January 14, 2021

Précis of *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's <u>Phenomenology</u>*
[For Eastern APA, January 14, 2021]

A Spirit of Trust translates and deciphers the philosophical metavocabulary Hegel develops in the *Phenomenology*: the language he deploys to enable us to talk and think about discursive practice. *Sprache*, he tells us, is the *Dasein* of *Geist*: language is the concrete existence of *Geist*, of what his book is a phenomenology of. [1]

I read him as offering a broadly *pragmatist* theory of *meaning* in terms of *use*.

Hegel's pragmatics of discursiveness is structured by dual *social* and *historical* axes.

- He understands the normativity of discursive practice as instituted *socially* by practical attitudes of **reciprocal recognition** between selves who only become self-conscious by recognizing one another *as* normative subjects, able to take responsibility and exercise authority.

- He understands the determinate contentfulness of concepts, their semantics, in terms of the pragmatic activity of **retrospectively recollectively rationally reconstructing** their actual applications so as to give such contingent sequences of doings the shape of expressively progressive traditions: turning a *past* into a *history*.
That is revealing them as the gradual emergence into *explicitness* of norms that show up as having all along *implicitly* governed the process of applying the concepts.

At the beginning of the journey to that finale, on the ground floor of Hegel's intellectual edifice, is a non-psychological conception of the conceptual. This is the idea that to be conceptually contentful is to stand in relations of material incompatibility and consequence (his "determinate negation" and "mediation") to other such contentful items.

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[1] *PG* 666.

This is his first and most basic semantic idea: an understanding of <u>conceptual content</u> in terms of modally robust relations of *exclusion* and *inclusion*.

This understanding of the conceptual is *hylomorphic*. Conceptual *contents*, understood as roles with respect to relations of material incompatibility and consequence, are *amphibious*: they show up in two different *forms*.

They have a *subjective* form and an *objective* form.

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

They are related as the two poles of the intentional nexus:

what can be *known* and the attempted *knowing* of it, noumena and phenomena.

Subjectivity and objectivity are both conceptually articulated,

and the *same* conceptual content can show up both

- in the subjective normative form of thoughts and
- in the objective modal form of states of affairs.

Genuine knowledge occurs when one and the *same* content shows up in *both* different forms:

the *subjective* form of *thought* and the *objective* form of *fact*.

I call this view "bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism."

Hegel's *second* semantic idea is this consequence of the hylomorphic development of the first:

Conceptual contents of the two forms stand in a broadly ***representational*** relation to one another:

as subjective represent*ings* of reality and

as the objective realities represent*ed*.

These two dimensions of semantic contentfulness, the *conceptual* and the *representational*, can be thought of as Hegelian versions of the Fregean metaconcepts of <u>sense</u> and <u>reference</u> (*Sinn* and *Bedeutung*):

- thoughts, and what thoughts are *about*,
- what can be *expressed*, and what can be *represented*.

Hegel's semantic explanatory strategy is to explain the second, *representational* dimension of conceptual contentfulness in terms of the first, *expressive* dimension.

What it is to *represent* something is to be understood in terms of relations among conceptual contents.

The idea of a *noumenal reality* is to be explained in terms of how *phenomenal appearances* point beyond themselves, in virtue of their relations to one another.

(This is one sense in which his book counts as a "phenomenology.")

The semantic relations between these two forms of conceptual content are understood in the pragmatic context of processes and practices of **intentional action.**

"Reason is purposive agency," Hegel says.[2]

- Regarded *pro*spectively, practical agency is the experience of coping with cognitive error and practical failure.
- Regarded *retro*spectively, it is reconstructed by the exercise of *recollective rationality* as the actualization and determination of a governing intention, which both:

  --provides standards for assessments of correctness and success (on the deontic normative side of the knowing subject) and

  --to which the process is subjunctively sensitive (on the alethic modal side of the known object).

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[2] *PG 22.*

Hegel explains the representational semantic dimension of conceptual content (relations between thought and things, phenomena and noumena, appearance and reality) in terms of this essentially *temporally biperspectival* pragmatics of rational agency.

The *historical* process by which conceptual contents are determined (prospectively *made* and retrospectively *found*) exhibits the *social* structure of co-ordinate, reciprocal authority and responsibility characteristic of the institution of normative statuses by mutual recognitive attitudes. It is a *social*, *recognitive* process.

The normative pragmatics accordingly explains the interrelations among the *inferential*, *social*, and *historical* holisms characteristic of Hegel's semantics.

Reasons, in the form of *objective conceptual norms*, show up *retro*spectively as acknowledged in the attitudes of practitioners, hence as setting normative standards articulating the contents of the commitments they undertake and the authority they claim, within each generous, forgiving recollection exhibiting a progressive tradition of imperfect, but cumulative, ever more explicit, and ultimately successful expressions of those concepts.

Particularity, *contingency*, and *immediacy* enter during the *pro*spective phase of experience, making themselves felt as practitioners find themselves falling into *error* and *failure* by applying their current conceptions, find themselves with theoretical and practical commitments *incompatible*, by their own lights, which normatively call for the alteration of those conceptions and the reconstrual of that tradition.
What is, when it appears, still irrational (the moment of difference), the immediate eruption of causes into the mediating realm of concepts (the exercise by particulars of authority over universals), shows up in the breaks, the ruptures, the caesuras between the Whiggish *Erinnerungen*.

The first is the construction of concepts, the second is the incorporation into them of the initially nonconceptual immediacy and contingency in virtue of which those concepts are determinately contentful.

The recognitive cycle of *confession*, *trust*, and *recollective forgiveness*, followed by confession of the inadequacy of that forgiveness, and trust in subsequent forgiveness of that failure, is what ties these phases together, articulating the internal fine structure of the relations between the moment of rational unity and the moment of determinate disparity.

Under the heading of *Vernunft*, Hegel is putting forward **a new metaphysics of meaning and intentionality**, a highly structured story about the *pragmatics of semantics*:

- about the sorts of *doings* that are the necessary background for *saying* or *intending* anything determinately contentful, and
- about the sense in which concepts can be thought of as having determinate contents.

Hegel's story about how determinate conceptual *content* arises out of normative *force*—what it is by recollecting to *take* objective conceptual norms to be acknowledged as binding in the attitudes of discursive practitioners, and thereby to *make* those attitudes properly intelligible as the adoption of normative statuses, the undertaking of commitments and responsibilities that outrun the conceptions of those whose statuses they are—is accordingly supposed to be at once a *theory* and a *fighting faith* for the first generation of moderns for whom intellectual history came to seem a central and essential undertaking.

It is, remarkably, a ***semantics* that is *morally* edifying.**
For properly understanding the conditions of having determinate thoughts and intentions, of binding ourselves by determinately contentful conceptual norms in judgment and action, turns out to commit us to adopting to one another practical *recognitive* attitudes of a particular kind: *forgiveness, confession*, and *trust*.

The sort of Hegelian semantic self-consciousness that consists in understanding our discursive activity according to the categories of *Vernunft* accordingly obliges us to *be* certain kinds of *selves*, and to *institute* certain kinds of *communities*.

In particular, the sort of *theoretical* understanding he teaches (the explicit acknowledgment of what he shows to be implicit in our discursive practice) 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.

Recollective rationality is also the key both
to understanding the history of *Geist*—all our norm-governed practices and performances, and
the statuses, selves, and institutions they produce and are produced by—and
to envisaging its next development. For Hegel the turning point of history so far has been the
gradual, still incomplete transition from *traditional* to *modern* forms of life.

This was a shift from
--a metaphysics of normativity structured by the **status-dependence of normative attitudes** to
--one structured by the **attitude-dependence of normative statuses**.

The mistake characteristic of the first is *fetishism*: mistaking what are in fact the products
of our activities for objective features of the world. Modernity is the advent of a distinctive kind
of normative self-consciousness of our own role in instituting norms.
The pathology characteristic of modernity is *alienation* from the norms that make us what
we are: failure to understand them practically as *rationally* constraining.

The alienation that is the worm in the shining apple of modernity is the practical
incapacity to see how normative statuses can *both* be instituted by normative attitudes *and*
transcend those attitudes, so as genuinely to constrain them.
His conception of *Vernunft,* and how it overcomes the commitment to Mastery as pure
independence manifested in *Verstand,* is Hegel's response to this challenge. It is what animates
the postmodern shape of self-conscious practical agency.
At the heart of *Vernunft* is the conception of a new kind of rationality and understanding:
recollective rationality. It emerges through a distinctive kind of retrospective rational
reconstruction of the course of development of one's commitments.

The conception of *Vernunft*, whose heart is recollection, is what explains

- the reciprocity of the normative statuses of authority and responsibility (Hegel's 'independence' and 'dependence'—the sense in which they are always two sides of one coin,

  and

- the reciprocity of normative recognitive attitudes of acknowledging and attributing authority and responsibility,

  and

- the relations between these.

In doing so, it reconciles

- the distinctively *modern* insight into the *attitude-dependence of normative statuses*—the sense in which statuses of authority and responsibility are instituted by reciprocal recognitive attitudes—

- with the *traditional* appreciation of the *status-dependence of normative attitudes*.

This is the dimension along which attributions and acknowledgments of commitments (responsibilities undertaken by exercising one's authority to do so) answer for their correctness to what agents are *really* committed to.

The key to understanding the way Hegel moves beyond the *basic* Hegelian normative statuses jointly socially instituted by *syn*chronic reciprocal *social relations* of recognitive attitudes consists in appreciating the orthogonal *dia*chronic *historical* dimension of recognitive *processes.*

　　When recognition takes the form of confession and *forgiving* by retrospective rational reconstructive recollection, the insights of traditional practical and modern theoretical normative self-consciousness will be reconciled and their failures overcome.

　　We will move decisively beyond the normative structure of subordination and obedience to genuine self-conscious freedom: *Geist* with the structure of trust.

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