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"Spirit" – or the Self-Creating Life-Form of Persons and Its Constitutive Limits

Abstract: In this chapter I will elaborate on three broadly Hegelian ideas. Firstly, that the subjective and objective aspects of "spirit" (*Geist*), that is to say the psychological and social structures distinctive of persons and their life, are co-constitutive elements of a whole. This whole is the human life-form, or "the life-form of persons". Secondly, that recognition or *Anerkennung* as self-transcendence and inclusion of otherness is ontologically constitutive of both, and key to their internal interrelations. Thirdly, that though freedom as collective autonomy is distinctive of this life-form, thought on the model of abstraction from necessarily determining otherness it is theoretically mistaken, and, put in practice, pathological in a literal sense of a pathology of life with this form.

Keywords: Hegel; spirit; life-form; personhood; humanity

1 Introduction

In the year 2020 Australia experienced the most devastating bush-fire season in recorded history, and right after that the world economy stalled due to a global virus outbreak the severity of which has no modern precedent. Crises tend to speed up paradigm shifts, and the one begun in 2020 certainly will. In this paper I will contribute to a shift that has been gathering momentum for some time now, the need for which the current crisis has made all too obvious. This is a shift in Kant- and Hegel-influenced philosophy from thinking of *Geist* or "spirit" as an abstract realm or dimension insulated from nature – frictionlessly spinning without touching it, or at least with a tendency to do this as essential to it – to thinking of spirit as a life-form, situated in nature at large, just as all life is.

More exactly, the idea that I will be working on, an idea which I adopt from Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, is that Hegel's term *Geist* or "spirit" is best understood as a "title-word" for the human life-form, or as I will say for reasons that I hope to make clear, the life-form of persons.[1] This translation cuts with ease through both mystifying interpretations of *Geist* in Hegel according to which the term

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1 See, for example, Stekeler-Weithofer (2011). For considerations by a historian for speaking of humanity as a life-form, see Chakrabarty (2009).

stands for some "spooky" metaphysico-theological entity or transcendent principle with causal powers, as well as deflating interpretations according to which it stands for "normativity", "the realm of normativity", "the space of norms", "the space of reasons", and so on. Neither one of these interpretations makes much sense when one takes a serious look at what Hegel actually discusses in his *Philosophy of Spirit*, the third part of his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*. Under the title "Subjective Spirit" Hegel discusses the human person in her bodily, intentional, and psychological constitution, under "Objective Spirit" the social and institutional structures of human co-existence (on what Hegel thought of as their ideal arrangement for his time and place), and under "Absolute Spirit" the collective forms of self-representation, philosophy itself as the ultimate form. Spooky entities or transcendent principles have no presence anywhere in the text, and "normativity" and other similar terms are severely limited characterisations of what *spirit* stands for in comparison to what the text is actually about – namely the three interrelated aspects of the life-form.

Though in what follows I will not be talking about Hegel directly, my contribution is inspired not only by Stekeler-Weithofer's proposal just mentioned, but also by three basic Hegelian insights. Firstly, that the subjective and objective aspects of spirit, or the life-form of persons, are indeed aspects or moments of an integral whole. Secondly, that recognition (*Anerkennung*) as self-transcendence and inclusion of otherness is ontologically constitutive of both, and key to their internal interrelations.[2] And thirdly, that freedom, if it is to be real, cannot mean abstraction from what necessarily determines us, but reconciliation with it.[3] Though autonomy in the sense of self-governance by collectively administered norms – as elaborated by recent neo-Hegelian philosophy – is part of what distinguishes "spirit" or the life-form in question from "merely" animal life, thought on the model of abstraction from necessarily determining otherness it is theoretically mistaken and put in practice pathological of the life-form in a literal sense of "pathology". To correct this mistake, self-governance by norms needs to be understood according to a Hegelian holistic, rather than a Kantian dualistic model. Or to use Hegel's wording, it needs to be understood concretely

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2 Recognition is a central concept in what I called the deflating interpretations, and in this they are certainly on the right path, even if they tend to give the concept and the role of the phenomenon in human reality an unduly narrow interpretation.

3 This is what Hegel meant by "concrete freedom", or Hans Jonas by "needful freedom" in his *The Phenomenon of Life* (Jonas 1966, p. 80) – a book that manages to articulate an amazing number of Hegel's ideas about organic life while barely mentioning the name, so much so that it is able to be a central reference in Richard Dien Winfield's book on Hegel's Anthropology and Phenomenology *The Living Mind – From Psyche to Consciousness* (Winfield 2011).

rather than abstractly.[4] What I want to do in this chapter is to present some outlines of a general ontology of our life-form that elaborates on these Hegelian ideas, but is independent of Hegel's own particular ways of utilising them, and draws on ideas from elsewhere as well.[5]

2 Three Distinctive Facts about the Life-Form of Persons

To get started, let me put to you three fairly humdrum thoughts about features that I take to be essential to the human life-form, and together distinctive of it. Firstly, in distinction to simpler animals whose lives are organised by natural instincts, the life of human persons is organised to a large extent in terms of collectively administered norms. Secondly, in distinction to simpler animals, humans are not merely driven by the urge to satisfy immediately given felt needs, but by concerns for future satisfaction, happiness, and maximally the success or goodness of their lives as a whole. Thirdly, humans are, directly or indirectly, dependent on cooperation or collective action for everything that distinguishes them from simpler animals.

What exactly each of these features require or consist of should not be stipulated too strictly in advance, and they need to be seen as allowing for degrees of development, as is required by the fact of the gradual evolution of the life-form.

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4 My ideas on concrete freedom are influenced by the work of Louglin Gleeson in his PhD-thesis *Reconstructions of Hegel's Concept of Freedom: Towards a Holistic and Universalist Reading of Concrete Freedom* at the UNSW Sydney (Gleeson 2019).

5 The reader may sense a distinctly Feuerbachian flavour in my use of Hegel's ideas. As I see it, Feuerbach was no match to Hegel as a philosopher, and his intended patricide of Hegel was fundamentally misguided, even if not thereby any less influential: Feuerbach, a student at Hegel's lectures on anthropology in Berlin, presented – to put it very briefly – Hegel's anthropological ideas as his own. He ramped up the image of his originality by puffing down the mystifying strawman-interpretation of Hegel that he himself set up, one which Marx and innumerable others then bought into. Feuerbach's anthropologising move in philosophy was indeed a healthy one; only it wasn't his, but already Hegel's, a move that Habermas later called Hegel's "de-transcendentalisation" of the Kantian subject. (Habermas' mistake was only to exaggerate the extent to which this move is obfuscated in Hegel's later work after the Jena period, see Habermas 1999.) Unlike that of Kant, Hegel's subject of knowledge and action is not divided into two ultimately irreconcilable "worlds", or "aspects", whichever reading one wants to follow (and ultimately it does not matter as the empirical and noumenal remain equally irreconcilable on both readings): it is without reservations a subject in the world, both embodied and social, a human person or human persons that is.

Also, they are perfectly compatible with the possibility that had evolution taken another path, the animal species whose distinctive features they today are might look somewhat different, as well as with the possibility that some other currently living species may also exhibit them to some degree. In other words, they are at the same time distinctive of Homo sapiens and their ancestors, and conceptually unbound from this or any other species of animals. They are, I suggest, central to what makes us persons, but then they would make members of any species persons. Hence, it is more accurate to say that they are central distinctive features of "the life-form of persons". Each of the three facts – norm-governance, immediacy-transcending concern, and cooperation – involve an internal interconnection of psychological and social structures distinctive of the life-form, or an internal interconnection between what I call the psychological and the intersubjective layer of personhood and what I call the three respective dimensions of the life-form, and of personhood: the deontological, the axiological, and the cooperative.[6]

3 The Deontological Dimension of the Life-Form

As for norm-governance, contemporary neo-Hegelianism has taught us something valuable, namely grasping it in terms of mutual recognition in the sense of authority-attribution. To be governed by norms, one must recognise some others in the sense of taking them as having authority on the norms in question. In terms of psychology or psychological structure, this means a certain kind of self-transcendence, or decentring of the subject's intentionality or intentional relation to everything, both on the epistemic or theoretical and on the practical dimension of intentionality. In short, this "deontological decentring" means subjecting one's life, both objectively and subjectively, to the authority of others and thus under norms that they lend their authority to. On the other hand, to be recognised in this sense is to be attributed, by the recogniser(s), a status or standing of an authority on the norm or norms in question. Though as we proceed things will turn out to be somewhat more complicated, as a first approximation we can think of the self-subjection to others by recognising others as authorities as the person-making psychological feature, and the status of an

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6 For the layers and dimensions of what I call "full-fledged personhood", see Tab. 1 at the end the paper. Here I will not be talking about personhood in the sense of a legal status, nor, to borrow Arto Laitinen, in the sense of a "high and equal moral status" (see chapters 3 and 4 in Ikäheimo/Laitinen/Quante/Testa, forthcoming), but of ontologically foundational intersubjective statuses.

authority that this form of recognition by others attributes one as the person-making intersubjective status on the deontological dimension.

We can usefully think of the deontological dimension in terms of Dave Elder-Vass's idea of "norm-circles". In short (and here I am not following the details of Elder-Vass's elaborations but rather utilising the general idea)[7] each norm bears in the subject's mind the authority of those others – real or imaginary, present or absent, close or distant, alive or dead – that she recognises as having authority over it and thus over the aspects of one's life governed by the norm. Depending on the norm, and the kind of norm in question, who exactly the authoritative others are for a person may be far from definite and may vary across time. In order to be shared and thus actually govern shared life, the subjective norm-circles of individuals only need to be sufficiently co-extensive for there to exist a definite enough "objective" norm-circle for the given norm.

Now, a norm-circle comes with two basic kinds of standings or statuses for the participating individuals: that of someone subjected to a norm, and that of someone having authority on the norm. Collective autonomy in the sense of collective self-governance by norms only adds up to individual autonomy when the individual occupies both roles – those of a subject and of an authority – or in other words when the individual is a "co-authority" of the norms governing her life. Though being subjected to social norms can already be thought of as a minimally person-making intersubjective status (depending on what exactly one thinks it involves) on the deontological dimension, I take it that having authority on the norms is what is required for a full-fledged person-making status on this dimension. This interconnection of the psychological and the intersubjective aspect of norm-governance, and of the two possible standings in norm-circles, is foundational for what I call the deontological dimension of the life-form of persons: the psychological structure or capacities involved in norm-governance is part of what makes something a person psychologically, and the standings in norm-circles are part of what makes something a person in status. They are what I call the psychological and the intersubjective layers of the deontological dimension of full-fledged personhood.

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7 See Elder-Vass (2010).

4 The Axiological and Cooperative Dimensions of the Life-Form

It is important to note that this is not the whole story, however. A philosophical framework limited or too narrowly focused on this deontological dimension – a common feature of philosophical imaginaries that are Kantian rather than Hegelian in basic orientation – easily ends up painting an abstractly "frictionless" picture of "spirit", or of the life-form of persons and thus of personhood. We can start overcoming this abstractness by elaborating on the idea that the deontological dimension is only one of the dimensions of the life-form and thus of personhood. Consider the second and third feature that distinguish human life from simpler animal life: immediacy-transcending concern and cooperation, or the axiological and the cooperative dimension respectively. Here everything hangs together. Not only is it distinctive of persons to have Frankfurtian "second-order" motivations in addition to "first-order" ones;[8] their motivations also have a temporal extension and logical complexity, spanning into the future and involving complex connections of ends and means. And since securing future is for humans impossible without cooperation, the horizon of concerns of a person will include other persons in instrumental roles – a connection between the axiological and the cooperative dimension.[9] In short: I cannot secure my future alone and thus have to acknowledge others as needed or instrumental for securing it. Furthermore, since imagining, preparing for, or planning for non-immediate future requires complex representational capacities and thus linguistically structured thought, and since language involves linguistic norms and thus collective norm-governance, the axiological and the cooperative dimension of the life-form depend on the deontological. Also, since cooperation in the relevant sense is, for the most part, not organised by animal instincts, but by shared norms, the cooperative dimension depends on the deontological in this sense as well.

This, however, does not mean that the deontological dimension is any more fundamental than the axiological or the cooperative, as can be seen by simply considering the fact that without orientation towards and concern for the future, and without cooperation required for securing the future, there would be nothing to govern by shared norms. The deontological dimension of the life-form is

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8 See Frankfurt (1971).
9 For a study in evolutionary anthropology that puts a heavy emphasis on the role of cooperation in the evolution of Homo sapiens, see Sterelny (2012).

not self-standing, or more fundamental, but dependent on the axiological and cooperative dimensions, just as they are dependent on it and on each other. This already goes some way in correcting an abstract or frictionless picture of freedom as collective self-governance by norms.

Let me now introduce two further kinds of "circles" to illuminate the axiological and the cooperative dimensions of the life-form, and the intertwinement of the psychological and the intersubjective layer of personhood in these dimensions. Partly analogically to the deontological dimension where the transition from animality to personhood takes place through the subject's self-transcending or decentring in the sense of recognising others as other centres of authority, on the axiological dimension this happens through recognising them in the sense of acknowledging them as other centres of concern, or in other words other perspectives to value.[10] This *axiological decentring* is necessary for a subject to be a person for a number of reasons. Firstly, sharing a world with others requires sharing relevance structures, and relevances are concern-dependent. Conceptual norms "fix" how to carve the world, but why these rather than those carvings are relevant in the first place depends on concerns, and without a grasp of the concerns of others there are no shared structures to fix. Secondly, there is the question of what in ontogenesis causes transcending immediate desire-orientation or orientation by first-order desires alone. What I take to be the most plausible explanation is in abstract outlines shared by the philosopher Hegel and modern developmental psychology and psychoanalytical theory: namely that it is the resistance or challenge of the other subject or subjects that does this. In Hegel's highly idealised philosophical story, a primitive desiring subject is confronted with another similar subject which curbs the first subject's capacity to immediately satisfy its given need and object-related desire, and forces it into an attitude of postponing satisfaction to the future and thus of concern for the future. The human infant of developmental psychology and psychoanalysis is similarly forced to transcend immediate desire-satisfaction through experiencing the unavailability of the satisfying breast (to speak in psychoanalytic shorthand) and through experiencing the dependence of satisfaction on another subject with independent needs or concerns. On this line of thought transcending the *immediacy* of concern in the sense of extending it temporally

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10 I am describing here dimensions, or aspects, or facets, or moments of one and the same development or transition.

happens through transcending the *solipsism* of concern in the sense of experiencing another subject as another centre of concerns.[11]

Furthermore, both the desiring animal of Hegel's philosophical imagery and the human infant that each of us once was not only experiences the other subject as an independent centre of concerns, but is also forced to include the concerns of others into the complex of its own concerns, or in other words to care about them, to the extent that its (or her) own satisfaction is dependent on or intertwined with what moves the others, or in other words with their concerns. Partly analogically with the norm-circles on the deontological dimension of the life-form, we can talk of *value-circles* on the axiological dimension. The idea is in brief the following: securing future well-being in the sense specific to persons requires cooperation or collective effort, and for any collective effort to get off the ground those participating in it must find it conducive for what they see as good from their individual perspectives. Furthermore, the several individual perspectives of good and bad must be sufficiently in harmony. Those whose individual perspectives of good and bad count in relevant ways in the determination of the "goods" that are collectively aimed at and "bads" that are collectively avoided are members of the given value-circle, in partial analogy with how members of a norm-circle participate in authorising norms. Whereas norm-circles consist of those whose authority a given norm or norm-system embodies (as well as, if you want, those subjected to the norm or norm-system, but without authority over it), value-circles consist of those whose concerns count in determining the goals of cooperative activities. As for personhood in this axiological dimension, at the psychological level it is distinctive of persons to have a structure of concerns that transcends mere immediate desire-orientation, or in other words to be concerned of one's future, and I have suggested that this comes with concern for some others as well. Those others are the ones comprising the subjective value-circles of an individual. At the intersubjective level, being recognised as someone whose concerns matter and thereby being someone whose concerns count in the setting of cooperative ends seems no less important for one's standing in social life than having authority over the norms of co-existence or cooperation. Whereas the psychological structure just mentioned is the psychological layer of personhood in the axiological dimension, this status or standing is the intersubjective layer of personhood in this dimension.

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11 Benjamin (1988) presents this well in (Hegel-influenced) psychoanalytic terms. Hegel's version is best presented in §§ 424–439 of his Berlin Encyclopaedia (1830) (Hegel 2007). I elaborate at more length on the latter text in Ikäheimo (2013).

Finally, as for the closely related, or only analytically distinct cooperative dimension of the life-form, it is useful to think of this dimension, in partial analogy with the concepts of norm-circle and value-circle, in terms of "cooperative circles". Whereas norm-circles consist of those recognised as authoritative over the given norm or norm-system (as well as, if you want, those subjected to it but without authority over it), and whereas value-circles consist of those recognised as someone(s) whose concerns, happiness or well-being matter and thereby count positively in determining cooperative ends, cooperative circles consist of those who are recognised in the sense of acknowledged as contributors to cooperation. Again, two layers of personhood are involved in this dimension of the life-form: the psychological one consisting of capacities for the given form of cooperation, and the intersubjective one of a standing or status of a contributor to the cooperation. As with norm-circles, in order to be shared and thus actually govern shared life, the subjective value-circles and the subjective cooperative circles need to be sufficiently co-extensive for there to exist definite enough "objective" value- and cooperative circles.

5 Less and More Fully Person-Making Membership-Statuses, and Fundamental Ethics

There are further important details about the various membership-statuses in the circles constitutive of the life-form that I haven't discussed so far. Spelling them out introduces what I think of as a "fundamental ethics", or an ethics grounded on the constitutive structures of the life-form. In general, subjects in plural constitute or "create" the life-form of persons, and thereby themselves and each other as persons, by including each other and thus being included into the three circles. But there is a crucially important distinction between two kinds or "modes" of active membership-status in each of the three circles, corresponding to the two different modes of intersubjective recognition that attribute the statuses.[12]

As for the deontological dimension, the status of an authoritative member in a norm-circle comes in a *conditional* and an *unconditional* mode, corresponding to the exact mode of recognition in the sense of attribution of authority by the relevant other or others. This form of recognition can be conditional in the sense of conditioned by prudential considerations on the part of the recogniser(s), whether this means fear or calculation of utility. Hegel's master

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12 See Fig. 1 at the end.

only commands authority in the slave's eyes in so far as the latter has reason to fear the former, and a slave has any authority in the master's eyes only in so far as granting him authority serves the master's purposes (think of granting an intelligent slave authority over how certain tasks are to be executed). Recognition as authority-attribution is in this relationship thus on both sides conditional. But authority-attribution can also be unconditional, not conditioned on prudential considerations on the recogniser's part. Such unconditional attribution of authority is what I understand by recognition as *respect*, and this is the properly moral or ethical mode of recognition (or to be more exact of what I call "purely intersubjective recognition", see Fig. 1[13]) on the deontological dimension.

Analogically, on the axiological dimension, membership in value-circles determining cooperative ends comes in conditional and unconditional variants corresponding to conditional and unconditional modes of recognition as caring about the other and thus about her concerns. It is possible for members of a value-circle[14] to care about their own well-being or life unconditionally, but care about the well-being or concerns of other members only conditionally, only insofar as the latter are important for their own concerns or well-being (or those of third persons they care about). This is the case, for example, when members only care about each other's concerns to the extent that these are important for the contribution of the respective others in cooperative circles. When this is the case, any individual's concern affects the content or direction of collective aims only insofar as she is considered as useful by the others. This may be the case for example in a business-partnership that has a limited, relatively well-defined end, but it is less likely to be the case in families where the individuals are more likely to have recognition for each other also in the sense of intrinsic concern, or in other words love. Since larger social wholes consist of people involved in various kinds of relationships or circles with each other – both the business kinds of relationships and the family kinds of relationships – they are mixtures in this sense, involving both instrumental concern and intrinsic concern between the members.

Thinking of, say, a nation-state from the point of view of value-circles, this distinction bites both in thinking of the particular axiological status of particular groups such as refugees, or immigrants with temporary working visas, and in thinking of solidarity among members of the society more broadly. As for the

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13 This is the ontologically foundational form of recognition, and it contrasts with "norm-mediated recognition", which is recognition of someone as a bearer of deontic powers implied by norms.

14 Individuating value-circles is more difficult than individuating norm-circles since individuating "values" or "concerns" is more difficult than individuating norms.

mentioned special groups, not only may they have very little authority – both conditional and unconditional – over the terms or norms of the society or social life; also their well-being or concerns may count for little in determining collective ends. They may appear too strange or "other" to arouse sympathy or intrinsic concern in the majority population, and this means that whether their well-being or concerns matter much or at all depends wholly on their contributions being seen as useful. As to the issue of solidarity more broadly, the less intrinsic concern there is between citizens, or in the "attitudinal atmosphere" of the society, the more precarious will be the position of those who are seen to have little or nothing to contribute, and whose well-being is hence of little or no conditional importance or "use" for others. Such can be the case, especially, of the elderly or people with disabilities. Analogically to recognition as unconditional attribution of authority or respect on the deontological dimension, recognition as unconditional concern for others and thus their concerns, or in other words *love*, is the properly moral or ethical mode of recognition in the axiological dimension.

Finally, as for the cooperative dimension of the life-form and thus cooperative circles, membership in them similarly comes in two different modes, corresponding to two modes of recognition in the sense of appreciation of someone as a contributor to collective ends: instrumental valuing and *gratitude*. A master recognises his slave in the sense of appreciating him as a useful contributor. This is recognition as instrumental valuing. Since the slave does not work freely, and since he probably has no unconditional or intrinsic concern for the master or his concerns, the master also has no reason for gratitude for the slave. (Needless to say, the slave, as a slave, has no reason for gratitude for the master as a master either.) Gratitude, I take it, is the properly moral or ethical mode of recognition on this dimension, and thus the properly moral or ethical mode of inclusion in cooperative circles. To use the example of immigrant workers with temporary visas again, they may be making a significant contribution to cooperative goals, such as Australian agricultural production, and recognised as making it (otherwise they would not be hired in the first place), and yet they may be unlikely to be mentioned in speeches, erected statues for, or figure in any major way in the collective imagination of the nation or of a given rural community as persons to be grateful to. They are recognised members of cooperative circles, but only as instrumentally valuable, rather than as persons deserving gratitude.

Taken as a whole, on each of the three interrelated dimensions of the life-form and in the three corresponding kinds of "circles", inclusion or membership-status thus comes in two different modes, and I suggest that one of these is more person-making than the other, and hence something without which an individual or individuals lack something important from full-fledged personhood. On the intersubjective layer, full-fledged personhood requires having the

recognised status of an "irreducible" or "original" centre of authority, of an irreducible or original centre of concern and thus perspective to value, and of a free (and not purely selfish) contributor deserving gratitude. Each one of these statuses attributed to an individual by the respective form of purely intersubjective recognition in the unconditional mode by others is, I am arguing, fundamental to the moral or ethical quality of human interaction, or their relative presence or absence decisive for the moral or ethical quality of the "circles" constitutive of the life-form of persons. This is what I see as the core of a "fundamental ethics" of the life-form, an ethics that connects with lived experiences of lack of recognition in the sense of relative depersonification, and that provides a differentiated analysis and articulation of such experiences of depersonification, reification, or dehumanisation. Importantly, it is independent of any particular cultural or institutional form or modification of the life-form, and thereby promises to provide means for immanent social critique with cross-cultural applicability.

6 Autonomy and Concrete Freedom

There will be much more to say about the above topics, but let me now move on to the final theme of this paper: freedom as collective autonomy and abstract versus "concrete" ways of thinking about it, the latter being the properly Hegelian way.

Since the path-breaking work of (narrowly or broadly defined) "neo-Hegelian" thinkers such as Robert Brandom, Terry Pinkard, Robert Pippin, and others beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, much has been written about freedom as collective autonomy in the sense of self-governance by collectively authorised and administered norms. Not only has this work introduced Hegel to the philosophical landscape in a new way as a serious thinker, it has also fed important insights into systematic philosophical work in semantics, social ontology, epistemology, and elsewhere. Though it would be hard to overestimate the value of this work, it also comes with certain limitations or problems. As for Hegel, it has encouraged a truncated view of what *Geist* or "spirit" stands for in his *Philosophy of Spirit*, something that does not hold water if one takes a serious look at what is actually going on in the text.[15] But more importantly, there is philosophical trouble, namely trouble that comes with the imagery of *Geist* as the "realm of the normative", thought of as abstractly free from nature – a phil-

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15 See Ikäheimo (2021).

osophical imagery partly motivated by a desire to counter the reductive naturalism or naturalist reductivism common in Anglo-American philosophy.[16]

In the remainder, I will not engage with any of the details of the work that I am referring to, mainly because I am not invested in challenging those details, but rather in contributing to a general shift in the paradigms under which to think of "spirit" or the "life-form of persons" as free, autonomous or self-creating. I will only put forth here two general ideas regarding this theme and elaborate briefly on their interconnections. The *first* idea is that of "concrete freedom" as a principle of a higher order under which autonomy as collective self-legislation should be subjected on the Hegelian view, and, more importantly, arguably on any reasonable view. The *second* idea is that the "normativity" of collectively legislated or administered norms is, so to say, only a surface layer of several levels of "normativity" that govern human life. Together with Stekeler-Weithofer's interpretation of what *Geist* in Hegel stands for, these ideas contribute to what I see as a paradigm shift in Hegel-inspired thought. Paradigm shifts in philosophy tend to reflect the Zeitgeist. Similarly to the way in which the shift in Hegelian thought to *Geist*-as-collective-autonomy reflected the optimism of the era at the end of the cold war, with Fukuyama's "End of History" as liberal democracy globalised in sight, the shift I am talking about to a more grounded or "concrete" conception of *Geist*-as-the-life-form-of-persons reflects our time and its defining concerns. What I mean is of course the global environmental crisis crashing through our door and putting an end to any illusions of abstract freedom of the life-form from natural processes.

To spell out the idea of concrete freedom as a higher-order principle under which autonomy as collective self-legislation should be thought, let me first say very briefly what Hegel means by "concrete freedom". Whereas its opposite, the concept of "abstract freedom" is that of *freedom from* something that determines one, "concrete freedom" means *reconciliation with* something that determines one.[17] And whereas contingent or accidental determinants such as, say, particular annoying other people, particular bad governments, or overweight are something we can *free* ourselves *from*, essential determinants are something we cannot. An individual person cannot be free from determination by others in

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16 The works of each of the three mentioned authors, as well as those of other seminal neo-Hegelian authors such as Paul Redding, are much more nuanced in content then my broad-brush picture allows to account for. But I am more interested here in certain problems in the general discourse or paradigm that their work has given rise to (one symptom of which are casual equivocations such as "spirit or the space of reasons", "spirit or normativity", and so on in the literature) than in the details of their work, many of which I agree with and have accommodated.
17 See Gleeson/Ikäheimo (2019).

general, by social institutions in general, or by internal and external nature in general since these are essential or constitutive determinants for persons. Most relevantly for our times, at a collective level no human community, nor humanity at large or the life-form thought of as a totality can be free from nature, as nature is a necessarily determining, constitutive "otherness" for it. Any way to imagine and try to live a human life, whether at the individual or collective level, without acknowledging this fact is pathological or pathogenic in the literal sense of dangerous to life. Hegel never tires of emphasising the folly of abstract freedom and the destructiveness of attempts to apply it in relation to necessarily determining otherness, whether internal or external nature, other people, or social institutions. What I am suggesting here is that the same goes for the concept of autonomy as collective self-governance by norms, if it is thought in abstraction from necessarily determining otherness over which humans have no legislative power – or in other words from nature. The idea of autonomy as collective self-government by norms is, for sure, a "healthy" one since it articulates a genuine capacity or power of our life-form to organise and reorganise itself, but it can turn into something dangerous, unhealthy or pathological unless it is subjected under the higher-order principle of concrete freedom as reconciliation with what necessarily determines us.

This connects with the second idea that I mentioned – that of levels of normativity. One of the consequences of the predominantly deontological focus of recent neo-Hegelian thought has been a tendency to narrow down Hegel's *Sollen* (the closest equivalent in his vocabulary to the contemporary term "normativity") to the deontological dimension only, when in truth it includes both the axiological dimension of value and thus the good and the bad and the deontological dimension of norms and thus the right and the wrong. Hence "normativity" has come to stand for the realm of norms only, which according to the neo-Hegelians is constituted or created by mutual recognition as authority-attribution. There is much more to Hegel's *Sollen* however, and much in it that our life-form shares with other life-forms. Not only do we need to include the axiological dimension, but also what can be called levels of normativity to follow Barbara Merker.[18]

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[18] See Merker (2012). As with Elder-Vass, I am not following the details of Merker's very elaborate presentation but accommodating the general idea in my reading of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature and Subjective Spirit. For the details of my reading, see Ikäheimo (2021). Within Hegel-scholarship I have found Cinzia Ferrini's work on nature, spirit, normativity, and related themes very helpful. See https://units.academia.edu/CinziaFerrini (accessed March 18, 2022).

Firstly,[19] there is what we can call "vegetative normativity" or *Sollen*, which is the "perspective" of good and bad unfolded by the vital functions of any living organism, or the internal and external conditions under which it is able to flourish or survive. Secondly, there is the animal level of normativity, including a complex of both axiological and deontological structures. Animal life includes an experiential (and thus non-metaphorical) perspective of felt or sensed good and bad, or what Hegel calls "the pleasant" and "the unpleasant" (*das Angenehme und das Unangenehme*) (Hegel 2007a, § 401). These feelings serve the animal's vital functions, but do that only in conjunction with an intentional or subject-object form of *Sollen*, or in other words with something in the external world appearing as desirable or rejectable.[20] Here we find not only axiological structures of good and bad of different kinds – vegetative, felt, and intentional – but also deontological structures of right and wrong, or correct and incorrect. It is namely possible that sensation fails to serve its function in the service of the organism's vital processes, or in other words that something that is bad for the animal's well-being or survival feels good, or the other way. Here feeling gets things wrong. Similarly, something may appear desirable that ends up feeling (or tasting) bad, or that is bad for the animal's well-being or survival, or the other way around. This is intentionality getting things wrong.[21]

Thirdly and finally, there are the normative structures specific to persons that I have discussed: an axiological perspective to value or to good and bad that transcends or goes beyond mere animal or first-order desire, and the deontological normativity of collectively self-legislated and -administered social norms. To think of the self-legislative form of normativity concretely, we must not only understand the intertwinement of the deontological dimension with the axiological (and the cooperative), and thus its connection to human concerns; we must also understand these concerns as bound up with the requirements of our life as biological beings, or of our life-form in the biological sense. Whereas the homeostasis of a plant depends on successful exploitation of a particular environment or *Umwelt*[22] and falters when that environment changes too much, and whereas animals are capable of both limited domestica-

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19 See especially Hegel (1970, § 347) on vegetative assimilation.

20 See Hegel (2007a, §§ 427, 470), Hegel (2007b, p. 185).

21 This is where Robert Brandom's more recent account of the birth of normativity in animal life begins in Brandom (2007). See Ikäheimo (2021).

22 This is an expression often associated with Jacob von Uexküll. The expression resonates very well with Hegel's philosophy of nature the 1821/22 lectures of which Uexküll's grandfather Boris von Uexküll attended and wrote down, and which were kept in the Uexküll family library. See Brentani (2015, 24, footnote 7).

tion of their environments and limited moving around when environmental changes dictate this, humans have much greater capacities of modifying both themselves and their environments, as well as moving about, and thereby much greater capacities of flourishing or at least surviving in a great variety of environments. Yet, these capacities are not unlimited, and the basic requirements of biological life apply. The natural levels of normativity are not something we can legislate ourselves free from, but something that normatively constrain what we legislate, and thus something we can only be free in relation to in the concrete sense of reconciled with.

7 Conclusion

Anthropologists often emphasise the crucial importance of relative climatic stability during the Holocene for the transition from foraging to agriculture, and hence from there to our current civilization. That this civilization may just have managed, by its own actions, to bring that period of stability to an end is a truly bewildering thought. There is a long arch of evolution of our life-form from a struggle of immediate survival in and with external nature, though increasing domestication of and mastery over it, to the brief period in certain parts of the planet where illusions of freedom from nature have been able to be entertained. We are now clearly past the use-by date of those illusions, and the time has come to put the philosophical discourse of unlimited self-legislation that uncomfortably resonates with it in its proper context.
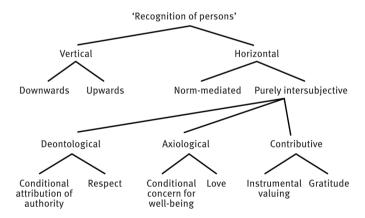

Fig. 1: Recognition of persons

Tab. 1: Dimensions and layers of full-fledged personhood

Full-fledged personhood	*Deontological dimension*	*Axiological dimension*	*Contributive/ cooperative dimension*
Psychological layer of personhood	Capacities required for norm-governed life	Capacity for immediacy-transcending concerns	Contributive motivations and capacities
Intersubjective (status-) layer of personhood	Status of someone subjected to norms (minimal) or also with authority on them (maximal)	Status of someone whose happiness or well-being matters	Status of a contributor/cooperation-partner
Institutional (status-) layer of personhood	Person-making institutionalised deontic powers (paradigmatically basic legal rights)		
Moral (status-) layer of personhood^2 (?)^{23}	Person-making informal deontic powers (paradigmatically universal basic rights)		

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23 The point of the question mark is to suggest that whether this is real phenomenon, or a "mere ought" in Hegel's sense is an open question. The answer depends on whether one can offer a plausible ontological account of it on which it is the former. Chapter 3 in Ikäheimo/Laitinen/Quante/Testa (forthcoming) tries to offer one such account. See: https://www.academia.edu/38989973/Intersubjective_recognition_and_personhood_as_membership_in_the_life-form_of_persons (accessed March 18, 2022).

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