

# Hegel on spirited animals

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## Abstract

Hegel conceives of human beings as both natural and spirited. On Robert Pippin's influential reading, we are natural by being 'ontologically' like other animals, but spirited through a 'social-historical achievement'. I contest both the coherence of this reading and its fidelity to Hegel's texts. For Hegel the human being is the truth of the animal. This means that spirit's self-production is not, as Pippin claims, an achievement that an animal confers on itself, but the *realization* of what the human being *is*. I end by specifying Aristotelian features of Hegel's account whose neglect by Pippin can help explain what goes wrong in his reading, and provide the outlines of a reading that is both coherent and faithful to Hegel's texts.

## Introduction

Hegel marks the transition between the two parts of his *Realphilosophie* with the slogan 'spirit is the truth of nature'. In the first edition of the text that expounds the *Realphilosophie*, the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, he lends this formulation particular emphasis by invoking it both in the last sentence of Part II (the Philosophy of Nature) and the first sentence of Part III (the Philosophy of Spirit). In the 1830 edition these sentences (now separated by new intervening material) appear as follows:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have consulted the following edition of Hegel's works: [GW] *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968). I have used the following translations: [E I] *Hegel's Logic*, trans. W. Wallace, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975); [E II] *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); [E III] *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, rev. M. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); [PR] *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952); [PSS] *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, ed. and trans. M. J. Petry (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978); [SL] *Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge

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With this, nature has passed over into its truth, into the subjectivity of the concept whose objectivity is itself the sublated immediacy of singularity, is *concrete universality*; so that the concept is posited that has for its *determinate being* [Dasein] the reality which corresponds to it, namely, the concept – [i.e.] *spirit*. [E II §376]

For us spirit has nature as its *presupposition*, whose [i.e. nature's] *truth* and therewith its *absolute first* it [i.e. spirit] is. [E III §381]

The relationship between nature and spirit encapsulated in the formulation 'spirit is the truth of nature' involves both a continuity and a discontinuity. In one sense spirit is to be understood as still natural; in another, as transcending or going beyond nature.<sup>2</sup> Take the following *Zusatz*:

Spirit has thus proceeded from nature. The goal of nature is to destroy itself and to break through its husk of immediacy and sensuousness, to consume itself like the phoenix in order to come forth from this externality rejuvenated as spirit. [E II §376Z]

Here vivid imagery of rupture is to the fore. But Hegel also makes it clear that in entering the realm of spirit we do not enter a non-natural realm. His discussion of the 'natural soul' (E III §§391–402) bears this out. Again, Hegel tells us that the philosophy of subjective spirit begins 'with spirit still in the grip of nature' (E III §387Z).

This essay is concerned with how to understand the continuity and the discontinuity between nature and spirit in Hegel's account, and the relation between the continuity and the discontinuity. I begin from Robert Pippin's reading of Hegel's account, which, I argue, misconstrues how to think the continuity and the discontinuity together, and then develop my critique of Pippin's reading in order to motivate an alternative reading.

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University Press, 2010). I have tacitly emended the translations as appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> It is instructive to compare the treatment of 'logical life' in *The Science of Logic*, where Hegel writes: 'In *spirit*, however, life appears both as opposed to it and as posited as at one with it, in a unity reborn as the pure product of spirit. For life is here to be taken generally in its proper sense as *natural life*, for what is called the *life of spirit* as spirit, is spirit's own peculiar nature that stands opposed to mere life; just as we speak of the *nature* of spirit, even though spirit is nothing natural but stands rather in opposition to nature' (GW 12: 180/SL 677). Here natural life and the life of spirit are described as both 'at one' with and 'opposed' to each other.

I claim that Pippin's reading is both difficult to make sense of on its own terms, and fails ultimately to be true to Hegel's texts. Furthermore, I claim that Pippin is pushed in the direction of this reading by failing to recognize a central element in Hegel's account – Hegel's distinctively Aristotelian understanding of the relations between a succession of life forms making up a *scala naturae*. Once we see its centrality, a rival reading to Pippin's emerges that avoids the difficulties with Pippin's reading and is truer to Hegel's texts.<sup>3</sup>

Pippin takes the continuity to be 'ontological' in character (2008, pp. 61–62). For him, spirited beings are *ontologically* natural beings. Pippin sets this ontological continuity alongside a discontinuity, which he sees as being introduced by spirited beings' self-creation of the normative realm that they inhabit, a self-creation he repeatedly refers to as a 'social' and 'historical' 'achievement' (Pippin, 2008, pp. 42, 112, 194).

I propose a different interpretation of the talk of spirit's 'self-creation' that prompts Pippin to read spirit as an achievement by creatures that, all through achieving what they achieve, remain 'ontologically' natural. The reading I propose takes seriously Hegel's own conception of himself as a distinctive kind of Aristotelian, for whom being alive in the human way marks a specific *form* of being alive, related to non-human animal such ways by being the 'truth of' non-human animal forms of life. In doing so, this reading makes palatable an idea Pippin wants to reject as un-Hegelian: that we are, in some sense, 'already', just in virtue of being *human* animals, beings that are subject to the kind of normativity that is characteristic of what Hegel calls *Geist*. We must recognize, I shall urge, that the culmination of the Philosophy of Nature already brings the *geistig* animal organism on the scene. *This* animal organism is the completion or perfection of the animal organism, in that it is both in and for itself its *Gattung*. Another way to see that we – as the perfect animals in which the Philosophy of Nature culminates – are in and for ourselves our *Gattung* is to recognize that we can say 'I', whereby we manifest, at once, our universality and our self-consciousness. Recognizing this, we have already brought into view the distinctive normativity to which we are subject. The normativity to which we human beings are subject does not need to be constructed

<sup>3</sup> In more recent writing on Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Pippin has given greater attention to Aristotelian strands in Hegel's thought (Pippin, 2019). He has not, however, to my knowledge, offered any revision to the account of our spirited animality presented here in light of his increased attention to Aristotle.

or ‘achieved’ by us: to be human *is already* to be subject to such normativity. It is the task of the Philosophy of Spirit to spell out this normativity, not to show its construction at the hands of human animals.

I focus on Pippin not only because his reading has been highly influential. As I seek to show in what follows, Pippin’s insistence on reading the ‘self-production’ of spirit in terms of an ‘achievement’ performed by beings who are ‘ontologically’ natural serves to block a reading of Hegel that provides for just the continuity that Pippin rightly wishes to emphasize. The reading I offer may seem ‘essentialist’ in a way Pippin would want to reject. It will seem that way only if Hegel’s claim that human beings are essentially historically constituted, self-producing beings is read as ‘essentialist’ in a problematic way. In other words, this essay can be read as seeking to break up a perceived dichotomy between ‘constructionist’ and ‘essentialist’ readings of Hegel that might be seen at work in much of the literature on Hegel.

## **1. Pippin’s reading**

The account I identify in Pippin’s work appears across a series of essays. These essays were reprinted, together with new material, as a book (Pippin, 2008). I draw on material from Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 7 of the book.

Pippin’s account involves the following claims. Spirit is an achievement. Moreover it is a *collective* achievement through which is brought into being the normativity to which we are subject (or by which we come to stand in the ‘space of reasons’ (Pippin, 2008, pp. 50, 61)). The achievement is the outcome of a collective act of self-legislation, through which those who perform it bind themselves to the normativity that results. The achievement takes place in historical time, and it might not have occurred: the creatures that perform it might have failed to do so. Those who achieve it do not thereby alter ontologically what they are: ontologically they are still the same natural creatures as before. So something radically new has come into being: a space of reasons in which these creatures now stand. But at the same time there is an underlying continuity: ontologically, those creatures are still merely natural beings.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> I concentrate here on the work of Pippin. A similar picture is found in writings by Terry Pinkard. See Pinkard (2004, pp. 31, 34; 2005, pp. 22–23, 30). Pinkard writes (2005, pp. 22–23): ‘For Hegel, agency itself is a kind of

This picture answers to a demand Pippin rightly sees Hegel's account as making: that we must not end up with a picture of spirit as totally detached from nature. It also answers to the demand to show that human subjectivity is intersubjectivity.

Despite the picture's aptness for meeting these demands, I want, first of all, to draw attention to ways in which the picture is difficult to make sense of. Second, I claim that it is not faithful to Hegel's texts, and that the textual evidence Pippin thinks supports his reading does not support it. Third, I think that the considerations Pippin experiences as pushing him in the direction of this reading actually point in the direction of a view he rules out.

(1) How is the picture difficult to make sense of? Pippin's Hegel claims that there are natural creatures who bring into being a normative realm through a collective act of self-legislation. This is a difficult idea. Where do the creatures find the resources for bringing into being the space of reasons in which they thereby come to stand?

Pippin does not explain how this is possible. Perhaps the suggestion is that the natural creatures engage in a process of, so to speak, trying out various things that, as natural, non-normative beings, they are capable of, establishing the hold of the norms they subject themselves to as they go. But however Pippin might envisage fleshing out this idea, he crucially thinks that the achievement gets accomplished in history. Spirit is 'an historically achieved status' (2008, p. 29), and should be thought of 'in terms of achieved capacities and practices that natural organisms can be said to have made over historical time' (2008, p. 17). This claim is difficult to make sense

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norm, something that is socially and historically instituted, not some metaphysical or natural fact. Our independence from nature, that is, is a normative historical and social *achievement*, not a fact (metaphysical or natural) about ourselves that we have only recently discovered. [...] [W]e establish or *institute* our freedom from nature by virtue of a complex historical process in which we have come to see nature as inadequate to agency's (that is, *Geist's*) interests [...]. Our freedom [...] is itself an achievement [...], and it is bound up with the achievement of our normative independence from nature.' See also Pinkard (2012, p. 18), 'We are self-conscious, self-interpreting animals, natural creatures whose "non-naturalness" is not a metaphysical difference (as that, say, between spiritual and physical "stuff") or the exercise of a special form of causality. Rather, our status as *geistig*, as "minded" creatures is a status that we "give" to ourselves in the sense that it is a practical achievement.' Both Pippin and Pinkard draw on the approach of Brandom (1979). For a critique of this type of approach, see Gardner (2007).

of. While we can envisage how human beings can ‘make’ the *practices* they engage in over time, what could it mean to say that they make the *capacities* involved in their subjecting themselves to the normativity they end up subject to? It is not just instances of sets of moves in the ‘space of reasons’ that Pippin thinks we ‘make’, but the very capacity to operate in such a space (2008, p. 60). Perhaps Pippin does not mean this literally. But even granting this, it is clear that he must ultimately be committed to some such claim. For Pippin wants to say that it is a kind of beings who are already engaged in history – who have already quit the non-historical realm in which non-human species live – who self-legislate their normativity.

It might be thought that Pippin’s picture can be made to seem more palatable if it is recognized that for him such self-legislation is not a one-off event but a long-drawn-out process (one perhaps still in progress). This would fit with Pippin’s adherence to a gradualism about agency: different human beings at different times are, according to him, more or less fully agents. He says that Hegel claims ‘that genuine agency is the collective historical product of earlier, only partially realized attempts at the actualization of such agency’ (2008, p. 18). But the gradualness of the ‘achievement’ does not, in the end, matter. This still leaves just as pressing the question what gets it going at all: what gets *human normativity itself* into the picture. Pippin thinks that according to Hegel ‘spirit is supposed to *become* spirit by virtue of the efforts of some organisms over time to “make” [...] an effective “space of reasons”’ (2008, p. 60). That is, human beings, on Pippin’s picture, do not just get to make moves within the space of reasons: they get to instigate the game itself. This seems to amount to something like the idea that there are beings who do not yet subject themselves to norms who subsequently get to bring the required norms into being, where the relevant non-normative beings are something like pre-historical human beings who thereby get to bring human history into being. To think of this as happening gradually does nothing to lessen the strangeness of this idea: we must somehow imagine human beings who are neither fully pre-historical nor fully historical – a kind of beings that stand with only one foot in history, the other foot outside it.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Of course there must in fact be some story about the beginnings of human history that involves a transition from one kind of (proto-human) primate life to another kind of (human) primate life. But Hegel’s critique of the importation of evolutionary accounts into philosophy is to the point here. Hegel is reported as saying (*E* II §249Z) that ‘it is a completely empty thought to represent species as developing successively, one after

Pippin seems to take on this perplexing idea because of a commitment to the claim that the creatures who bring the space of reasons into being *remain*, ‘ontologically’, the merely natural beings that they were prior to this act. He offers in support of this a reading of the idea that spirit is the truth of nature according to which ‘since *spirit* is said to be the “truth” of nature, it [spirit] is founded on or emerges from a kind of natural complexity’. Given this, ‘everything about spirit is embodied in[,] and expressed in, nature, and in no sense can ever be considered supernatural’ (2008, p. 14). In Section 4 below I will contest this reading of the idea that spirit is the truth of nature. Let me note for now that it is remarkable for Pippin to claim, as he does in the passage just quoted, that spirit’s being natural involves spirit’s being able to be squeezed back into the realm of nature as laid out in *Encyclopaedia* II. Hegel says, by contrast, that nature has ‘disappeared’ as spirit presents itself as the Idea that has accomplished its being-for-self (*E* III §381). For spirit to be the truth of nature involves that we have left behind the conception of nature that *Encyclopaedia* II spells out. Hegel’s picture of the relation between spirit and nature is not that spirit *belongs within* nature, but that nature is an inadequate realization of the Idea, whose adequate realization is spirit.

(2) How does Pippin’s picture fail to be faithful to Hegel’s texts? Pippin rests much of his case on passages in which Hegel speaks of spirit ‘producing itself’, interpreting them in the light of his idea of spirit as an ‘achievement’. Now, it is undoubtedly right that Hegel regards spirit as self-produced. It might be thought that Pippin’s language of ‘achievement’ is an apt metaphor for this self-production, one that is not to be read over-literally as if the achievement were from scratch. But as I will now show, Pippin’s readings of the self-production idea precisely have the effect of committing him to the problematic notion I have been sketching of an achievement that ‘ontologically’ merely natural beings confer on themselves while already (at least with one foot) *in history*. Furthermore, the passages

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the other, in time. Chronological difference has no interest whatever for thought.’ Hegel’s point is not that there is no natural evolutionary story to be told, but that it does not afford philosophical comprehension to give a merely descriptive account that does not at the same time offer to *explain* how (for instance) normativity could arise among non-normative creatures. To offer such an explanation would involve specifying what it is about the pre-normative creatures such that normativity could ‘break out’ or ‘emerge’ among them through pre-normative goings-on.

which he cites in order to support his reading decisively point away from this reading, and towards a notion of self-production that requires the normativity characteristic of spirit to be on the scene as soon as spirit is. Spirit, as Hegel sees it, is such as to produce itself. But such production is not something that an ontologically merely natural being achieves; precisely not, for (as we shall see in sections 2–4) such self-production eludes the powers of such merely natural beings.

(i) In support of his claim that according to Hegel ‘spirit must be conceived [...] as some sort of collectively achieved, normative human mindedness if it is to be properly rendered intelligible’ (2008, p. 16), Pippin invokes a passage in Gustav von Griesheim’s lecture notes on *Encyclopaedia* III to bring out the ‘unusual’ conception of spirit that this requires, trading on the idea that spirit ‘has made itself into what it is’. But the kind of self-making Hegel speaks of here does not involve Pippin’s idea of ‘collectively achieved, normative human mindedness’. Griesheim reports Hegel as saying that ‘it is of the very nature of spirit to be this absolute liveliness, this process, to proceed forth from naturality, immediacy, to sublimate, to quit its naturality, and to come to itself, and to free itself, it being itself only as it comes to itself as such a product of itself; its actuality being merely that it has made itself into what it is’ (Griesheim’s note on §377; *PSS* I: 7). Spirit is inherently productive, Hegel is saying, and only fully realizes itself through what it produces. This is something it does *as spirit*, not a feature of an ostensible transition by which humans get from standing outside history to being in it. The self-production spoken of here is said to be ‘of the very nature of spirit’, without any mention being made of something that spirit must ‘achieve’ in order for this to become true of it.

(ii) To support the idea that human beings remain the ‘bits of matter’, as Pippin puts it (2008, p. 54), that they ‘ontologically’ are all through the achievement by which they create for themselves the space of reasons, Pippin says (here drawing on Ludwig Boumann’s *Zusätze*), ‘Thus the unique capacity of spirit, its freedom, “does not occur as an immediate characteristic of spirit [*nicht etwas unmittelbar im Geist Seiendes*], but is something to be brought about through its own activity [§382Z].”’ (2008, p. 55) But again, the contrast in play here is just between what spirit is potentially and what it is in actuality. Only through its own activity does spirit make itself what it implicitly or potentially (already) is. More fully, the text reads: ‘In its immediacy, spirit is [...] only free implicitly, in accordance not with actuality but with the concept or possibility. Consequently, actual freedom is not something which occurs



within spirit as an immediacy, but is to be brought forth through the activity of spirit' (§382Z; *PSS I*: 53, trans. modified). Implicitly or in potentiality, then, spirit is still natural and not free; in its actuality, spirit is free. It is actual only through its own activity. This does not require Pippin's idea that spirit, even while it gives itself its freedom, remains ontologically fettered within the bounds of a nature conceived as what it belonged to before the 'achievement' it allegedly had to perform in order to become spirit.

(iii) Pippin draws on Hegel's Remark on §387 to the following effect:

In distinguishing his approach from all empirical and philosophical psychologies, Hegel insists again that the former are misleading because they try to say [']*what* spirit or soul is, what happens to it, what it does, presupposing it to be a ready-made subject within which such determinations appear only as expressions.['] The contrasting view which Hegel wishes to defend is that spirit 'posits for itself the expression of what it is', that all 'expressions' (*Äusserungen*) of itself are 'moments of its bringing itself forth to itself, of its agreement with itself whereby it first becomes actual *spirit*' [§387R]. As we have seen so often: *spirit* is a product of itself, only what it takes itself to be. (2008, p. 60)

In the passage Pippin cites, Hegel is making explicit that spirit is not ready-made. This is because it is not (merely) natural, but is self-productive. Pippin's reading, however, does not follow from what Hegel has been saying. That spirit is self-produced does not entail that spirit is 'only what it takes itself to be'; it means that spirit is the self-agreement of the concept. Notably here Hegel has been contrasting the 'philosophical treatment of spirit' with 'what constitutes instruction and education'. In instruction and education (*Bildung und Erziehung*) various stages have to be gone through in time. The philosophical treatment of spirit, by contrast, considers spirit 'as instructing and educating itself *within the concept*' (§387R; *PSS I*: 81). To say it does so *within the concept* is to signal a logical unfolding, not something that human creatures do. Of course, such logical unfolding will have historical, temporal manifestations (and the tracing of such manifestations is a highly significant part of Hegel's project). But nonetheless the logical unfolding is importantly *prior* to the historical unfolding; a historical process cannot, as it were, reach down into a deeper level and itself effect the logical unfolding.

(3) Why do the considerations that Pippin experiences as pushing him in the direction of this reading in fact point in the direction of a view he rules out? Pippin tells us:

Spirit is supposed to *become* spirit by virtue of the efforts of some organisms over time to ‘*make*’, let us say, an effective ‘space of reasons’. We don’t inherit such a domain for free, just by showing up as the kind of beings we are. (2008, p. 60)

Pippin is right to insist that we ‘don’t inherit such a domain for free’, if this means that spirit, rather than being self-produced, is just a (mere) nature that governs us whether we know about it or not. On the other hand, in another sense we *do* precisely ‘inherit such a domain for free, just by showing up as the kind of beings we are’. We *do* stand in normative relations to each other – we participate in our distinctive sociality – *just by being* human beings.

For Pippin, it is important that sociality is not already contained in the idea of the human being. He thinks, rightly, that Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit goes through various stages of logical development. He outlines these stages of logical development as follows. ‘There is first a form of mindedness, habituated dispositions oriented from some considerations about normative appropriateness, still deeply embodied in and deeply influenced by the natural world’ (2008, p. 14). (Like Pippin, I will use temporal language; but this language is there to pick out a *logical* development, not an ostensibly historical one.) It is only at the next stage that sociality comes into the picture. ‘There is next an account of forms of social mindedness, subjects in relation to each other (or the achievement of successful forms of like-mindedness or “objective spirit”) ...’ (2008, p. 15) But, as I will argue, it would be wrong to think that sociality is not already there in the very idea of the human being with which Hegel opens *Encyclopaedia* III (and in fact has already appeared at the close of *Encyclopaedia* II).

Pippin rightly insists that ‘holding individuals responsible as we do is a distinctly modern achievement, requiring a complex set of social presuppositions, and not a modern discovery of what could have been the truth of the matter all along’ (2008, p. 30). Of course, the normativity of *modern society* is not something discovered, but something formed in history. And more generally, the normativity to which we are subject is not something we could simply *discover* in the sense that it could be unknown to us, working (so to speak) behind our backs.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless I will present (in the next section) a reading of Hegel on which the sociality of the human being that (by Hegel’s lights) is most fully articulated in modern society *is* something that was, for Hegel, ‘the truth of the matter all along’. On this

<sup>6</sup> I thank an anonymous reader for *Philosophy* for pressing me on this point.

reading, spirit comes to an ever fuller realization of what it truly is – and so of what has been the truth all along. One might think that such a conception of spirit falls foul of Hegel’s insistence that spirit is, in some sense, historically constituted. But Hegel wants to say two things: that what spirit is can be stated ahead of considering its realization in history; but that what it is to specify this is to articulate its historical self-development.<sup>7</sup> This difficult idea marks out the specific difference that Hegel thinks obtains between the human form of life and non-human forms. Rationality brings with it historical self-shaping in a way that, for instance, perception does not. (There is no history of bat perception; bat perception is not self-shaped.)

But it is precisely Pippin’s recognition that spirit is, in some sense, self-produced (which mere animals are not) that ought to have led him to a recognition of an insight that his reading precisely works to block: namely that, as soon as *we humans* are on the scene, so is the distinctively social normativity to which we are subject. As soon as the human being is on the scene, talk of being ‘ontologically’ (mere) animals must drop out. And so Pippin ought to have been led to say precisely what he so vehemently resists: that we were subject to our distinctive normativity (or have stood ‘in the space of reasons’), as he puts it, ‘all along’.

## 2. Hegel’s account of the human animal

In the remainder of this paper, I will be concerned to outline the reading of Hegel I want to offer instead of Pippin’s. This reading seeks to make good on the claims in Section 1 to the effect that the correct reading of Hegel not only deviates from that of Pippin but involves endorsing claims on whose rejection Pippin’s account is built.

I begin, in this section, with Hegel’s account of the animal organism in *Encyclopaedia* II. My aim will be to show, contra Pippin, that what Hegel offers us is precisely a picture of the human being that contains human normativity from the start. This picture is that of the animal organism brought to perfection, already glimpsed at the end of *Encyclopaedia* II.

<sup>7</sup> Pinkard writes, in discussing Hegel’s philosophy of history: ‘What Hegel calls “philosophical history” takes its subject matter, as he puts it, to be “the spirit which is eternally present to itself and for which there is no past.” This is, as he notes, something that looks itself like a contradiction: “How can what is outside history, since it is not subject to change, still have a history?”’ (Pinkard, 2017, p. 39). In effect the challenge here is to understand how it is, for Hegel, that spirit is both eternal and historical.

The treatment of living organisms contained within Hegel's Philosophy of Nature ascends an Aristotelian *scala naturae*: plant, animal, rational animal.<sup>8</sup> Each of these kinds of organism realizes the life process (or 'process which is vitality', *E II* §346) in a different way, distinctive of the kind of organism that it is. The life process is, in turn, the unity of a 'triad of processes' (*E II* §346; cf. *E I*, §217): the process of formation (the coming-to-be and growth of the organism), the process of assimilation (by which the organism appropriates or consumes the environment), and the 'genus-process' (*Gattungsprozess*)<sup>9</sup> through which the organism engenders further instances of its kind. The *Gattungsprozess* does not fully come into its own in the plant, since plant reproduction is not restricted to producing discrete individuals of its own kind (it may happen through the grafting together of mere plant parts). In plants, then, we get no more than 'a beginning and an adumbration of the genus-process'. In the plant, the *Gattungsprozess* 'is, on the whole, superfluous since the process of formation and assimilation is itself already reproduction as production of fresh individuals' (*E II* §348). It is not that the *Gattungsprozess* fails to be instantiated in plants; it is, as Hegel acknowledges, instantiated in reproduction through the dispersal of seeds. The point is that reproduction is not, in plants, *confined to the Gattungsprozess*, so that the *Gattungsprozess* is not properly distinct from the process of formation and assimilation. It is in the animal that reproduction is restricted, as is proper, to the generation of new individuals.<sup>10</sup> Such individuals are governed by a life of 'self-feeling': they are subjects over against an external world (but not subjects for-themselves).

In the human (*geistig*) animal, the life of self-feeling is overcome and the subject becomes for-itself: 'it [*Geist*] can abstract from everything external and from its own externality, from its very life' (*E III* §382). As Hegel is reported as saying in the *Zusatz* to the final paragraph of the Philosophy of Nature, this is effectively the full

<sup>8</sup> An excellent treatment of the way in which Hegel's *scala* is related to that of Aristotle can be found in Rödl (MS).

<sup>9</sup> It would also be possible to translate *Gattungsprozess* as 'species-process'. But Hegel reserves *Gattung* for 'genus' and *Art* for 'species'.

<sup>10</sup> 'The organic individuality exists as *subjectivity* in so far as the externality proper to its shape [*die eigene Äußerlichkeit der Gestalt*] is *idealized* into members, [or in so far as] the organism in its process outwards preserves in itself the unity of the self. This is the *animal nature* [*die animalische Natur*] which, in the actuality and externality of immediate singularity [*Einzelheit*], is equally, on the other hand, the *inwardly reflected* self of *singularity*, *inwardly present* [in sich *seiende*] subjective universality.' (*E II* §350)

resolution of the *Gattungsprozess*. With the emergence of *geistig* life, ‘instead of the third moment in the genus-process sinking back again into singularity, the other side, death, is the sublating of the singular and therewith the emergence of the genus, the procession of spirit; for the negation of the natural, i.e. of immediate singularity, is this, that the universal, the genus, is posited and that, too, in the form of genus’ (*E II §376Z*). We humans are, that is to say, the *Gattungswesen* as such – the *Gattung* that does not lose itself in the individuals that it gives rise to, but is the universal individual.<sup>11</sup> That we are this is already established by the end of the Philosophy of wNature – that is, it gets established as part of Hegel’s treatment of the animal as such, not in the treatment of spirit that follows upon it.<sup>12</sup>

The human being is, then, a distinctive kind of animal. Just as the transformation we saw in the gear change from plant life to animal life brings with it a distinctive repertoire of further capacities, so too with the gear change from merely animal life to human animal life. What opens up this distinctive repertoire is the characteristic of the human that can be described in two ways: as self-consciousness or as universality. It is as the animal that can say ‘I’ (that is, as a self-conscious, and this is universal, being) that I stand in a new relation to my psychical life. With this comes an extensive psychical repertoire, notably including habit – which serves both to liberate and to regularize our behaviour.<sup>13</sup> It also makes us self-consciousnesses for each other, and thereby recognitive beings.

<sup>11</sup> Hegel does not use the term *Gattungswesen*, but the concept, as appropriated from him by Feuerbach and then Marx, clearly figures in his discussion in so far as he speaks of *Wesen* that are in and for themselves their *Gattung*. See Schuringa ([forthcoming](#)).

<sup>12</sup> Both Karen Ng and Catherine Malabou observe that *Encyclopaedia III* picks up where *Encyclopaedia II* left off, without the need for an intervening ‘transition’. Ng writes that ‘the transition to *Geist* already takes place in the concluding paragraph of [the Philosophy of Nature]’ (Ng, 2018, p. 23). Malabou writes that ‘The transition between the two [the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Spirit] poses a genuine problem because it concerns the only moment of Hegel’s philosophy where the same term plays the role both of result and of origin. The Philosophy of Nature ends with the study of the soul and its functions; the Philosophy of Spirit begins with the study of the soul and its functions.’ (Malabou, 2005, pp. 25–26) It seems not farfetched, in line with these observations, to take Hegel as having the human being already in the picture when he speaks of *das vollkommene Tier* in the closing sections of *Encyclopaedia II*.

<sup>13</sup> I will not discuss habit and how it relates to the gear change from nature to spirit here. Suffice to say that Hegel distinguishes between mere

### 3. Species-being and the concrete universal

I have suggested that Pippin's notion of a collective self-imposition of normativity is difficult to make sense of and is not required by Hegel's texts. Instead, I have urged, Hegel's conception of how we are normative beings has our normativity be internal to the kind of animal beings we are – that is, self-conscious, universal animal beings.

What is it about conceiving us as the self-conscious, universal kind of animal that means that the normativity to which we are subject is contained in what we are? To answer this, we need to examine how Hegel presents us human beings as the animal beings that truly are *Gattungswesen* so as to bring out the logical structure of human individuals' relationship to their *Gattung*.

Hegel claims there to be a contrast between those animals in whom the *Gattungsprozess* is not fully resolved (that is, mere animals) and those animals in whom it is fully resolved (that is, humans). Mere animals in some sense attempt to be their *Gattung*. An individual horse, say, attempts to be the horse-kind or the horse-species through reproducing itself. But it manages, through reproduction, only to give rise to further individuals that, like it, fail to be for-themselves their *Gattung*. In this sense, merely natural animals are deficient: they fail to be, fully, their concept. Each horse is deficient, because it fails to be the horse-kind. Only human beings manage, through the way the *Gattungsprozess* functions in their case, to be *Gattungswesen*: we human individuals, each of us, succeed in *being* our *Gattung*, in- and for-ourselves. This marks out that we have a special relationship to our *Gattung* that non-*geistig* animals lack. This relationship – the way in which we are individuals conforming to or falling under a *Gattung* or kind – accords us what Hegel calls 'concrete universality'.

First, to see why we are *universal*, we need to spell out more fully the contrast between human beings and other animals. This contrast, as Hegel emphasizes, can be brought out by considering our capacity to say 'I' (or, equivalently, our self-consciousness). Universality and self-consciousness are, for Hegel, two sides of the same coin. In a *Zusatz* to the *Vorbegriff* to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* Hegel is reported

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animal habit and human animal habit. Animals are said to 'bring about [their] own destruction' through 'the inertia of *habit*' (*E* II §375). But habit of a kind that has the dual function of mechanizing and liberating the behaviour of its possessors is proper to the *human* animal treated in *E* III.

as saying that ‘it is the human who first makes himself double so as to be a universal for a universal. This first happens when the human knows that he is “I”. By the term “I” I mean myself, a single and altogether determinate person. And yet I really utter nothing peculiar to myself, for every one else is an “I” or “Ego”’ (*E I* §24Z; cf. *E III* §381Z). In saying ‘I’, I abstract not just from the particularities of what confronts me, but also from my own particularities. In thus abstracting away from my own particularities, I am speaking of a universal – the ‘I’ that every other human being can also enunciate.

Second, to see that the universality of *Geistigkeit* is concrete universality, we need a brief excursus into Hegel’s *Logic*.<sup>14</sup> There he builds up to the kind of falling under a predicate that the concrete universal represents through a series of types of judgement, working through which we find the connection between subject and predicate becoming (so to speak) ever tighter. In a judgement, ‘we expect to see *one and the same object double*, once in its singular actuality, and again in its essential identity or in its concept’ (GW 12: 59/*SL* 557), but this desideratum is not yet satisfied in ‘judgements of existence’, such as ‘the rose is red’ (GW 12: 84/*SL* 581). Here there is, as Robert Stern puts it, ‘at best a superficial relation between individual and universal, as the latter forms an accidental property of the former’ (Stern, 2017, p. 99). Redness does not get us to the essence of this rose. We make some progress on this score as we advance through ‘judgements of reflection’ and ‘judgements of necessity’, but it is only in ‘judgements of the concept’ ‘that *its* [i.e. the subject matter’s] *connection with the concept is to be found*’ (GW 12: 84/*SL* 582). ‘The concept is at the basis of this judgement, and it is there with reference to the subject matter, as an *ought* to which reality may or may not conform’ (GW 12: 84/*SL* 582).

One way Hegel characterizes the way in which the predicate here reaches all the way down into the essence of the subject is in terms of ‘concrete universality’:

Subject and predicate correspond to each other, and have the same concept, and this *content* is itself posited *concrete universality*; that is to say, it contains the two moments, the objective universal or the genus [*Gattung*] and the *singularized universal*. [GW 12: 88/*SL* 585–86]

<sup>14</sup> The ‘concrete universal’ seems to have lost its status as a focus of interest since its heyday in the period of Bradley, Bosanquet and Royce; but see Stern (2007).

The human being is regarded by Hegel as a paradigm instance of concrete universality,<sup>15</sup> and in the last paragraph of the Philosophy of Nature he tells us emphatically that in the perfect animal (which can only be the human, *geistig* animal) nature ‘has passed over [...] into the subjectivity of the concept whose *objectivity* is itself the sublated immediacy of singularity, is *concrete universality*’ (*E* II §376). Each individual human being, *qua* human (*geistig*) being, is fully its *Gattung*. In a passage in which Hegel recalls the contrast with mere animals, who are incapable of ‘perfect exemplification of the genus’, he tells us that ‘the genus genuinely actualizes itself, on the other hand, in spirit, in thinking, in this element which is homogeneous with the genus’ (*E* III §396Z).<sup>16</sup>

We now have in play the idea of normativity as being internal to the individual human being *qua Gattungswesen*. Mere animals are, of course, in their own way, subject to norms; the norm for dogs is to have four legs, and a three-legged dog is a defective dog. What we still need to see is how not just this but the full-fledged normativity that Pippin explains through a social-historical act is already contained in Hegel’s very conception of the human animal.

I have claimed that, for Hegel, the norms to which the human is subject – and, as we have seen, our being self-conscious implies that these are *social* norms – are contained in the very idea of the human. But now it might be objected that this does not seem to fit the structure of Hegel’s exposition. For, so the thought goes, it is only some way into his treatment of the human that Hegel brings in recognition, through the life-and-death struggle. Does it matter that Hegel does not speak of recognition before this point? First, a negative point. There is nothing in Hegel’s text to indicate that such ‘development’ or ‘unfolding’ as he offers is incompatible with the idea that what comes to light in the unfolding is already contained

<sup>15</sup> See Chitty (2011, p. 482). Chitty suggests that we take ‘a community of mutual recognition, or of spirit, to be Hegel’s paradigmatic example of concrete universality.’

<sup>16</sup> Again, in another image that brings out how each human being is at once individual and universal, just as what it is: ‘We have the tremendous diremption of spirit into different selves which are, both in and for themselves and for one another, completely free, independent, absolutely obdurate, resistant – and yet at the same time identical with one another, hence not self-subsistent, not impenetrable, but, as it were, fused together [*zusammengefloßen*].’ (*E* III §436Z) Another important passage, for our purposes, is *PR* §24: ‘It is the universality concrete in character and thus for-itself universal which is the substance of self-consciousness, the immanent genus [*Gattung*], or immanent Idea, of self-consciousness’.



in the conception of the human animal with which we begin the Anthropology. Hegel claims that self-consciousness is already contained in consciousness as its truth (*E* III §424); and that self-consciousness is essentially recognizant self-consciousness (§430). Nothing needs to *happen* to see all this other than our looking on at the unfolding of the concept. When Hegel chides those who look for ‘temporal development’ instead of the development of the concept (*PR* §32), this point has application quite generally across the *Encyclopaedia* project in which the *Philosophy of Right* is embedded.

In addition to this negative point, we can see, on the positive side, that in closing the ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ section of the *Encyclopaedia* within which his account of recognition has been elaborated with an account of ‘Universal Self-Consciousness’ (*E* III §§436–37), Hegel renders explicit what was already implicitly contained in the assertions at the beginning of *Encyclopaedia* III to the effect that the human is the universal being:

*Universal self-consciousness* is the affirmative awareness of oneself in the other self. Each self as free individuality has *absolute independence*, but in virtue of the negation of its immediacy or desire it does not distinguish itself from the other; it is universal and objective; and it has real universality in the form of reciprocity, in that it is aware of its recognition in the free other, and is aware of this in so far as it recognizes the other and is aware that it is free. [*E* III §436]

Appreciation of that being which fully realizes the *Gattungsprozess* – a being that is truly for itself its own *Gattung* – had already equipped us to see that such a being, in its self-consciousness, knows itself to be universal. Its self-consciousness means that it holds *itself* to account. Mere animals are subject to standards (such as the standard for dogs to have four legs) but do not hold *themselves* to these standards; the human, by contrast, *thinks of itself as* subject to norms. Its universality means that all instances of it are held to account. Since the *Gattung* is sundered into individuals, each individual (each of which is universal) holds each other individual to account. Not only this, but the norms for humans must be social. For another I shows up for me, in its otherness, as you. Likewise, I show up as you for that other I. This social relation is built into the very notion of the universality that all the I’s share with one another, since for them to *be* I’s is for them to understand themselves as the you to another I and *vice versa*. Hegel’s account of mutual recognition in the ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ stretch of *Encyclopaedia*

III serves to fill in this picture. And in thus filling it in, Hegel does not bring in anything that leaves the natural lives of such individuals behind.

I do not think, then, that there is anything in the description of the life-and-death struggle that Hegel offers in *Encyclopaedia* III that requires us to read Hegel as doing anything beyond articulating, and making vivid, what is already contained in the idea of the *Gattungswesen*. Part of Hegel's idea seems to be that the life-and-death struggle can be recognized as taking place in history.<sup>17</sup> But what the very idea of the life-and-death struggle articulates is that spirited beings are free beings in whose nature it is to recognize each other as such. The articulation is of what was true of human beings 'all along' (to speak in a way that emphasizes how we are here accepting what Pippin wants to reject). It is crucial to Hegel that the logic of spirit can be found to manifest itself in history: but, again, it must be remembered that the logic is prior to the history. Such processes as the life-and-death struggle are to be understood as working towards the realization of what spirit is: what we are as human beings without us having had to 'achieve' (in Pippin's sense) anything.

#### **4. Spirit as the truth of nature**

How could Pippin's reading diverge as sharply from what I am suggesting is Hegel's account as I have claimed? The answer, which I hinted at in Section 1 and now want to elaborate, is that Pippin's reading lacks a full appreciation of Hegel's formulation 'spirit is the truth of nature'. This does not just mean that spirit, whatever else it may be, is still natural. It means that nature is such as to give way to spirit, and that in spirit nature's deficiencies are remedied. In remedying nature's deficiencies, spirit does not leave nature behind but realizes that which nature only attempts to be. Spirited beings, realizing the *truth of nature*, are not natural in the *Encyclopaedia* II sense of 'natural'. They are not, in Pippin's terms, 'ontologically' natural in the way that the mere animals who figure in *Encyclopaedia* II are. They are natural in, so to speak, a new way. The very concept of nature has been modulated in such a way that

<sup>17</sup> As an anonymous reader for *Philosophy* pointed out, part of the point of giving a historical account of the life-and-death struggle may be to illustrate how difficult mutual recognition is to attain.

*mere* nature now shows up as deficient with respect to spirit.<sup>18</sup> I surmise that Pippin does not see this, because, through a neglect of Hegel's philosophy of nature, he gives insufficient weight to the distinctive form of Aristotelianism that underlies Hegel's conception of the nature–spirit relation.

Hegel takes over from Aristotle, as we have seen, a hierarchical account of living beings. In Hegel's rendering of the Aristotelian hierarchy, the transition from each form of soul to the next is a dialectical one, so that each higher form involves the 'sublation' of that immediately below it. In addition Hegel thinks he can find in Aristotle the idea that the truth of nature is spirit, and that is, for Hegel, the idea that the self-conscious, rational form of life is the 'truth of' animal life (in which nature culminates).<sup>19</sup>

In order to understand the full import of the way in which the nature–spirit relation is, for Hegel, a transition from one form of life to another, considered in Aristotelian terms, it is helpful to consider to what degree Hegel's view fits what Matthew Boyle has called a 'transformative theory of rationality'. Boyle has defended such a theory, which he contrasts with 'additive theories' (Boyle, 2012; Boyle, 2016). Boyle's 'transformativism' seems to resemble the reading of Hegel being advanced here, both since it conceives of itself as embodying an Aristotelian insight and because it seems, *prima facie*, to deliver something structurally similar to Hegel's view as presented here. Furthermore, there has been recent discussion relating Boyle's transformativism to Hegel directly.<sup>20</sup>

The opposition between Boyle's transformative theory and additive theories can be spelled out as follows. Take some capacity shared by non-rational and rational animals, such as perception. According to additive theories, the difference made by the addition of rationality in rational animals is that a further capacity governs or monitors the capacity of perception in some way, perception

<sup>18</sup> I read Hegel as committed to the idea that nature, *per se*, is shown to be deficient once we get spirit in view. One might alternatively think that Hegel takes nature to be perfectly adequate in its proper place, with spirit as a kind of better nature. That thought, however, brings with it difficulties about how these two natures are then related.

<sup>19</sup> There is not space here to defend these claims about the form taken by Hegel's Aristotelianism. In his lectures on the History of Philosophy, however, Hegel says that Aristotle has the 'true' conception of nature – one that takes life to be nature's highest realization, with self-conscious animal life the highest realization of life. See Santoro-Brienza (1992) and Ferrarin (2001).

<sup>20</sup> See especially Haase (2017) and Khurana (2017).

remaining unchanged as it does so. According to transformative theories, by contrast, the difference made is not mere addition, but a ‘transformation’ of the capacity of perception. As a result transformative theorists want to say that rationality ‘reaches down’ into perception, such that rational animals have perception ‘in a different way’ from the way non-rational animals do so. This seems to answer to an insight – that human perception is itself conceptually structured.

Boyle’s transformativism is presented in terms of an Aristotelian picture of capacities. As we progress through the Aristotelian hierarchy of nutritive, sensitive and rational soul, we do not simply *add* capacities as if building a ‘layer-cake’. Rather, we should see the addition of capacities as we rise up the hierarchy as bringing with it the transformation of the capacities that have been previously accumulated.

Hegel’s conception of the relation of nature to spirit would seem, in broad terms, hospitable to transformativism.<sup>21</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to substantiate in detail how Hegel provides a transformative account of the lower capacities in the Anthropology of *Philosophy of Spirit*. Nevertheless it seems clear that Hegel thinks that, for example, perception stands transformed as we enter the realm of spirit. And part of this story is that spirit brings with it a distinctive normativity characteristic of a rational form of life, analogous to rationality as it figures in Boyle’s account.

The transformative picture, however, falls short of endorsing commitments that are crucial to Hegel’s picture. This is significant since these commitments, as I will now show, supply deficiencies in the transformative picture. It may be that transformativists will find these commitments excessive. Be that as it may, the two pictures (standard transformativism, on the one hand, and Hegel’s view, on the other) can helpfully illuminate each other. That Hegel is effectively in a position to remedy shortcomings in transformativism tells us something important about Hegel’s account. That transformativism stands in need of supplementation, and that Hegel’s account provides something of the right shape to do this work, tells us something important about transformativism.

<sup>21</sup> Here I agree with Khurana (2017, p. 383). Khurana develops a reading (ibid., pp. 380–88) according to which spirit itself does ‘transformative’ work on nature in spirited animals. There isn’t space here to discuss the intricacies of this reading; but for the purposes of the present arguments what matters is not the precise character of *Hegel’s* ‘transformativism’ but the way in which (as Khurana would agree) standard forms of transformativism fall short of what Hegel presents us with.

There is a problem with the transformative picture. That picture leaves us with a duplication of the concept ‘animal’ (and perhaps with a duplication of the concept ‘nature’). There are mere animals and there are rational animals. But the picture fails to provide the resources for understanding how to link the two kinds of animal to each other. How are we to understand their both being *animals*? It may seem to answer to a truth to say that I possess the power of perception ‘in a different way’ from the manner in which a wildebeest does. But we shall also surely want to be able to say just how such a ‘transformed’ capacity for perception as rational animals possess relates to the non-transformed capacity for perception that non-rational animals possess.<sup>22</sup> It would seem that the transformativist picture has replaced one mystery with another. The old mystery was: how could my rationality possibly have purchase on, or govern or ‘monitor’, my capacity of perception? The new mystery is: how can I understand that what the wildebeest and I are doing are both acts of *perceiving*, now that I understand my own acts of perception as inherently rationally modulated?

The Hegelian picture is able to remedy this deficiency. This is precisely thanks to its commitment to the thesis that spirit is the truth of nature, as I have been explicating this thesis. Such a commitment, or anything analogous to it, is notably absent from transformativism. More generally, transformativism refrains from any systematic commitment to spelling out the nature–spirit relation, proceeding as if its claims can gain acceptability without being grounded in any such framework. Once the thesis that spirit is the truth of nature is in play, it becomes possible to give an account of the relation between non-transformed animals and transformed animals. Non-transformed animals are a less full realization of the animal than are transformed animals. A transformed animal is a spirited animal; and the spirited animal is the truth of the non-spirited animal. This brings with it the idea, discussed in the previous section, that non-spirited animals are deficient with respect to the concept ‘animal’ in a way that spirited animals are not. Whether or not transformativists find this acceptable, it does provide a possible resolution of the problem with the transformative picture. The mystery about my grasp of the wildebeest’s perception goes away. For such perception is now *understood to be* deficient in just such a way that my failure to grasp it is not a mystery, but what I should expect.

Transformativism can thus be seen as friendly to Hegel’s account, as I have read it here. Transformativism, however, suffers deficiencies

<sup>22</sup> These issues become particularly acute on what Haase (2013) calls a ‘resolute’ reading of transformativism.

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that Hegel's account is of the right shape to remedy. It is doubtful that *this* way of making good on the deficiencies of transformativism will satisfy transformativists. Nonetheless the Hegelian picture helps to indicate the shape a remedy might take.

### Conclusion

Further work is needed to elaborate Hegel's Aristotelian conception of nature and its significance for his philosophy of spirit. This will involve developing a fuller appreciation of the way in which Hegel reworks Aristotle's hierarchical conception of soul in terms of the sublation of each form by the next highest one, so that the higher one is always the 'truth of' the immediately lower. And that should clear the way for coming to an understanding of how, according to Hegel, we can be spirited animals that have all the trappings of *geistig* self-determination. The language of 'achievement', read as Pippin reads it, can then be jettisoned, and his picture of *Geist* itself coming into being through a social-historical act abandoned.

All I have taken myself for now to have shown is that Pippin's way of construing spirit and its relation to nature, as well as being difficult to make sense of, is not required by Hegel's texts and rests on an interpretation of the desiderata for interpreting them that those texts do not in fact support.<sup>23</sup>

### Competing interests

The author(s) declare none.

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