Douglas Moggach, Nadine Mooren,
Michael Quante (Hg.)

Perfektionismus der Autonomie

Wilhelm Fink

Inhalt

Hegelian Perfectionism and Freedom

Loughlin Gleeson & Heikki Ikäheimo

Introduction

In this chapter, we take up the connection between perfectionism and autonomy, or more generally freedom, from the Hegelian perspective. As one might expect of Hegel, his understanding of both concepts, as well as the nature of their interconnection, is highly original, at times difficult to discern and quite often misunderstood. On our interpretation, Hegel's perfectionism is a form of "evaluative essentialism", while his understanding of freedom turns around the concept of "concrete freedom" [*konkrete Freiheit*]. "Evaluative essentialism" refers to the view whereby an entity's essence, or in Hegel's terms "concept", is in effect its *immanent evaluative criterion*, the realization of which is a measure of the "goodness" specific to that entity.[1] "Concrete freedom", to give a preliminary characterization, is a relationship obtaining between self and other (whether other subjects, society, or internal or external nature) wherein the former is *genuinely reconciled* with the latter.[2] The connection between these two principles – perfectionism as evaluative essentialism and freedom as concrete freedom – is encapsulated in Hegel's claim that the "essence" [*Wesen*] of *Geist*, or as we interpret the latter, the "human life-form", is concrete freedom.[3] As we will show in more detail below, Hegel's conceptualization of the interconnection of the relevant concepts not only marks a continuation with the Kantian tradition, but also a partial break with it, to the extent that it embraces aspects of Aristotelianism. We will begin by introducing the main features of the unique brand of ethical perfectionism that Hegel espouses, evaluative essentialism that is (Section I). Following this, we will adumbrate Hegel's concept of concrete freedom with specific reference to its various "dimensions" (Section 2). By way of conclusion (section 3), we will consider

1 A version of this position has already been set out in Ikäheimo, (2011), 155-159. We switch here from "normative" to "evaluative" as the latter term avoids the potentially misleading deontological connotations of the former.

2 Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1827-8)* (2007), 67. Hereafter *LPS*.

3 Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind* (2007), §382. Hereafter *PM*. We are utilizing Inwood's excellent new edition of the Philosophy of Spirit, but we are replacing his use of "mind" as a translation for *Geist* with "spirit", as it covers more of the meanings Hegel gave to this central term.

the relationship of concrete freedom to autonomy, and discuss the various "opposites" of concrete freedom, in particular the alternative ideal of abstract freedom and its dialectical reversals into relations of domination. We will end by suggesting that the ideal of collective autonomy put in practice without the guidance of the meta-principle of concrete freedom amounts to a pathological development of the life-form.

1

Perfectionism is standardly interpreted within the context of moral philosophy as an ethical stance – different in kind both from deontological and consequentialist approaches – according to which human beings are to realize a certain conception of "the good." That "the good" has been differently conceived by various philosophers has given rise to competing perfectionist approaches. When the object whose realization is indicative of axiological desirability has not been designated by a putative "human nature", or the human *differentia specifica* as in Aristotle, it has usually been specified in terms of non-naturalistically derived "objective goods", perhaps most commonly happiness. Both approaches have been subject to rigorous criticism – for a-historicism and heteronomy, respectively – and in consequence perfectionism generally has for some time now found itself somewhat out of favor within ethical theory. The general theme of this volume is a specific version of perfectionism that combines the basic idea with a broadly Kantian notion of autonomy: post-Kantian or autonomy-perfectionism. As our reconstruction of Hegel's position should reveal not only is it meaningfully different from the naturalist and non-naturalist variants of perfectionism referred to above, it is also largely immune to the standard charges brought against perfectionist ethics. As to post-Kantian perfectionism in the sense specified by Douglas Moggach in this volume and elsewhere,[4] Hegelian perfectionism remains post-Kantian in so far as "the good" around which it turns is freedom. In many other respects however, Hegel's version of perfectionism is unique to him, and distinct from both pre-Kantian perfectionisms and from autonomy-perfectionism.

Nowhere is the fact that Hegel espouses a unique kind of post-Kantian perfectionism more evident than in the "Introduction" to the Philosophy of Spirit of his 1830 Berlin *Encyclopaedia* and in the corresponding passages of his 1827/8 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*. It is here, in introducing his readers and students to the theme and basic principle of the Philosophy of

4 Moggach (2011), 179-200.

Spirit, that Hegel declares freedom to be the "essence" of *Geist* or spirit. In §382 of the *Encyclopaedia* we read: "For this reason formally the *essence* of spirit is *freedom*, the concept's absolute negativity as identity with itself."[5] In the lectures Hegel reaffirms this claim, albeit with reference to the synonymous terminology of "essential determination" and "concept": "Freedom constitutes the essential determination of spirit, and we can say that freedom is the concept of spirit."[6] Whether freedom is referred to as the "essence", "concept" or "essential determination", such a claim requires delicate handling. Before explaining the concept of freedom – concrete freedom that is – in the next section, let us thus characterize his evaluative essentialism by means of four general characteristics:

(i) Hegel's essentialism is of an *immanent*, and in this sense broadly Aristotelian kind;
(ii) it is normative or *evaluative*, as opposed to purely descriptive;
(iii) *contra* Aristotle, or at least simple versions of Aristotelianism, Hegel's essentialism on *Geist* has a decidedly *anti-naturalistic* twist;
(iv) marking a further point of differentiation from Aristotelianism, Hegel's essentialism also encompasses, to an extent, *historicism*.

(i) In our view, both *Geist* and its essence are to be interpreted in a fundamentally *immanentist* vein. Many good reasons, both exegetical and philosophical, have been presented for resisting the equivalence established by Charles Taylor between *Geist* and "cosmic spirit."[7] Taylor's reading, which is selectively grounded on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ultimately exports to the discussion of *Geist* a transcendent plane which is detached from the down to earth descriptions and conceptualizations of the various elements of the human life-form which Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit actually consists of. The rival, "post-Kantian" conception of *Geist* developed more recently by Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, Robert Brandom and others, by contrast, rejects the cosmic spirit-reading, and turns around the general idea of self-generating, self-legitimating shared norms as set within a *sui generis* "space of reasons."[8] Though the self-generation and self-legitimation of norms is actually something done collectively by humans, this reading largely omits the "thicker" (psychological, affective, "ethical") aspects of human life that Hegel spends so much time and effort in conceptualizing in the Philosophy

5 *PM*, §382.
6 *LPS*, 67.
7 Taylor (1988).
8 See, for instance, Pippin (2008), 17.

of Spirit. Our approach seeks to do justice to the completely human content of Hegel's conception of *Geist*, as well as those moments which cannot be reduced to "thin" deontological-normative concepts. As we understand it, *Geist* encompasses the totality of all distinctly *human* activities, structures, capacities and achievements – from the most "immediate" naturally-founded, anthropological determinacies discussed at the beginning of the Philosophy of Spirit to the most elaborate ones of philosophical reflection discussed at the end. Otherwise expressed, *Geist* is a *title-word* for the "human life-form"[9] and it embraces all the partially given, partially self-produced and self-reflective moments – in Hegel's terminology the "subjective", the "objective" and the "absolute" – constitutive of our life-form. These – and nothing else – are the explicit topic of Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit.

What Hegel means by "essence" is equally immanent, in contrast to a Platonic "form" on the traditional interpretation. In the *Science of Logic* Hegel says that by the "essence" of a thing he means its "concept" or "universal":

> [...] the *nature*, the specific *essence*, that which is truly *permanent* and *substantial* in the manifold and accidentiality of appearance and fleeting externalization, is the *concept* of the thing, *the universal which is present in it* just as there is present in each human being, although universally unique, a specific principle that makes him human (or in each individual animal a specific principle that makes it animal).[10]

Essence, in this broadly Aristotelian sense, is hence the immanent principle that makes a given entity what it is[11]; or as James Kreines puts it, its "immanent concept."[12] An important feature of essences so conceived is also their "objectivity." Such entity-defining concepts are mostly not products of human construction or legislation *a la* Pippin and other post-Kantians,[13] but have a relative mind-independence, the more precise determinations of which depend on the general kind of thing in question.[14] For Hegel concrete freedom

9 See Stekeler-Weithofer (2013), 701-735.

10 Hegel, *Science of Logic* (2010), 16. Hereafter *SL*.

11 *LPS*, 67.

12 Kreines (2015), 22.

13 As we will show, nor is self-legislation all that the human essence amounts to. Compare Pippin (2008), 40.

14 Artifacts are of course human made and their human purpose defines their essence. This is not so with natural entities. Here we are focused only on the human essence, which for Hegel is what it is independently of what humans think it is, even though its actualization is not.

is *the* human essence, and he clearly does not think this is up to negotiation or re-legislation.

(ii) That Hegel's brand of essentialism is Aristotelian means that it is not simply descriptive. It is not focused on demarcating entities in terms of necessary properties or necessary and sufficient conditions on which something counts as a particular kind of entity. Rather, it is of a normative or *evaluative* type, whereby the "essence" or "concept" of a given entity is its *immanent ideal* and thus *evaluative principle*. From this perspective, evaluative judgements pertain to the correspondence of an entity to its essence, and the degree to which an entity instantiates or realizes its essence is the degree of its "goodness" or "badness" on criteria specific to it.[15] As to the human life-form and concrete freedom as its essence, the more instantiations of the life-form instantiate concrete freedom, or the "freer" they are in this sense, the better (and "truer"[16]) they are. Conversely, any non-insignificant failures to realize concrete freedom count as defects or imperfections, forms of "badness" that is, of human life. As should become clear in the next section, the goodness and badness at stake here are of a broadly *ethical* kind.

(iii) Associating Hegel with Aristotelian essentialism will no doubt be cause for concern both within and outside of Hegel-scholarship, as it may seem to imply some sort of reductive *naturalism* on *Geist*, or humanity. The worry is that this involves positing a fixed or invariant conception of "human nature" and negating the self-constituting character of the human life-form – a position categorically rejected by the post-Kantian Hegelians such as Pippin and others.[17] At least part of this worry can be allayed by a consideration of what the realization of the essence in question actually involves. It is significant, in this respect, that Hegel himself disavows the thought that concrete freedom is something to which we as humans tend *naturally*, as flowers turn to light or bees to honey. Instead, he characterises our essence as a "vocation" [*Bestimmung*], the achievement of which necessarily involves human activity and thus at least potentially explicit thought. Hegel says:

> If it is asked, what is spirit? The proper sense of this question is what is essential in spirit, and this is equivalent to the question, what is the vocation [*Bestimmung*]

15 *SL*, 712: "In the concrete things, together with the diversity of the properties among themselves, there also enters the difference between the *concept* and its *realization*. […] Therefore, although an actual thing will indeed manifest in itself what it *ought* to be, yet, in accordance with the negative judgment of the concept, it may equally also show that its actuality only imperfectly corresponds with this concept, that it is *bad*."

16 This involves an ontological concept of truth. See Halbig (2006), 234-35.

17 Pippin (2008), 17.

> of the human as such? Vocation expresses on the one hand a difference [between what is, and what is supposed to be], an end, a purpose that is supposed to be achieved. [...] On the other hand, vocation means the origin, what the human being is in himself [*an sich*]. The human being is supposed to bring himself about, but he cannot make himself to be anything other, and can have no other end, except what he originally is in himself. [..] The nature of spirit is to bring forth what it is, to bring it to manifestation, to discourse, to consciousness. The vocation of spirit is to make itself be what it is in itself.[18]

Though Hegel's substantializing turns of phrases on *Geist* at the end of the quotation may initially suggest a naturalistic determinism with respect to the realization of the essence, what he is actually talking about is the determination and vocation of human being or beings which can only be "brought about" through individual and collective human action. It is only through an activity of *self-realisation* that, invoking Hegelian terminology, our essence becomes "for itself" [*für sich*], actual and determinate, as opposed to merely "in-itself" [*an sich*], an implicit potentiality.[19] This connects with the next point and we will also return to it in the third section.

(iv) Whereas the above may allay some of the post-Kantian worries about naturalism, it does not address the related worry of an uncritical *a-historicism.* Here it is important to understand that Hegel conceives of the relevant essence at a high degree of abstraction, or, if you like, *formally*. For concrete freedom to be realized in human affairs, it necessarily requires specification and thus "fitting into" the specific historical and cultural conditions pertaining to the social reality in question. Whereas Hegel himself construed a particular institutional complex as the ideal system of concrete freedom overall that he could think of for the conditions of his time and place, the details and attendant evaluative judgments pertaining to the realization of concrete freedom in, for instance, continental Europe today would be rather different, despite the "context-transcending" general form of concrete freedom. Hegel's *formal* evaluative essentialism does not as such determine the details of any particular specification thereof. Rather, it is here that the real-philosophical labor actually begins, and that is what Hegel undertook in his *Philosophy of Right*. Even if not operating with exactly the same concept of freedom, a close enough analogue tuned to the social, economic and cultural conditions of contemporary Germany (or perhaps Western Europe) can be found in Axel Honneth's *Freedom's Right*.[20] It too operates on a fairly formal concept of

18 *LPS*, 67.

19 *PM*, §382z.

20 Honneth (2014).

("social") freedom, and applies it to social reality by specifying what it means in the different contemporary social and institutional spheres. To return to the previous point, however exactly one thinks of the connections between philosophical theory, practice, and historical development, it is clear that the realization of concrete freedom in institutions and in social structures and practices does not happen naturally, but requires human activity, philosophical work as activity of "absolute Spirit" included.

Bringing together the various threads set out above, concrete freedom hence figures in Hegel's thought as *the* immanent evaluative criterion of the various instantiations of the human life-form. The relevant essence is such that its realization requires human activity and this necessarily involves its specification under determinate contexts. The more or the better concrete freedom is realised by instantiations of human life – and more exactly, as we will see next, relations to necessarily determining others – the better or more perfect those instantiations are on a criterion immanent to them, hence exemplifying the "goodness" proper to our kind.

2

Having briefly reconstructed the main features of Hegel's evaluative essentialism, it is time now to explicate what exactly the essence in question – *concrete* freedom – is on his account. In the "Introduction" to the Philosophy of Spirit and in the accompanying lectures, Hegel emphasizes that by freedom as the essence of *Geist* he does not mean merely "abstract freedom", or *freedom from* something.[21] His critique of and polemic against abstract freedom spread across his writings is that it cannot apply to what we are necessarily determined by (e.g., other subjects, society, internal and external nature).[22] The concept of abstract freedom is logically incoherent with regard to such necessarily determining "others,"[23] and practical attempts to apply it relation to them are doomed to fail, the more catastrophically so the harder the attempt (as evidenced for example by the infamous "reign of terror" during the French revolution[24]). Hegel's point of departure with respect to his *concrete*

21 *PM*, 65-67.

22 Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (2011), §5. Hereafter *PR*. Also see Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), §549.

23 As Hegel puts it, "the one who flees, however, is not yet free, for in fleeing he is still dependent on what he flees." In Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline: Part I: Science of Logic*, (2010), 94 A. Hereafter *EL*.

24 *PR*, §5 Z.

conception of freedom is marked by the idea that the necessary determinants or necessarily determining others referred to above should not be conceived of as restrictions to the subject, but as *constitutive* of it, and that freedom in relation to them cannot be freedom from them, but, if you like, freedom *with them* or *with regard to them*. Concrete freedom is thus a certain kind of relation in which the subject is *reconciled* with constitutive otherness, whether epistemically or practically, whether affectively or in reflective thought. Importantly, concrete freedom as reconciliation with necessarily determining others, or, as Hegel puts it, "being with oneself in the other" [*bei sich selbst sein in anderem*], does not amount to the complete overcoming of the other in question.[25] Nor does it mean the subject merging with or being engulfed by the other. Rather, freedom *in concreto* amounts to the "sublation" [*Aufhebung*] of the other's alienness or inimicality.

Another way in which Hegel attempts to capture just this is by the formal expression "unity of unity and difference." Simply put, all finite things are constituted not only by an immediate (abstract) relation-to-self, but also by what they are *not*, an "other."[26] Being maximally constituted and thereby free in the relevant concrete sense is not a matter of abstractly negating such "difference"; on the contrary, it implies incorporating it within a mediated (concrete) self-relation.[27] "What exists concretely," Hegel writes, "is […] not abstractly for itself but only in an other, but in this other it is the relation to itself and the relationship is the unity of the relation to itself and the relation to an other."[28] Here, of course, we are only interested in human beings and in the ways in which they, or we, realize our essence with regard to constitutive others, as expressed by the formulas of "unity of unity and difference' or "being with oneself in otherness." As to the "objectivity" or relative mind-independence of concrete freedom's status as *the* essence of the human life-form, for Hegel this clearly at least partly stems from his ontology of finite being and thus from something not up to human legislation. Whatever human *autonomy* in the sense of self-legislation encompasses, it does not have the power to change or legislate over these fundamental ontological facts about finite being, including human existence.

25 To claim as much, as figures as otherwise diverse as Adorno, Habermas or Deleuze have, is to effectively conflate the overcoming of the other's otherness with the overcoming of the other *tout court*. Only the former can be said to accurately characterise Hegel's position.

26 *SL*, 46: "[…] *there* is nothing, nothing in heaven, or in nature or in mind or anywhere else which does not equally contain both immediacy and mediation […]".

27 Ibid., 89.

28 *EL*, §135 A.

The practical relevance of the concept of concrete freedom that is beginning to come into view now will undoubtedly hinge on spelling out in more detail what it means to be concretely free with regard to necessarily determining others, and this requires a general conception of what those others are. To speak at the level of the human individual we can discern four kinds: (i) her "internal" physiological and psychological processes, features and capacities; (ii) external nature; (iii) other humans; and (iv) social institutions and social reality broadly speaking. As different as these "others" and the relations with them constitutive of the human individual are, they all represent essential determinants of human life in whose absence it is not conceivable. We are *physiologically and psychologically determinate beings constitutively connected to other similarly constituted subjects and our natural and social environments*. No account of human freedom that tries to abstract from what we are, that is, our constitutive determinatedness, can be adequate to its subject matter. Further, whatever the historical and local specifications of concrete freedom, they clearly need to be attentive to all four above mentioned dimensions. To grasp the fundamental difference of this framework of thinking of freedom to the Kantian moral philosophical framework, consider the fact that the latter starts from a wholesale abstraction from what we are as empirical beings. Whatever the Kantian elements present in Hegel's thought, this difference is crucial for understanding Hegel's particular combination of perfectionism and freedom.

Let us now try to spell out in brief what concrete freedom might mean in its different dimensions – the "'subjective", "natural", "intersubjective", and "social" – which can be rationally reconstructed from Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit. In the first place (i), the "subjective" dimension concerns the relationship to our "psycho-physiology" (body, first-order motivations, psychological capacities). Beginning in his "Anthropology" (*PM*, §§391-412), Hegel accounts for the emergence and gradual cultivation of an initially inchoate, pre-intentional "self", or "soul" [*Seele*],[29] which is endowed with a variety of internal-natural determinacies (sensations, feelings, and potentials of the human body). The course of its cultivation portends its liberation in the concrete sense of freedom whereby it gains an organized "self-feeling" [*Selbstgefühl*], which is present in and gives structure to all of its various determinations. The "cultivated" [*gebildete*] human subject is constituted through an organization of the sentient unity of the body, and at the same time gradually gains reflective distance to it. To put this in other words, the cultivated subject, or the "I" as Hegel calls

29 The "soul" is Hegel's Anthropology is to be understood in broadly Aristotelian, "hylomorphic" sense as the organizing principle of the body. See *PM*, §389: "The soul is not only immaterial for itself. It is the universal immateriality of nature, its simple ideal life."

it, is more or less at home in and thus reconciled with its psycho-physiology; it is necessarily determined by it, and yet not as if by something alien or unruly, but rather as by something that is its own.[30] With his usual acuteness, however, Hegel notes that the body is never *completely* shed of its "difference": part of our bodiliness is inescapably natural, beyond our powers to change or legislate over.[31]

Hegel's account of the internal constitution of the human subject continues in the "Psychology" section of the Philosophy of Spirit (*PM*, §§440-82), where he discusses the *intentional* processes and activities of the "I" and their organization into a rational whole or "system."[32] Again, what is at stake is a development through which the subject comes into its own *qua* a subject of knowledge and action, at once identical with its various cognitive and volitive capacities (i.e., memory and drives) and capable of reflecting and further developing those aspects. Though we cannot go into details here,[33] to avoid a false impression of dualism, it is important to see that for Hegel the "psychological" and the "anthropological" determinations are not abstractly separate but internally connected. To pick just one example, even abstract philosophical thought requires bodily habituation, and as Hegel somewhat humorously puts it, it can cause headache for those not accustomed to it.[34]

Secondly (ii), to grasp what concrete freedom in relation to external nature means, it is useful to distinguish between the *pre-intentional* and *intentional* relations of human beings to this particular dimension of their constitutive determinatedness or "otherness". Though these form a concrete whole, we can roughly locate Hegel's discussion of the *pre-intentional* side in the "Anthropology" section (*PM*, §§388-98). To underline the thoroughly empirical

30 Ibid., §412 Z.: "the self has [...] actualised itself in the soul's reality, in its bodiliness, and conversely, has posited being within itself; so that now that self or the I intuits its own self in its other and is this self-intuiting." The familiar formulation of 20th century phenomenology comes close to this: I both am and have my body.

31 Ibid., §412 Z.: "The soul's pervasion of its bodiliness [...] is not *absolute*, does not completely sublate the difference of soul and body. On the contrary, the nature of the logical Idea, developing everything from itself, requires that this difference still be given its due. Something of bodiliness remains, therefore, purely organic and consequently withdrawn from the power of the soul, so that the soul's pervasion of its body is only one side of the body."

32 Ibid., §408 Z.: "The sober and healthy subject has an alert consciousness of the ordered totality of its individual world, into the system of which it subsumes each particular content of sensation, idea, desires, inclination etc., as it arises, and inserts in its intelligible place in the system."

33 Ikäheimo (2016), 424-449.

34 *PM*, §410 Z.

nature of human subjectivity, Hegel discusses the various *affects* of external nature on it. External natural determinacies such as our distance from the sun, or the cyclical changes of seasons are inescapable determinations without which human life as we know it would not be possible.[35] Though *Geist* liberates itself from nature, both at the collective and individual level, this should not be read as meaning liberation according to the abstract concept of freedom. Thought in terms of the concrete concept of freedom, as Hegel prompts us to do in his "Introduction" to the Philosophy of Spirit, we should neither be completely immersed in natural determinacies, as this would simply amount to animal unfreedom,[36] nor try to deny them or try to abstract ourselves from them – a project doomed to failure or catastrophe, as we know all too painfully today.

Hegel discusses the reconciliation with external nature at the *intentional* level in the "Phenomenology" section of the Philosophy of Spirit (§§413-439).[37] His discussion of the *theoretical* aspect of that relation (§§418-423) tracks an ideal development from an immediate "sensuous" relation to nature to a refined, philosophical form of intellectual comprehension that grasps nature *both* as intelligently organised and thus not alien to the subject *and* yet fully independent from it.[38] His discussion of the *practical* aspect (§§424-437) begins with animal "desire" [*Begierde*], which refers to a purely destructive way of relating to nature by devouring it.[39] It proceeds to "labour", a form-giving relation or activity, which finds nature amenable to thoughtful utilization, while at the same time acknowledging its genuine separateness from the subject and its resistance to attempts of simply reducing it to subjective ends.[40] A concretely free relation with nature at an intentional level is therefore one in which it is both *epistemically familiar* and *practically habitable* to us, while retaining its "difference" from us. Though environmentalist concerns were not thematic to Hegel as they are for us today, it is not difficult to discern the outlines of an environmental ethics here, one which emphasizes our constitutive dependence on nature: concrete freedom with regard to natural

35 Ibid., §§392-94.

36 Ibid., §392: "In the case of man, the more cultivated he is and the more his whole condition rests on a free, spiritual foundation, the less the significance that such connections have."

37 The "Phenomenology" section deals with intentionality in general, but here we narrow our focus to this aspect of it.

38 See ibid., §§422-3, and the related discussion in "Psychology" in §§465-8.

39 Ibid., §427.

40 Ibid., §428: "In so far as self-consciousness relates as fashioning activity to the object, the object get only the form of the subjective, a form acquiring a *subsistence* in it, while in its matter the object is preserved."

determinacies is a matter of critically appropriating and cultivating them, to the point where we are individually and collectively more or less reconciled with external nature as something inescapable and separate from us, yet as not frighteningly hostile – a place in which we can build a home. As that home consists to a large extent of social institutions, it is potentially dangerous to conceptualize them and the norms they consist of as a *sui generis* reality constituted by collective self-legislation "spinning frictionlessly in [a] void", to invoke the allegory made famous by John McDowell.[41]

Thirdly (iii), the *intersubjective* dimension of concrete freedom, the idealized development and basic structure of which Hegel discusses in the "Self-consciousness" section of Philosophy of Spirit (*PM*, §§427-37), is a matter of *horizontal* relations of recognition between two or more human subjects.[42] The progressive movement considered therein begins with an encounter between two irreconciliable "desiring" intentionalities,[43] it transitions to the famous lord-bondsman-relation (also thematizing the theme of work just discussed) with an imperfect reconciliation by means of one yielding to the other,[44] and it ends in a relationship of subjects who mutually recognize each other as free and are thereby concretely free with regard to each other ("universal self-consciousness" in Hegel's shorthand).[45] Concrete freedom consists here, on the one hand, of the *independence* of the subjects with regard to each other, and, on the other hand, of the *unity* of their intentionalities in that they affirm each other by means of attitudes of recognition and find themselves thereby affirmed by each other. As Hegel puts it, subjects have "affirmative awareness" of themselves in and through one another, or they have "absolute independence" from one another, and yet they do not "distinguish [themselves] from the other."[46] Whereas post-Kantian readers of Hegel tend to spell this out in *deontological* terms of mutual attribution of authority on shared norms or of normative statuses[47], Hegel's own paradigmatic example of

41 McDowell (1994).

42 For details on the different senses of 'recognition' involved here, see Ikäheimo (2013), 11-38.

43 *PM*, §430.

44 Ibid., §433-45.

45 Ibid., §436-37.

46 Ibid., § 436: "*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 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 recognises the other and is aware that it is free."

47 Pippin (2008), 25.

recognition – "love" – is in the *axiological* register.[48] Abstracting from details, both mutual respect and mutual love are concretizations of unity of unity and difference in intersubjective relations, or of mutual consciousness of oneself in an independent other.

Finally (iv), concrete freedom also encompasses the "vertical" relation of subjects to the social institutions and the social whole, which Hegel treats under the banner of *objective spirit* both in the Philosophy of Spirit (*PM*, §§488-502; 513-52), and in greater detail in his *Philosophy of Right*. This dimension can be analysed either *objectively*, in terms of "ethical" [*Sittliche*] norms and institutions (family, civil society, modern nation-state),[49] or *subjectively*, from the perspective of individual subjects and their roles with regard to such norms and institutions.[50] In Hegel's view, subjects are first *integrated* into a "rational" social whole via the formative process of *Bildung*,[51] a whole which they then in turn help to *reproduce* through various modes of recognitive identification and practical participation.[52] In the ideal social-institutional setting, properly socialized individuals "find themselves" in established norms and institutions (that possess relative ontological independence from any particular individual's will),[53] in these reflect their personal-identity-defining attachments,[54] are amenable to their ends, and generally such that individuals can acknowledge them as just and good.[55] Both Kantian, explicitly reflexive endorsement,[56] and Aristotelian, habitual or "second natural" acceptance of the norms and institutions and the roles that they prescribe,[57] are modifications of these. Either sense would require further treatment beyond what it is possible here, but together they make up a complete picture of what it is to be both *reflectively* and *affectively* "at home" in a human world structured by social institutions.[58]

48 *PM*, §436 and 436 Z.; *PR*, §7 Z.
49 *PR*, §142.
50 *PM*, §484.
51 *PR*, §151 Z.
52 *PM*, §514 Z.
53 *PR*, §146.
54 Ibid., §147.
55 Ibid., §260.
56 Pippin (2008), 261.
57 See, for example Lumsden (2013), 220-243.
58 A worrying detail for egalitarians is that in Hegel's ideal society different estates embody the different modes of being at home in the institutional whole of the society or state: the "substantial estate" the unreflective or affective mode, and the "universal estate" the educated and reflective mode. But this is a detail in Hegel's application and specification of the principle of concrete freedom for his time and place open to challenge, not something determined by that principle.

A further way in which one can be said to be concretely free with regard to social norms and institutions, and thus roles they prescribe, is that one has some "legislative" authority over them. The general ontological fact that human societies are the sole authorities of their norms is clearly not enough for genuine collective autonomy. In addition, there has to be awareness of this fact in the society, and at the individual level actual opportunities to exercise legislative authority over the norms and institutions. This aspect of concrete freedom is one that Hegel did not show much interest in in the *Philosophy of Right*, but clearly it is much too important to ignore. And yet is it equally important to acknowledge that it – autonomy that is – is far from all there is to concrete freedom.

Interpreted holistically, then, Hegelian concrete freedom encompasses all of the constitutive and thus necessarily determining dimensions of otherness in individual and collective human existence. Above we have merely sketched some of the general features of what this means on each dimension, and treated them by and large in abstraction from each other. It is clear that they are in many ways interconnected: think of especially the ways in which the cultivated habits and inner dispositions of feeling, as well as the perceptions and thoughts of a person, the quality of her inter-human attitudes and relations, and the social and institutional roles prescribed by and available in her society must form a harmonious enough whole. Lack of concrete freedom in one of these dimensions is likely to reverberate as trouble in the others as well. And ultimately, the life-form as a whole will fail if its relation to the external nature of which it lives does not sufficiently exhibit concrete freedom, or unity of unity and difference in Hegel's sense. What all of this means more concretely is a matter for thoughtful application in the given natural, cultural and historical circumstances, and thus a task for social and political philosophy with an emancipatory interest.

3

Towards the end of the last section we suggested that autonomy – the core normative principle in autonomy-perfectionism as understood in this volume – is one aspect of what it means to be concretely free with regard to norms and institutions governing social life. And since social norms and institutions and the roles they prescribe are internalized and structure also our embodied psychological lives – our "subjectivities" – as well as our relations to others and the world in general, it is clearly a very important aspect of concrete freedom more generally. But there is also another, equally valid way to look at

the relation of concrete freedom and autonomy: this is to say that concrete freedom is a meta-principle, or principle of a higher order to which autonomy as self-legislation can and on the Hegelian view should be subjected. Unlike more historicist interpretations of Hegel would have it, for him it is not merely a subjective principle or ideal adopted in particular historical and cultural conditions (roughly, those of the "Germanic world"), but an objective principle grounded on facts about the ontological structure of finite beings in general, and of conscious living beings in particular. Finite beings are by definition determined, not only logically, but in many "real" ways discussed in Hegel's *Realphilosophie*, by things other than themselves. For animal life the relations to determining otherness are partly relayed through the medium of sensations; and for conscious beings in Hegel's sense, humans that is, they are in addition mediated by theoretical and practical intentionality. These general ontological facts form the inescapable setting within which human autonomy in the sense of legislation of norms or principles inevitably operates.

It is worth invoking here the double meaning of "autonomy" according to the Greek etymology, referring on the one hand to "one's own laws" in general, and "one's own laws" in the specific sense of self-legislated laws. On Hegel's account, concrete freedom is not a law or principle in the *subjective*, self-legislated, or in general legislated sense, but rather the *objective*, in important senses mind-independent evaluative principle of *Geist* or the human life-form.[59] And yet, its realization in human affairs, and thus Geist's realizing of its essence, depends on humans appropriating it as their evaluative essence or ideal subjectively. In the subjective sense of autonomy, humans are free to legislate the laws they live by, and it is also up to them whether or not they appropriate the higher order *nomos* of concrete freedom as the meta-principle guiding their legislation. However, if they do not, Hegel's message is that they are violating inescapable ontological strictures and thus doomed to fail, one way or another.

To illustrate the applicability and potential usefulness of the meta-principle of concrete freedom in critical social philosophy, let us finish by a brief sketch of a catalogue of such failures, or of the "opposites" of concrete freedom on the four dimensions we discussed in the previous section: inner and outer nature, other humans, and social institutions. Of particular interest here is abstract freedom as an alternative ideal, one which Hegel never tires of criticizing, and its tendency to morph in practice into relations of domination. Hegel's characterization of the structure of concrete freedom – unity of unity and

59 For elaboration of the "passive" sense of autonomy in relation to Kant's and Hegel's thoughts on living beings see Khurana (2013).

difference – is of heuristic use in this regard. Thought in terms of it, concrete freedom contrasts with two general kinds of "opposites":

(1) difference without the right kind of unity, which is therefore also a wrong kind of difference, and
(2) unity without the right kind of difference, which is therefore also a wrong kind of unity.

Formulated somewhat more concretely, the first opposite represents the structure of abstract freedom, whereas the second represents attempts to deny the independence or difference of the other – or in other words *domination.* Expressed in terms of the subject-other-relation, the latter can mean either (2a) domination of the other by the subject, and (2b) domination of the subject by the other.

Relation to Internal Nature

As to the relation with internal nature, Hegel's critique of ascetism or "monkishness" is here a case in point.[60] The attempt to abstract oneself from one's bodily needs, or to be (1) abstractly free from them – perhaps, as they are deemed sinful – is bound to fail one way or another, since, contrary to "Cartesian" theoretical abstractions of an ego abstractly distinct from the body, human existence is necessarily bodily existence. That abstract freedom in relation to one's body is a failed ideal shows also in its practical instability: if it does not take the form of suicide,[61] in practice it turns into one or the other form of domination. The attempt to be free from bodily urges demands (2a) a repression of them, a harsh regime that does not effect a positive cultivation of them; hence they remain "irrational" in content, pestering us with their unruliness. In the extreme, this can turn to the opposite of (2b) a pathological overtaking of the subject by its inner nature in which the subject ends up stripped of its capacity for rational self-determination.[62] In short: try to be (1) abstractly free from your bodiliness, and you will either eventually die, or end up in a vicious struggle in which you are trying to dominate your body (2a) while it is at the same time 'trying' to take over or dominate you (2b).

60 *PM*, §410 and 410 Z.
61 Ibid., §4.
62 See Hegel's discussion of the various forms of "derangement" in Hegel *PM*, 408 Z. 20th century and contemporary psychoanalysis has of course much to add on the importance of appropriating and being reconciled with one's mental and emotional life – not all of which can be perfectly mastered and thus part of which always retains some degree of otherness. Try to simply repress it, and it will return with a revenge.

Relation to External Nature

What holds true of the nature *within us* also partly holds true of the nature *around us*. The folly of (1) abstract freedom, difference without unity with regard to external nature, or the image of human beings as wholly free from external nature – frictionlessly hovering above it, if you like – can similarly only take one of two forms in practice: either death (the collective species-sense of death included), or a struggle in which both sides try to dominate the other (2). There is no overcoming of humanity's dependence on the natural conditions of our planet, and thus no use in trying to conceive of freedom with regard to them in terms of abstract freedom. We can try to force our will (2a) upon the planet and its biological, chemical and other elements and processes without a serious acknowledgement of their "otherness" or irreducibility to human ends or legislation. Yet, invariably, this results in consequences that are difficult or impossible to control, and in the worst case in nature metaphorically turning against us with a vengeance (2b).[63]

Relation to Others

Hegel's famous lord-bondsman scenario is, from one perspective, a reflection on how an attempt to be (1) abstractly free from other subjects effectively institutes (2) domination within horizontal relations.[64] Not exercising the Hegelian details here, it is enough to point out the obvious: humans cannot live without other humans, and thus fantasies of omnipotent abstract freedom from determination by others are unstable, involving a tendency of turning in practice into either domination *over them* (2a), or *by them* (2b), due to lack of genuine reconciliation in the relationship. Structurally, domination implies an asymmetrical and thereby a wrong kind of "unity" whereby the dominating party rules over and exploits the dominated party denying, the latter's independence and difference.[65]The history of liberal political philosophy from Hobbes to Fichte and beyond contains many variations of

63 What about a "return to nature" in the sense of an undifferentiated unity with it? Just as abstract difference, abstract unity is a folly with regard to external nature: it actually means nature at large taking over humans, just as it takes or rules over other animal species. Alternatively, "return to nature" can be a somewhat misleading expression for another and perhaps better kind of unity of unity and difference with nature – say, small farming instead of industrial farming. (Whether or not this is an example of an actually workable application of the principle is an empirical question, not something that can simply be deduced from the principle.)

64 *PM*, §§433-35.

65 Again, psychoanalysis has much to say about the importance of a balance between unity and difference with others for a non-pathological development of human subjectivity, and of the various failures or opposites of this. See Benjamin (1988).

the interplay of abstract freedom and domination. Fichte provides one of the most illustrative examples for our purposes: he thinks of freedom according to the abstract concept, in terms of individuals inhabiting "spheres of freedom" that are mutually exclusive and thus separate from one another, and ends up with a conception of the state that is largely coercive – the kind of state required to ensure that individuals abstractly free within their respective spheres (although in many other ways interdependent) do not encroach upon each other's spheres and thus try to dominate each other.[66] Fichte's solution to lack of adequate harmonizing factors on the horizontal dimension, and thus to the danger of intersubjective domination, is establishing vertical domination by a higher power, that of the state.

Relation to Society

The coercive or dominating images of the state, or of the social whole, the kinds of which one finds in Fichte and even certain (mis-)readings of Hegel, are bound to create fantasies of escaping from or denying it. The underlying theoretical mistake here is the idea that norms, laws or social institutions are abstractly separate from us, and hence we from them, and the consequent lack of understanding of genuine freedom with regard to them – not abstract (1), but concrete. A core idea in Hegel's thinking of *Sittlichkeit*, to speak in the deontological register of Hegel's post-Kantian interpreters, is that human life is necessarily governed by shared norms, and the system of institutionalized norms, or the various spheres of the state broadly conceived, should be largely in harmony with norms (habits and customs) *de facto* governing the life of the collective or nation. This image is of course still compatible with a simple immersion in established habits and customs and thus with an unreflective, uncritical relation to the institutional whole from which individual autonomy or in Hegel's terms "subjective freedom"[67] is absent (2b). A picture of *Sittlichkeit* that realizes concrete freedom must indeed include autonomy or self-legislation: social norms and their institutionalizations, and thus the interlocking and identity-defining social and institutional roles that they imply, being authorized by those whose life they govern. There is of course always a possibility that particular groups within society may aspire to dominate the social whole (2a) by taking over the authority on the shared norms, and the more so the less horizontal relations are imbued with a culture of mutual recognition and thus realize concrete freedom in that dimension. Here, as elsewhere, the various dimensions of Hegelian concrete freedom and

66 Fichte (2000).

67 *PR*, §§124, 185, 260, 262.

attendant defects are deeply interconnected. However, and to conclude, even collective autonomy with a fair and equal distribution of normative authority will fail to live up to the evaluative essence or immanent ideal of the human life-form according to Hegel if it is, implicitly or explicitly, guided by images of abstract freedom from, or domination over, all of the constitutive aspects of our being, or the dimensions of otherness, that we cannot be free from, nor legislate over. If anything deserves the name of "social pathology",[68] or more broadly a pathological development of the human life-form, then it is the ideal of collective autonomy put in practice without proper guidance by the meta-principle of concrete freedom.

Bibliography

Benjamin, Jessica, *The Bonds of Love*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.

Fichte, J.G., *Foundations of Natural Right: According to the Principles Wissenschaftslehre*, transl. by Michael Baur. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Halbig, Christoph, "Varieties of Nature in Hegel and McDowell", in: *European Journal of Philosophy* 14 (2), 2006, pp. 234-35.

Hardimon, Michael O., *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Hegel, G.W.F., *Philosophy of Mind*, transl. by W.W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. (*PM*)

– *Science of Logic*, ed. and transl. by George di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. (*SL*)

– *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* (1827-8), transl. by Robert R. Williams, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. (*LPS*)

– *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. (*PR*)

– *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. by A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

– *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline: Part I: Science of Logic*, transl. by Klaus Brinkman and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Cambridge, 2010. (*EL*)

Honneth, Axel, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Ethical Life*, transl. by Joseph Ganahl, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014.

– "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy", in: *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Cambridge, Polity, 2007, pp. 3-48.

68 See Honneth (2007).

Ikäheimo, Heikki, "Holism and Normative Essentialism in Hegel's Social Ontology", in: *Recognition and Social Ontology*, ed. by Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen, Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 155-159.

– "Hegel's Psychology", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. by Dean Moyar, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 424-449.

– "Hegel's Concept of Recognition – What is it?", in: *Recognition – German Idealism as an Ongoing Challenge*, ed. Christian Krijnen, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 11-38.

Khurana, Thomas, "Life and Autonomy: Forms of Self-Determination in Kant and Hegel", in: *The Freedom of Life: Hegelian Perspectives*, ed. by Thomas Khurana, Berlin, August Verlag Verlag, 2013, pp. 155-193.

Kreines, James, *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and Its Philosophical Appeal*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Lumsden, Simon, 'Habit, *Sittlichkeit* and Second Nature', in: *Critical Horizons*, 13 (2), 2013, pp. 220-243.

McDowell, John, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Moggach, Douglas. "Post-Kantian Perfectionism", in: *Politics, Religion, and Art: Hegelian Debates*, ed. by Douglas Moggach, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011, pp. 179-200.

Pippin, Robert, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Stekeler-Weithofer, Pirmin, "Intuition, Understanding, and the Human form of Life", in: *Recognition and Social Ontology*, ed. by Heikki Ikaheimo and Arto Laitinen, 11, Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 85-113.

Taylor, Charles, *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Thompson, Michael, "Forms of Nature: 'first', 'second' and 'living', 'rational' and 'phronetic", in: *Freiheit: Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 2011* (Veröffentlichungen der Internationalen Hegel-Vereinigung), ed. by Gunnar Hindrichs and Axel Honneth, Frankfurt am Main, 2013, pp. 701-735.