: 656). Then, the question is how to reconcile contingency with normativity, or how to achieve an unalienated form of normativity that takes up modern subjectivity, instead of taking it back.

> Pointing to the radical contingencies that our conceptual norms are subjunctively dependent upon poses a threat to our understanding of those norms as *rationally binding* on us. The challenge is to see why, if the norms are to this extent and in this way our products, they can nonetheless be understood to be binding on us, to be *correctly* used this way and not that (ibid. 2019: 656).

Brandom's Hegel on the "Hermeneutics of Magnanimity"

In Brandom's reading of the *Phenomenology*, "forgiving recollection" (Brandom 2019: 538) is the key to postmodern unalienated normativity. It requires an attitude of magnanimity that contrasts with the valet and the hard heart, the two allegoric forms of judging consciousness that deny any continuity with acting consciousness; that is, they deny the possibility to reinstitute a reconciled community of both consciousnesses. The hard heart does not grant forgiveness and

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4   Foucault, for instance, seeks to "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault 1982: 208) and expresses his suspicion of reason when he asks: "*What* is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers?" (Foucault 1984: 249). The term *épistémè* signifies for him an historical *a priori* that "defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge" (Foucault 1966: 183) and practice in a cultural epoch. Foucault adopts genealogical explanation most explicitly in his 1971 "Nietzsche" essay and his 1975 monograph *Discipline and Punish*. Yet I take it that Brandom's characterization of genealogical explanation also applies to Foucault's earlier archeological writings of the 1960s.
5   Along the same lines, Foucault states that "historical beginnings are lowly: not in the sense of modest or discreet like the steps of a dove, but derisive and ironic, capable of undoing every infatuation" (Foucault 1971: 143).

precisely in this denial thinks itself to exhibit universality, in opposition to the particularity of the confessing acting consciousness. In a Hegelian sense, by cutting itself off from the other and any happening outside, it belies its very commitment to universality. Through its discontinuity with the other, its professed universality turns itself into something particular.

Forgiving recollection then signifies the idea to rationally reconstruct any doing as implicitly governed by a normative force, even though the doer might have been unable to make that normativity explicit. Such recollective forgiving reconciles the intention of the doer with what really happened. Brandom's Hegel's "postmodern neoheroic form of practical normativity replaces (normatively) blind fate with something we do for reasons" (ibid.: 756). While in the ancient conception of normativity the doer was responsible regardless of what was intended, in the modern conception the doer takes up responsibility only for what was intended regardless of any result. The reconciliation of the two then does not consist in denying the responsibility of the doer for what has happened but in spreading it out onto the whole community, in which fellow self-consciousnesses confess to and forgive each other. This third conception combines "the modern insight into the attitude-dependence of normative statuses [and] the traditional insight into the status-dependence of normative attitudes" (ibid.: 263). It, therein, shows how normative force has both subjectivity and objectivity as its moments. That is to say, it encompasses, at the same time, both an understanding of how normativity happens through the autonomous subject that makes something normative by taking it to be normative and an understanding of how normative force is something that bears on actuality, something that is really efficacious in communities.

As such, normative assessment is more than just the recognition of the attitude of the doer. It recognizes the responsibility of the doer for what is actual but only does so insofar as this responsibility is shared by the ones who assess the doer. In "Hegel's recognition model based on symmetrical social recognitive attitudes" (ibid.: 263), deeds are the doing of all, as it were. Of course, there is a distinction between the doer of the deed and the ones who rationally recollect it. Otherwise, there would be no need to confess or forgive at all. But through confession and forgiveness the significance of the deed, its conceptual content, itself changes.

In contrast to the valet and the hard heart, adopting the magnanimous attitude means not to take the deed of the doer as an objective fact, as something whose significance is already decided in and of itself, as something which is entirely evil or good and the responsibility for which lies completely outside of the judger. Certainly, adopting this attitude does not mean that one can and will forgive just anything. It means, however, that one takes oneself to be subject to the same logic of confession and forgiveness as the person that one judges. In other words, one may find oneself unable to tell a recollective story in a certain case. But this does not let one off the hook to take on responsibility for one's inability to find the responsivity to norms in that particular case. It is not that anything is forgiven but that we are committed to forgive:

As a magnanimous, *edelmütig,* forgiving assessor of another's doing, one *confesses* that it is (also) one's *own* fault, that one is not good enough at forgiving. And one must *trust* that this recollective-recognitive failure, too— like the failure of the original, inadequately forgiven doer— will be more successfully forgiven by future assessors (who know more and are better at it). ... The content of the shared recognitive attitudes with which all parties identify is 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass before us' (ibid. 2019: 748-749).

In sum, by adopting the attitude of magnanimity, we treat our predecessors or fellow self-consciousnesses as guided by normative force and not just as determined by some contingent feature such as their breakfasts. In doing this, we institute symmetrical recognitive relationships with them and establish a continuity between us and them, instead of the discontinuity claimed by the valet and the hard heart. At the same time, we hope future judging consciousnesses will do the same to us, that is, judge our judgments or acts to be likewise guided by normative force and not just to be some particular natural or psychological event.

Brandom himself recognizes his Hegel as providing "at once a theory and a fighting faith". Put differently, "[i]t is, remarkably, a *semantics* that is *morally* edifying". This is to say, for Brandom, understanding the conditions under which forgiving recollection may be instituted "turns out to commit us to adopting to one another practical *recognitive* attitudes of a particular kind: forgiveness, confession, and trust". Understanding this postmodern conception of normativity does not just make intelligible what is always already going on but "obliges us to be certain kinds of selves, and to institute certain kinds of communities" (ibid. 2019: 635). This "semantics with an edifying intent" (ibid.: 636)

> obliges us in practice to forgive and trust one another: to be *that* kind of self and institute *that* kind of community. Practicing the recollective recognitive hermeneutics of magnanimity is not just one option among others. A proper understanding of ourselves as discursive creatures obliges us to institute a community in which reciprocal recognition takes the form of forgiving recollection: a community bound by and built on trust (ibid.: 635).

Brandom's Hegel points to the future, to something that is not yet actualized in modernity and only anticipated at the end of the *Phenomenology*. What is more, each practitioner of forgiving recollection points to the future, in so far as she must assume practitioners of such recollection following upon her will treat her as magnanimously as she treated her predecessors. These claims in particular have provoked criticisms of Brandom's reading.

While Brandom's critics do not deny that Hegelian philosophy counters certain reductive forms of explanation, they see one major problem in the very anticipation of a third unalienated age of trust and its edifying implications (see, for instance, Houlgate 2020 and Žižek 2015, 2020). For Slavoj Žižek, this proposition of a future we may actively work towards is anti-Hegelian at its

core, since Hegel "explicitly prohibits any project of how our future should look" (Žižek 2020). Žižek's critique focuses on Brandom's notion of forgiving recollection.

> Brandom gets caught into a spurious infinite of recognition: the gap between intention and consequences of our actions is constitutive, we cannot ever reach full reconciliation, we are condemned to the infinite progress towards overcoming disparity, every agent has to trust forgiveness from the future figures of big Other (Žižek 2015: 807).

In Brandom's picture, the inability to forgive is a failure also on our part and not just on the part of the evildoer; it is something one would have to confess and something that would be in need of forgiveness by other (future) self-consciousnesses. We recollect magnanimously the past, as we trust we will be recollected magnanimously in the future. In this sense, we trust in the spirit of trust pervading history. But this amounts to an ethical project and to what Žižek calls "holistic teleology" in which we have to trust in the unending telling of better recollective stories which discover a "'deeper meaning' that obfuscates the brutal reality of catastrophes" (Žižek 2020). Žižek also points out that "[s]uch a simple self-historicization/self-relativization is thoroughly non-Hegelian" (Žižek 2015: 807). He finds "this jump to the future, this faith in progress, totally unwarranted, and at odds with Hegel's basic metaphysical stance" (Žižek 2020). This mischaracterization of "Hegel's basic metaphysical stance" may fit with Brandom's neglect of the *Science of Logic*.[6] As both Stephen Houlgate and Clara Ramas San Miguel point out, the *Phenomenology* is a "sceptical 'ladder'" (Houlgate 2020) and, therein, of a "preliminary character", for "it cannot be assumed that [it] presents Hegel's definitive ideas on being, truth, consciousness or action" (Ramas San Miguel 2023: 228).[7]

Brandom's interpretation of Hegel focuses on the individuation of conceptual content through a process of the experience of error and the recollective reparation of error. This process is necessarily unending; hence, the open-endedness and instability of any empirical concept. This process does not just describe the way the sciences progress but applies to the social and historical institution of discursive norms. What is more, Brandom also wants the categories or meta-concepts in which philosophy traffics to be of that open and instable character.

> As a matter of deep pragmatist semantic principle, the *only* way to understand the content of a determinate concept, [Hegel] thinks, is by rationally reconstructing

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6   In Brandom's reading, the *Science of Logic* does not really add anything to the story. The *Science of Logic* is merely a purified and, in its finality, overly confident repetition of "those same contents", that is, "those metaconcepts" (Brandom 2019: 7) already laid out in the *Phenomenology*.

7   Of course, despite the objections raised against Brandom's interpretation, his philosophy of magnanimity may still be investigated on its own account and independently of the question of whether Brandom's Hegel is indeed Hegel.

an expressively progressive history of the process of determining it. This is Hegel's model of conceptual content, and he extends it to the content of his favored speculative metaconcepts (Brandom 2019: 7).

Thus, these categories or meta-concepts philosophers use to make intelligible how determinate empirical concepts work exhibit the same logical structure as empirical concepts. Brandom finds this in the progression of forms of consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and it is this that conflicts with the *Science of Logic*, in which a final set of categories or meta-concepts is developed. Brandom wants those categories or meta-concepts to be generated bottom-up, to be finite and unstable, that is, in need of forgiving recollection, just like our empirical concepts. His idea that the development of our logical concepts is subject to the same forgiving recollection throughout history as our empirical concepts contradicts both the presuppositionlessness and finality of the *Science of Logic*.

Finally, in the last section, I explore how Hegel can be read as countering postmodern genealogies, drawing from his logic of self-determination.[8]

Hegel and the Logic of Self-Determination

Ricœur characterizes the masters of suspicion as follows:

Descartes triumphed over the doubt as to things by the evidence of consciousness; they triumph over the doubt as to consciousness by an exegesis of meaning. Beginning with them, understanding is hermeneutics: henceforward, to seek meaning is no longer to spell out the consciousness of meaning, but to *decipher its expressions*. What must be faced, therefore, is not only a threefold suspicion, but a threefold guile. If consciousness is not what it thinks it is, a new relation must be instituted between the patent and the latent; this new relation would correspond to the one that consciousness had instituted between appearances and the reality of things. For Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, the fundamental category of consciousness is the relation of hidden-shown or, if you prefer, simulated-manifested (Ricœur 2008: 33–34).

Assuming that there is (at least some) truth to this characterization, it shows that the masters of suspicion go behind Hegel's insight into the limits of the

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8 Due to his own emphasis on contingency, Žižek would certainly not be fond of the top-down reading, as developed in the following. Along these lines, he writes that "contingency does not only enter at the level of the circumstances of the actualization of an end: what if the contingent aspects of an action are the very inner intentions of its agents? It is in this sense that Hegel speaks about the 'spiritual animal kingdom', his term for the complex interaction of individuals in a market society: each individual participating in it is moved by egotist concerns (personal wealth, pleasures, power…)" (Žižek 2015: 799). Notably, his example remains on the level of objective spirit which, for Hegel, is not the highest concept, that is, not the highest form of self-determination, we can think. Nevertheless, his critical remarks concerning Brandom's Hegel quoted above are still helpful to motivate my own reading.

Logic of Essence. Hegel's Logic of Essence deals precisely with something inner and something outer, with something expressing and something expressed. The Logic of Essence thinks mediation as concepts being reflected through one another. Yet it cannot think self-development. Being stuck in reflection, it cannot think the immanent movement of the concept. As such, the masters of suspicion ignore Hegel's Logic of the Concept.

The concept "is none other than the 'I' or pure self-consciousness" (Hegel 2010b: 514).[9] The masters of suspicion pretend to unmask the falsity of consciousness, to unmask ideology or to unmask certain determinate concepts we operate with. Yet they do not grasp self-consciousness. They fail to grasp the pure concept and reiterate concepts of the Logic of Essence which are only preliminary. Their suspicion is stuck in the reflection of some outer appearance in consciousness (truth, goodness, reason, autonomy etc.) and something hidden beneath that reveals the contingency or ideological character of that consciousness by referring to its origin or function. Genealogical explanation is restricted to the Logic of Essence, to contrasting distinctions between what is determining and what is determined, between condition and conditioned, ground and grounded, essence and appearance. As such, it is unable to conceive of self-determination and individuality.

Richard Dien Winfield presents the breakdown of the Logic of Essence as follows:

> What the entire development of the Logic of Essence shows is that none of these relations can sustain themselves as independent, immediate factors that could serve as ultimate principles. Instead, the relation of positor and posited continually undermines itself insofar as the positor can only play its determining role by being in relation to what is posited. What is posited, as posited, effectively posits the determining character of its positor, such that the positor is posited and the posited operates as a positor [...] With this development, the logic of foundationalism eliminates itself, giving way to the logic of self-determination (Winfield 2022: 67–68).

It is noteworthy that this breaking down of relations of conditioning and the transition to self-determination is present, first, at the transition *to* the Logic of the Concept by way of the self-dissolution of reciprocity at the end of Hegel's Logic of Essence and, second, *within* the logic of the Concept at the end of its "Objectivity" chapter that transitions to the self-determination of the idea articulated in inherently purposeful life, truth and goodness. This double appearance can be understood as follows: The concept already articulates self-determination with its three moments of universality, particularity and individuality. Yet it is only later, having gone through the "Objectivity" chapter, that we see how this self-determination is really something actual, that is,

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9   The passage goes on: "True, I *have* concepts, that is, determinate concepts; but the 'I' is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into *determinate existence*" (Hegel 2010b: 514).

something that does not have objectivity as its alien other and, hence, is not something that is trapped in subjectivity or a mind, as it were.

> Hegel's logic of the concept demonstrates how reason can escape Kant's appeal to the given, overcome heteronomy, and determine itself. The universal's self-determining self-differentiation is what allows concepts to lay hold of objectivity, which unlike conditioned appearance is determined in and through itself. Precisely because objectivity is what is in its own right, it can be the proper object of truth and transparent to a reason whose autonomous development can think through the self-development of an unconditioned subject matter (Winfield 2022: 69).

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive that it is in the subjective logic, the Logic of the Concept, where the notion of objectivity comes on stage. Yet this is because the concept, that is, self-consciousness or thought, is precisely not the other of objectivity but what opens up the idea of a totality of knowledge which objectivity is in the first place.[10] While the animal or, to a lesser extent, the plant refers to and interacts with its environment, its ecological niche, self-consciousness or thought refers to objectivity as such. The idea of thought is the idea of thinking what is. It is not the idea of thinking something particular, something conditioned, but thinking what is in its entirety. Self-consciousness is beyond any particular determination. As Hegel writes in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Right*, "[t]he human being alone is able to abandon all things, even his own life: he can commit suicide" (Hegel 1991a: §5 Zu). While the animal has a sensitivity to its ecological niche, self-consciousness is openness to what is thinkable or to reality as such. It is not that we are this and that, and, then, in a second step, on certain occasions, in genealogical explanation, for instance, we may also obtain self-consciousness of this or that feature. Rather, we only are what we are by being self-conscious. In virtue of being self-conscious, we are not just responsive to this or that biosphere but to objective validity or unconditioned objectivity as such. Along these lines, Hegel states at the beginning of the *Philosophy of Spirit* that "the aim of all genuine science is just this, that [spirit] shall recognize itself in everything in heaven and on earth. There is simply no out-and-out Other for [spirit]" (Hegel 2007: §377 Zu).

Both postmodern genealogies and Brandom's Hegel fall prey to a notion of external determination which cannot close over itself. Therein, self-consciousness remains alien to itself and must refer to something outside of itself: in the case of genealogy, some contingent given particular condition; for Brandom, some future forgiving recollection. Brandom's semantic inferentialism focuses on the individuation of determinate concepts, the questions of how our concepts obtain their content and how this content is shaped in normatively significant reciprocal relationships. He thereby leaves out the pure concept that

10 Sebastian Rödl develops this idea in detail in *Self-Consciousness and Objectivity: An Introduction to Absolute Idealism* (2018).

we ourselves are and that through us "has come into *determinate existence*" (Hegel 2010b: 514).

This point relates to wider criticism that has been levelled against contemporary Anglo-American adaptations of Hegel's thought. In a nutshell, Brandom, just like John McDowell, "overplay[s] the role and importance of the empirical in Hegel's thought" (Moss 2020: 461). Brandom claims that "[t]he point of developing an adequate understanding of ... categorial concepts is so that they can then be used to make explicit how ordinary empirical concepts work" (Brandom 1999: 165). What is more, he argues that the "content of these concepts presupposed by experience is derived from their role in experience" (ibid.: 168).[11] Addressing these quotations, Gregory Moss comments that "[c]ertainly this cannot apply to logical concepts, which do not derive their content from experience, for they are without presupposition" (Moss 2020: 479). Likewise, Houlgate argues, against Brandom, that Hegel "is not [...] a pragmatist about logical concepts" (Houlgate 2020; see also Houlgate 2009). Logical concepts are not determined by our use of something below them. Instead, they determine the intelligibility of any possible empirical concept there is. This is the way in which they work top-down. Brandom acknowledges that we need not have mastered the use of specific "ground-level determinate concepts" (Brandom 2019: 6) to be able to make our way through the logical concepts in the *Science of Logic*: "Their contents are available independently of any particular use of ground-level concepts" (ibid.: 5). Yet he still wants to hold on to the idea that everything logical concepts do is making explicit what is happening in the use of ground-level empirical concepts. Notably, this derivation of logical concepts from "their role in experience" is similar in structure to genealogical explanation in which something is explained by its origin or function. Such derivation renders the genuine truth of the logical concept in question invisible, just as the normative force of an attitude or commitment is rendered invisible in explaining it genealogically.

The pure concept, self-consciousness, is not gained through forgiving recollection. It is not generated bottom-up. It cannot be derived through particularities. Instead, it generates top-down. It is the source of the universality of judgment, regardless of whether such judgment is a genealogical explanation or an act of confession or forgiveness. That the concept signifies thought of the totality of unconditioned objectivity is not a matter of forgiving recollection but of the inherent universality of self-consciousness. This totality of what is thinkable expressed by the concept or self-consciousness cannot be placed as conditioning or as conditioned next to something else, for it cannot be placed alongside other things which it is not.

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11   Likewise, in *A Spirit of Trust*, Brandom writes that "Hegel's 'speculative,' logical, or philosophical concepts [l]ike Kant's categories, ... are metaconcepts: concepts whose job it is to express key features of the use and content of the ground-level empirical and practical concepts Hegel calls 'determinate' concepts" (Brandom 2019: 5).

Addressing Brandom's bottom-up model of explanation and defending Hegel's top-down model, Sebastian Rödl writes:

> Explanation of something by something other Hegel calls *finite* explanation. An *infinite* explanation, by contrast, explains the elements and the conditions in virtue of satisfying which they constitute X by the whole or unity they thus constitute. Here we need not turn to something other in order to comprehend why given elements satisfy the conditions and satisfy them all. The nature of X, which is internal to the elements that constitute it, accounts for that. In this way, the nature of X accounts for its existence. What is capable of this form of comprehension Hegel calls an idea. The first kind of idea, he thinks, is a life-form, then there is knowledge, theoretical and practical (Rödl 2008: 129).

Finite explanations, that is, explanations that explain "something by something other" are exhibited in mechanism, chemism and any genealogy. In contrast, explanations that explain a thing through the unity that is constituted through that thing we may call infinite. This infinity belongs to self-determination and is articulated by what Hegel calls idea, that is, life, truth and the good.

The finite does not have existence on its own. Finite explanation is parasitic on infinite explanation. It does not overcome the infinite but is merely abstracting from it. Finite objects or finite explanations of something through something other abolish themselves. They are defined by having their termination or limit in something else: "That is what everything finite is: its own sublation", or "immanent transcending" (Hegel 1991b: §81). The idea of something being conditioned by something else, a thought underlying all genealogy, is not exhaustive of reality. Such explanation is always already part of a totality in which there is life, truth and the good. Along these lines, Hegel states that "the world is thus itself the idea" (Hegel 2010a: §234 Zu). There is no world conceivable which would consist merely of external determination comprehended in finite explanation but not self-determination comprehended in infinite explanation.

The insight that infinite explanation is the truth of finite explanation or that teleology is "the truth of *mechanism*" (Hegel 2010b: 652), for instance, cannot be acquired by empirical investigation or a certain presupposed philosophical worldview. Instead, it has to be acquired by investigating these logical concepts themselves. For Hegel, "the reality that the concept gives itself cannot be picked up as it were from the outside but must be derived from the concept itself". We can do this, for the concept is not empty, and "to regard the given material of intuition and the manifold of representation as the real, in contrast to what is thought and the concept, is precisely the view that must be given up as condition of philosophizing" (ibid.: 518).

According to Hegel, unlike "[e]arlier metaphysics" we cannot presuppose "a certain picture of the world" where either efficient causality or final causality prevails. Instead, we need to investigate "which possesses truth *in and for itself* [...] independently", that is, logically, so that even though "it may turn out that the objective world exhibits mechanical and final causes [...] its actual

existence is not the norm of *what is true*, but *what is true* is rather the criterion for deciding which of these concrete existences is its true one". Moreover, "if mechanism and purposiveness stand opposed to each other, then by that very fact they cannot be taken as *indifferent* concepts, as if each were by itself a correct concept and had as much validity as the other, the only question being *where* the one or the other may apply" (ibid.: 651). This is to say, we cannot just throw up our hands and conclude that, on certain occasions, mechanical law prevails over teleology and, on other occasions, teleology prevails over mechanical law; or that, on certain occasions, finite genealogical explanation prevails over infinite explanation and, on other occasions, infinite explanation prevails over finite genealogical explanation; and that none is the truth of the other.

Mechanism exhibits a universality that is indifferent to its particular instantiations. This form of causality remains entirely external to the object it works upon. That an object in a mechanism is a cause is a coincidence with respect to the nature of that object. Rain or a stone is only a "cause because this determination has been posited in it by another" (ibid.: 498), yet "the object is indifferent to this determination attributed to it; that it is a cause is therefore something accidental to it" (ibid.: 635). While in chemism the particular chemical substances have a say, as it were, in the result of their reaction, the initial cause of that reaction is still due to some external force. Mechanical or chemical causality, just like any other form of conditioning that is not self-determining, cannot account for individuation, for why that law or conditioning takes place here and now, since it remains abstract and thus external to the particular cases in which it is efficacious. It fails in bringing together the universality of that form of conditioning and the particularity of its instances. That is to say, such a form of explanation fails in making its concreteness intelligible. What affects objects or is affected by them are, for example, "motion, heat, magnetism, electricity, and the like, all of which, even when one wants to imagine them as stuffs or materials, must be termed as *imponderable* agents, for they lack that aspect of materiality that grounds *its singularization*" (ibid.: 636). These agents are not themselves objects; instead, they presuppose objects that carry or communicate them.

In mechanism, the intelligibility of the universal conditioning is indifferent to the nature of the particular objects through which that conditioning is efficacious. In other words, here, intelligibility only concerns form. The particular contents do not contribute anything to that intelligibility. Thus, they remain outside of that which is intelligible. This is the contradiction of relations of external determination and contingency. They depend on particular contents from outside that do not contribute to their intelligibility.

Life then articulates, for the first time, self-determination in which what is determining and what is determined describe one and the same totality. Yet the natural living being is still subject to the universality of the genus or lifeform on which the individual living being has no impact. The individual living being thus has to blindly procreate and re-instantiate its genus to achieve that universality which is beyond its individual actualizations. Hegel states that

"the fate of a living thing is in general the *genus*, for the genus manifests itself through the fleetingness of the living individuals that do not possess it as genus in their *actual singularity*". This is why in living beings, in "their *own immediate nature*", there still remains "externality and contingency" (ibid.: 639). Only in self-conscious beings or spiritual life, full self-determination is achieved, for the universality of spirit is nothing above and beyond the universality of each self-conscious individual. While the individual living being still has the universality of the genus as outside of it, as that which imposes normativity, that is, its lifeform on it, the normativity of spiritual life has overcome such externality and is at stake in any of its actualizations, that is, in any self-conscious being.

Genealogical explanation articulates ways of conditioning that are echoed in Hegel's notions of mechanism and chemism as, ultimately, failing conceptions of an objective totality. As mentioned earlier, it is not that thinkers conceived by Brandom as genealogists (the masters of suspicion, the late Wittgenstein and Foucault) share a mechanistically determined worldview. Genealogical explanation might make use of all sorts of ways to make conditioning intelligible, including non-linear and functional ones. They do however all refer to some particular factor or factors that condition what is conditioned. Thereby, at least to some extent, they split reality into what determines and what is determined. These forms of explanation are lacking in that they cannot close over themselves. They are, ultimately, expressing an endless chain of external determination—bad infinity—and cannot account for the self-determination of the individual in which what is determined and what is determining are the same. The living individual being does not overcome mechanism or chemism in the sense of abolishing their efficacy. Yet it uses them to realize ends that are not reducible anymore to those forms of conditioning. Along these lines, Hegel writes, "mechanical or chemical technique, because of its character of being externally determined, naturally offers itself to the connection of purpose" (ibid.: 657).

It is not just that genealogists cannot account for how they could have arrived at their theories, for how their insight could have stepped out of the play of the infinite chain of conditioning. Though this is the case as well. Rather, for Hegel, mechanism, chemism or any sort of external determination are not a thought of an intelligible totality, that is, of what truly is at all. In these conceptions, universality and particularity remain separated. In them, we cannot think "self-particularization" (Hegel 2007: §383). Postmodern genealogies seek to explain something that has a universal appeal by something particular and thereby render that universality as itself something particular. Hegel's concept and self-consciousness, however, are self-particularizing; they engender particularities that never leave the medium of the universal.[12]

Hegel does not just propose self-determination so that we may feel better about ourselves, or so that we may push back the genealogical unmasking of

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12   See also Hegel's exposition of the moments of the concept in the 'I' or self-consciousness in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Right* (Hegel 1991a: §§5–7).

false claims to universal validity. In contrast to Brandom's interpretation, this is not a matter of attitude. The universality of self-consciousness or thought does not depend on our attitude, which may be suspicion or magnanimity. Instead, self-determination is the truth of those forms of conditioning. The external determination and contingency exhibited in mechanism is not what subverts and is not the out and out other of self-determination. Rather, the efficacy of mechanism is parasitic on there being self-determination. Likewise, genealogical explanation is not what subverts and is not the out and out other of the normativity articulated by self-determining beings. Rather, the efficacy of genealogical explanation is parasitic on there being the normativity articulated by self-determining beings. Just like the living being may use mechanical or chemical force in order to pursue its purpose without this purpose being reducible to those forces, self-conscious beings who live through knowledge of the true and the good may apply genealogies, that is, natural, psychological, sociocultural or any other finite explanations in order to explain a certain happening without truth and goodness being reducible to those forms of explanation. We do not have to reject genealogical explanation and adopt an attitude of magnanimity instead. Rather, genealogical explanation cannot deconstruct self-conscious life, for the latter is the truth of that form of explanation, and the genealogical notion of conditioning on its own is not a thought of an objective totality, not a thought of what truly is at all.

Ultimately, a Hegelian exposition of self-conscious life, that is, of us, will have to show how the logical progression towards increasing self-determination plays out not only in the logic but in the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit. At this point, the foregoing exposition may only foreshadow the way in which any evolutionary, that is, natural, explanation, any psychological, that is, 'subjective', explanation and any sociocultural or sociopolitical, that is, 'objective', explanation will, ultimately, not exhaust self-conscious life. Albeit to different degrees, these explanations remain on the level of external determination. There may be all sorts of appropriate applications of them, in the empirical sciences, for instance. Yet, these explanations are parasitic on the self-determination of self-conscious life. Its self-comprehension in art, religion and philosophy is not exhaustible by any evolutionary, psychological or sociocultural description. Certainly, there is the history of art, the history of religion and the history of philosophy. But there is no genealogy of the experience of beauty, of religious faith or philosophical truth, just like there is no genealogy of the acts of confession and forgiveness or love. In other words, there is neither a natural nor an institutional history that could explain the absolute genealogically.[13]

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13   In this regard, see recent scholarship by Chen Yang and Christopher Yeomans (2023). They elucidate the logical notion of teleology through its application in Hegel's account of world history. What is more, they show how a notion of objective spirit like the state, which is often rendered as the culmination of Hegel's philosophy, remains something incomplete and does not exhaust absolute self-comprehension in art, religion and

Conclusion

At first glance, starting philosophy with certain natural, psychological, cultural or any other contingent particular factors might seem modest, but it actually implies various presuppositions: for instance, that what there is in thought (subjectivity) and what is really going on (objectivity) are ultimately to be conceived as one thing conditioning the other. Certainly, we are born without being asked. We find ourselves in a body that we did not pick. We acquire a native language that we did not choose. These are enabling conditions for there to be so much as thought and philosophizing at all. Yet, to take these as proof that conditioning, i.e., external determination, is the truth of self-determination and not the other way round is unsound. Hegel's logic exhibits how we come to understand which one is the truth of the other by examining these notions of conditioning themselves; not by empirical evidence or intuition. We can do this because they are not empty concepts but exhibit an immanent development. They fail or succeed in articulating the totality of what is. Hegel has no problem in recognizing that "stages of feeling, intuition, sense consciousness, and so forth, are prior to [and] the conditions of the genesis of [thought] but they are conditions only in the sense that the concept results *from their dialectic* and *their nothingness* and not because it is conditioned by their *reality*". He goes on:

> [T]he prevailing fundamental misunderstanding is that the *natural* principle, or the *starting point* in the *natural* development or the *history* of an individual in the process of self-formation, is regarded as the *truth* and *conceptually the first*. Intuition or being are no doubt first in the order of nature, or are the condition for the concept, but they are not ... the unconditioned in and for itself; on the contrary, in the concept their reality is sublated and, consequently, so is also the reflective shine that they had of being the conditioning reality. If it is not the *truth* which is at issue but only *narration*, as it is the case in pictorial and phenomenal thinking, then we might as well stay with the story that we begin with feelings and intuitions, ... [b]ut philosophy ought not to be a narrative of what happens, but a cognition of what is *true* in what happens, in order further to comprehend on the basis of this truth what in the narrative appears as a mere happening (Hegel 2010b: 519).

Postmodern genealogies are stuck in finite explanation and in mediation as reflection (of the hidden in the manifest, the "conditioning reality" in the conditioned and so forth) and, hence, in the Logic of Essence. They narrate or explain but do not cognize "what is *true* in what happens". They cannot undermine self-determination, for they, by definition, only explain something finite.

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philosophy. To this effect, they quote Hegel saying: "All deeper feelings such as love as well as religious intuition and its forms are wholly present and satisfying in themselves; but the external existence of the state with its rational laws and customs, is an incomplete present, the understanding of which calls for incorporating the awareness of its past" (Hegel 2011: 116).

Just like determinate empirical concepts are unable to explain and will never amount to the pure concept, genealogical explanation is unable to explain and will never amount to self-consciousness. Hegel denies that philosophy consists in the narration of a succession of phenomena (phenomenology) or the explanation of one phenomenon through something else (Logic of Essence and natural science). What is truly there is the self-determination of the concept, and only in self-determining beings do we achieve a comprehension of why something is actually held together, not in the sense of not being easily breakable but in the sense of comprehending something through the unity that is constituted through that thing, that is, comprehending the existence of something through itself.

Can there be what Hans Joas calls an "affirmative genealogy" (2009), in contrast to subversive ones? Would Hegel's historical writings be a case in point? These questions could not be adequately addressed within the scope of this paper. Such an affirmative genealogy would disclose or undergird our trust in normative commitments rather than subvert them. This would certainly be in line with what Brandom's Hegel is proposing. However, as long as such a genealogy traffics in finite explanations, it falls prey to the same critique as subversive postmodern genealogies. If it exhibits infinite explanations, on the other hand, we may have no reason to call it a genealogy in the first place.

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Timo Hendrik Enen

Suprotstavljanje postmodernim genealogijama: Brandom, Hegel i logika samoodređenja

Apstrakt

U svom nedavnom „Duhu poverenja", Robert Brandom tumači Hegela kao predlagača koncepcije normativnosti koja prevazilazi nedostatke kako modernosti, tako i njenih kritičara. Brandomov Hegel traži „hermeneutiku velikodušnosti", u suprotnosti sa onim što je Paul Riker nazvao „hermeneutikom sumnje". Prema Brandomu, „veliki razotkrivači" moderne normativnosti poput Ničea ili Fukoa koriste delegitimišuću silu koja karakteriše genealoško objašnjenje. Njihova sumnja jeste da je ono što se smatra normativnim uslovljeno nepredviđenim okolnostima koje potkopavaju upravo tu normativnost. U ovom radu, dok iznosim zamerke protiv Brandomovog čitanja, želim da se zadržim na njegovoj ideji da se hegelijanska filozofija suprotstavlja tim subverzivnim postmodernim genealogijama. Umesto da se fokusiram, kao što Brandom čini, na kraj poglavlja „Duh" u Hegelovoj fenomenologiji, oslanjam se na Hegelovu logiku samoodređenja. Za razliku od „velikih demaskira", za Hegela, objašnjenje nečega kroz upućivanje na neki spoljašnji ili kontingentni faktor parazitira na objašnjenju koje objašnjava nešto kroz samo sebe. Ovo poslednje je artikulisano samosvesnim životom u kome se konceptualni momenti univerzalnosti, posebnosti i individualnosti ne rastavljaju.

Ključne reči: Hegel, Brandom, genealogija, postmodernizam, samoodređenje.