

Hegel and Pragmatism

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While professional philosophy as practiced in the English-speaking world over the last hundred years has, for the most part, been hostile to Hegel and “German idealism”, exceptions are to be found within the American “pragmatist” tradition. Among the founders of pragmatism, strongly Hegelian themes can be found in the work of John Dewey (1859–1952), George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and, to some extent, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). By the mid-twentieth century, however, the influence of “classical” pragmatism within philosophy had waned, while the “analytic” approach to philosophy, traceable back to founding figures such as Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, was becoming institutionally dominant within most of the English-speaking world. Analytic philosophy had started as a reaction *against* Hegelianism, and so Hegel’s influence might have seemed to have come to an end, but recently a generally more favourable orientation towards Hegel’s philosophy has once again emerged within the type of “analytic pragmatism” associated with the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars (1912–89). Sellars himself had been at best ambivalent towards Hegel, and aligned his own philosophy more with the approach of Kant whose “transcendental idealism” he tried to give a “scientific realist” twist.¹ Among his followers, however, Richard Rorty attempted to promote the discernible “Hegelian” dimension of Sellars’s work and extract this from Sellars’s “realist” aspirations, that he criticized in ways drawing on the earlier pragmatism of William James.² In turn, Robert Brandom, deeply influenced by Rorty, has developed Sellars’s ideas in a way that could be used to reconstruct a more systematic interpretation of Hegel from an “social pragmatist” point of view.³ Such pragmatic versions of Hegel have been criticized by “mainstream” interpreters of Hegel, and the question of what relation—if any—exists between Hegel’s philosophy and that of the pragmatists will probably be debated

¹ On the one hand, Sellars referred to his influential work, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, as his “incipient *Meditations Hegeliennes*” (*sic*). Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, with an Introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), § 20. On the other, he tried to resist the paths leading him in that work from Kant towards Hegel. See, for example, Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview Publishing, 1992), chs 1 and 2.

² Rorty read Hegel predominantly as a historicist thinker who destroyed the Kantian idea of philosophy as science and who created a new “literary genre”. Richard Rorty, “Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism” in Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays 1972–1980)* (University of Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 139–59.

³ See especially, Robert Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), chs 1, 6 and 7.

indefinitely. Nevertheless, viewing Hegel's philosophy from the perspective of pragmatism and the tools it brings to philosophy can help elucidate aspects of his thought that might otherwise be missed or misunderstood.

1. Pragmatism

In a lecture in 1906 William James spelt out the characteristics of what he called "pragmatism" – "a new name for some old ways of thinking".⁴ The term, he said, was taken from the Greek word for action, "pragma", and the philosophical stance he described as first put forward as such by Charles Sanders Peirce. Crucially, Peirce had developed an alternative way of thinking about mental contents such as beliefs, treating them as "rules for action". To ask after the *meaning* of a thought is to ask after the "conduct it is fitted to produce".⁵ Pragmatism, then, was basically a philosophical tool for the analysis of the meaning of mental states: "To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object" said James, paraphrasing Peirce, "we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all".⁶

James himself thought the approach of pragmatism very unlike the philosophy of Hegel, but Dewey and Mead, having both been deeply influenced by teachers who were part of the Hegelian revival of the final third of the 19th century, were more appreciative of what they took to be common to the approaches of Peirce and Hegel.⁷ The case of Peirce himself is somewhat more complicated. He was strongly influenced by Kant and explicitly *critical* of Hegel, especially on matters of logic, but this overt antipathy seemed to cover over many points of convergence between the two thinkers.⁸ In particular, both were critical of the "Cartesian" view of mental contents as privately accessible "ideas", knowable with certainty by the individuals whose states they are, but radically unknowable to others.⁹ Peirce's "pragmatic" criterion of the meaning in which the meaning of a person's beliefs *could* be

⁴ William James, "What Pragmatism Means", in William James, *Selected Writings* (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), pp. 3–19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷ Dewey was influenced by his teacher at Johns Hopkins, G. S. Morris, Mead by his teacher at Harvard, Josiah Royce.

⁸ For a good account of the complex relations between Hegel and Peirce, see Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Part III, "Hegel, Pragmatism and Peirce".

⁹ See, for example, Charles S. Peirce, "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man" (1868), in Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (eds), *The Essential Peirce, Volume 1: Selected Philosophical Writings, (1867-1893)* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1992).

understood from the perspective of another—namely, as the inferred “grounds” of their observable actions—had been raised as an alternative. Similar approaches to thought grasped as expressed in actions were to be found in Hegel who was keen to advocate a socially based, non-individualistic view of the mind. In the cases of both Peirce and the Sellarsians, the path to Hegel had been through the ideas of Immanuel Kant and appreciating Hegel’s relation to Kant might help in understanding how his philosophy could find allies among the pragmatists.

2. Kant’s “Copernican” assault on metaphysical realism

Kant is known for his “Copernican revolution” intended to overthrow metaphysics as traditionally conceived. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously proclaims that, with respect to the science of *metaphysics*, rather than thinking “that all our cognition must conform to the objects” we might “assume that the objects must conform to our cognition”.¹⁰ This puzzling claim should be seen against the background of his fundamentally *Aristotelian* metaphysical conception of the “objects” in question that he has in mind. For Aristotle, the primary substances that populated the world at the most basic level were not simple lumps of “matter” but rather the material bearers of “forms” or “essences”. As a thing’s form or essence is what is responsible for it being the *kind* of thing it is and behaving as it does, knowledge of that thing will involve a grasp of its essence. Furthermore, linking knowledge to perceptual experience, Aristotle effectively thought of perception as a process in which the form of the thing known passes into the knower’s mind (or a part of the mind—“nous”), where it comes to exist *without* the connection to matter that it possesses in the thing.

Kant intended to reverse key aspects of this picture. Rather than being passively imprinted into nous *from* the object *qua* formed matter, the “form” possessed by those objects as experienced and known was now seen as a product of the knower’s own form-creating *activities*. But being an “idealist” or non-realist about “form” did not entail being a non-realist about “matter”, as with Berkeley. The active mind obviously does not *create* the object, but “determines” the form that makes it available for knowledge and reasoning. But in turn, this seems to imply that what can be known is not the “thing in itself”—that is, the thing with the form that it possesses “anyway”—but rather that thing grasped *in relation to* the constituting mind of the knower. In Kant’s jargon, what is known is the thing as “appearance” or “phenomenon” rather than as “thing in itself” or “noumenon”. It is this fundamental focus on the *activity* of the knower in which something about the object is “determined”, and the resistance to metaphysics as traditionally conceived, that provides the broad framework within which parallels can be recognized between idealism and pragmatism.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B xvi.

For Kant, the decisive advantage of his “transcendental idealism” was that it made intelligible how we could conceive of ourselves as free agents within a causally deterministic world. In short, causal determinacy could now be restricted to events in the world of appearance thereby bypassing the world “in itself”. If we can thus think of our actions *as* the actions of our noumenal selves, we can conceive of them as free. Many were attracted to this attempt to solve the difficult problem of free agency, but Kant’s actual solution was often felt to reflect an intolerable sense of one’s alienation from the empirical world in general and one’s body in particular. For this reason, many post-Kantians sought to somehow reunite the realms of appearance and the “in itself” that Kant kept rigidly distinct, but they did this within what they thought to be a broadly Kantian spirit, by exploiting a conception of the self in Kant that seemed to elude the appearance/thing-in-itself dichotomy. The first clear emergence of this pragmatist theme can be seen in the approach of J. G. Fichte (1762–1814), a philosopher who would be key figure for Hegel’s “absolute idealism”.

In a well-known passage from his *Science of Logic* Hegel states that “it is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the *unity* which constitutes the nature of the *Notion* is recognized as the *original synthetic unity of apperception*, as unity of the *I think*, or self-consciousness”.¹¹ Kant had introduced the idea that each finite rational being must have a certain conception of him or herself as what is doing the thinking. In the very activity of representing the world of appearance, I need to grasp myself *as* the “I” that is representing—the “I think” that “must be able to accompany all my representations”.¹² As a rational being I must have a conception of an “I”—a “transcendental unity of self-consciousness”—in terms of which I understand myself as a thinker.¹³ While Kant said frustratingly little about this idea of self-consciousness, Fichte took it up and developed it into the doctrine of the actively “self-positing” I. It would also be the idea, as the quote above suggests, that would be behind the development of Hegel’s own form of idealism based on the peculiar logical structure of “the notion”.

3. From Kant and Fichte to Hegel

For Fichte, this conception of a “self-positing I” should not be confused with that of an empirical entity. The “I” does not name one’s body *qua* empirically knowable objects, but neither does “I” name some immaterial entity that might exist independently of the body like, say, Descartes’ immaterial soul. Fichte’s I is simply not an “entity” of any sort, neither material nor immaterial, but is conceived more in terms of a *process* embodied in a living animal able to identify itself with this concept. Importantly, following Herder, Fichte had explored the idea of the

¹¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 584.

¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 131.

¹³ *Ibid.*, B 132.

possession of *language* as what allowed articulate thought.¹⁴ Once language is taken as expressive of the conceptual structures in which self and other are “posited”, Fichte’s picture of humans as “self-positing subjects” starts to look like the conception of humans described by Charles Taylor as “self-interpreting animals”.¹⁵

We might naturally think of practical action as a type of mindful “determining” of the world: I intend that the closed door be open, and I open it, and thereby a state of the world comes to fit my intention. But from the Kantian approach something like this *also* applies to “theoretical” action itself. In perceptual knowledge I might think of my mental states as *causally* brought about by the object perceived, but here causation is not taken as *explaining* my knowledge. Thus Kant had criticized Locke’s conflation of the relation of *knowing*, which aims to grasp the thing *correctly*, with the idea of the mind’s states as mere *causal effects* of the thing.¹⁶ In the mid-twentieth century, Wilfrid Sellars was to use such a criticism in his critique of empiricism’s “Myth of the Given”, broadly along the lines of the earlier critique of Cartesianism of Peirce. In Hegel, much the same distinction had been made in terms of the difference between the fallible “certainty” of the mind’s initial take on the world, and the “truth” that emerges as the result of the mind’s *thinking through* contradictions that emerge when “certainty” is reflected upon.¹⁷ In Fichte, the idea is found in his analyses of the mind’s theoretical and practical activities, as the mind always *strives* to go beyond those immediate states in which it finds itself, attempting to *free itself* from being determined by anything other than itself. It is this that imparts to Fichte’s philosophy a proto-pragmatist attitude to knowledge, suggesting a *practical infrastructure* to all theoretical cognition itself: “All reflection is based on the striving, and in the absence of striving there can be no reflection”.¹⁸ “[I]t is not in fact the theoretical faculty which makes possible the practical, but on the contrary the practical which makes possible the theoretical”.¹⁹

Hegel’s attitudes to Fichte were complex. While a student at the *Tübingen* seminary from 1788 to 1793, he had become friends with two other students who were to leave equally deep impacts on German culture: Friedrich Hölderlin and

¹⁴ J. G. Fichte, “On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language”, trans. Jere Paul Surber in Jere Paul Surber, *Language and German Idealism: Fichte’s Linguistic Philosophy* (New York: Humanity Books, 1996), pp. 117–145.

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, “Self-Interpreting Animals,” in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 45-76.

¹⁶ Thus Kant criticized Locke’s “physiological derivation” of the ideas. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A86-7/B119.

¹⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1977, ch. 1.

¹⁸ J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* in *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 258.

¹⁹ *Ibid*: p. 123.

Friedrich Schelling. During 1790s while the friends maintained a type of ongoing collaboration, Fichte's philosophy shot to prominence, and by the second half of the decade, both Hölderlin and Schelling were developing their own sympathetic critiques of Fichte's conception of the "self-positing" I.

In the influential 1794–5 version of his "Doctrine of Science" [*Wissenschafteslehre*], Fichte had sketched, albeit at a stratospheric level of abstraction, an account of what we now might think of as the "intentional" structure of consciousness. First, he treats the most basic feature of any object at all (whether it be actual or possible), in terms of its *self-identity*. For all A, A=A. But applying Kant's formal idealism, such a *formal* property of the object must be understood as grounded in the unity of the *I think*. Thus, the idea of any thing's self-identity must be "*in the self, and posited by the self, for it is the self which judges*".²⁰ In Fichte's shorthand, A=A must depend on the I=I, the latter formula being his first principle, the "Principle of Identity". In the next two sections Fichte establishes further principles which are "reciprocally based upon" the first.²¹ The "Principle of Opposition", concerns the *difference* or *opposition* between the conscious subject and its object (the not-I). But a not-I "given" to consciousness implies a consciousness that is, as we have seen, *determined* by that not-I, disrupting its abstract self-identity. A third principle is then needed to reconcile the first two principles. The I must posit *both itself and the not-I as opposed*.

Reacting against Fichte while nevertheless deeply influenced by him, Hölderlin and Schelling had denied that the initial unity from which the opposing I and not-I emerged should *itself* be thought of as an "I". Rather, I and its world of objects emerge from a primal unity more like Spinoza's pantheistic "*natura naturans*" than some infinite anthropomorphic and self-conscious God or an infinite "I".²² Hegel *too* was to challenge the primacy of the Fichtean idea of rationality as the striving for self-identity of an "I", but not with the more Spinoza-leaning type of naturalism of his erstwhile friends. The context for the emergence of the finite "I" is rather the objective but "spiritual" social realm. One of the expressions of this transformation of Fichte is to be found in what is possibly Hegel's most-well known piece of writing: his account of the social preconditions of self-consciousness sketched in the famous "master–slave" dialectic in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* of 1807.²³ Clear pragmatist themes emerge in this work.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

²¹ Ibid., p. 120.

²² For example, in the fragment, "Judgment and Being", Hölderlin had described the finite I's capacity for concept-use or judgment (*Urteilung*) as conditional upon an original separation (an *Ur-Teilung*) within the primordial unity of "being". Friedrich Hölderlin, "Judgment and Being", in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, translated and edited by Thomas Pfau (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988). And so, as using concepts is characteristic of the I, I-hood is improperly attributed to the unity *prior* to separation of I and not-I.

²³ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ch 4.

4. The pragmatic structure of the “master–slave dialectic” and beyond

In a seminal essay first published in 1967, Jürgen Habermas drew attention to Hegel’s treatment of the themes of *language* and *labour* in the master–slave episode, an approach, he claimed, that anticipated the overtly *pragmatist* one of George Herbert Mead in the early twentieth century.²⁴ Habermas thus describes Mead as having repeated Hegel’s insight “though under the naturalistic presupposition of pragmatism—that the identity of the “I” can only constitute itself in the acquisition by practice of social roles, namely, in the complementary character of behavioral expectations on the basis of mutual recognition”.²⁵

Like Kant and Fichte, Mead rejected the type of “passive” conception of the formation of objects of consciousness typical of the empiricist tradition, and linked the consciousness of objects to patterns of practical interaction with those objects.

“In so far as our physical conduct involves movements toward or away from distant objects and their being handled when we come into contact with them, we perceive all things in terms of distance sensation—color, sound, odor—which stand for hard or soft, big or little, objects of varying forms, which actual contact will reveal.

Our conduct in movement and manipulation, with this stimulations and responses, gives the framework within which objects of perception arise—and this conduct is in so far responsible for the organization of our physical world.²⁶

But human conduct not only involves actions towards objects *qua* merely physical things. Human actions equally include gestures and actions directed towards other *humans*, and to the extent to which physical objects get caught up in the network of these social behaviours they are to be understood as “social objects”, defined “in terms of social conduct as we defined the physical object in terms of our reactions to physical objects.”²⁷ Social objects are physical objects but ones invested with properties that derive from the peculiarities of their functioning in social interactions. A ten dollar note, for example, is a physical object—a variously coloured piece of paper or plastic or whatever—but its properties (that I can exchange it for, say, two cans of beer, or one pair of socks) cannot be explained by those physical properties. For Hegel, objects acquiring *these* sorts of properties thereby acquire “spiritual”

²⁴ J. Habermas, “Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel’s Jena *Philosophy of Mind*”, in *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), first published in German in 1967.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 297, fn 11.

²⁶ G. H. Mead, “The Mechanism of Social Consciousness”, *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Vol. 9, No. 15 (Jul. 18, 1912), pp. 401-406, p. 401.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 403.

status.²⁸ Importantly, for Mead, what distinguished the possession of the type of behavioural repertoire of which humans are capable from the actions of non-human animals was articulate speech,²⁹ an idea found in Fichte, Hegel and others largely via the influence of J. G. Herder.³⁰

Chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is, among other things, devoted to an analysis of the type of self-consciousness that Fichte had developed on the basis of Kant. Hegel sketches a scenario in which a simple model of political life between a master and his slave can be seen to result from a resolution of a initial struggle in which one antagonist capitulates and accepts slavery to the other. We can see Hegel in this chapter as, somewhat like Mead, trying to discern the conditions necessary for an animal to be a self-conscious willing agent. Thus Hegel will consider existence within a *social* realm in which behavioural interactions are mediated by “social” and not merely “physical” objects, but in contrast to Mead’s naturalism, will derive these conditions from a recognizably Fichtean starting point in which self-consciousness has two moments. In the first of these, “otherness is for it in the form of a *being*”, while in the second, self-consciousness is aware of its own unity with itself—it is, Hegel says, appealing to the Fichtean formula, the moment of “I am I”.³¹ Of these two moments, it is the latter that is regarded as the “truth” of the former’s “certainty”. The object thus corresponds to the finite, conditioned moment of consciousness that must mediate any *self-consciousness*. Agency on this model is based on *self-conscious desire* and as such cannot be reduced to *natural* desire. Hegel describes this Fichtean model of self-consciousness as “*Desire* [or appetite [*Begierde*] in general”.³²

Consciousness, as we have seen, is a central ingredient of the Fichtean model of *self-consciousness*, including *practical* self-consciousness—willing: to be conscious of *myself* as possessing a desire is to be conscious of myself as being *determined* by something *other than* me—the object my desire is directed to. And rather than action being simply some sort of *causal* consequence of the naturally conceived desire, action on the Fichtean model is an attempt to re-establish the essential self-identity striven for by *negating*—overcoming the determining influence

²⁸ For a comprehensive account of Hegel on symbols see Kathleen Dow Magnus, *Hegel and the Symbolic Mediation of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

²⁹ “That ... a consciousness of a self as an object would ever have arisen in man if he had not had the mechanism of talking to himself, I think there is every reason to doubt.” Mead, “The Mechanism of Social Consciousness”, p. 405. See also, Mead’s “The Social Self,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, vol. 10, (1913), pp. 374–380.

³⁰ See, for example, Michael Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and, with respect to Hegel, Jere O’Neill Surber (ed.) *Hegel and Language* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

³¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 167.

³² *Ibid.*

on myself of—the object. This is the Fichtean version of the autonomy that Kant equated with practical reason *qua* morality. But, Hegel thinks, this generalized “appetite” model of self-consciousness cannot maintain itself—it is self-contradictory. The conscious self must *strive against* its object, the not-I, just as the appetitive organism strives against the object of its appetite by trying to consume it. But just as the satisfaction of an appetite both removes its object and abolishes the appetite, so self-consciousness on this model would be self-extinguishing, since a resisting object is *required* for an individual who defines itself *as a striving* self-consciousness.

While Hölderlin and Schelling had tried to find the conditions for the emergence of a consciousness in some primordial unified “being” prior to “separation”, Hegel locates the *consciously desiring* agent against a background of social life—the realm objective “spirit”. The realm of spirit is differentiated from *mere* life by the constitutive processes of concept-using acts of “recognition” in which each member implicitly recognizes the other as occupant of some normative role, just as the slave recognizes his master *as his master* in the very act of obeying his commands. But in this manifestation of the relation of recognition, we find one consciousness as “the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself”, while the other is “the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another”.³³ And yet the master is in fact dependent for his identity as master on the recognition of the slave—“*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*”.³⁴ In not acknowledging the independence of his slave the master is thus depriving himself of the conditions under which *he* can be properly self-conscious. As a form of objective spirit, such a society cannot actualize the features essential to self-consciousness, reason and freedom.

Despite its limitations as a model of the conditions of consciousness and self-consciousness, we can see elements within it that will be carried forward into succeeding stages that give a further “pragmatic” feel to many of Hegel’s central ideas. There may be hierarchical patterns of social life in non-language using animals, but there could not be, we might say, a form of social life with the *institution* of slavery with its conventionally defined social roles and patterns of interaction. From a linguistic point of view, we might think of the respective roles of master and slave as differentiated by the type of *speech act* that each can employ. Most simply put, only the master can utter imperatives like “cook me a fish!”—that is, perform the social act a consequence of which is that the one addressed *thereby* acts in a way specified by the words expressed in the sentence.³⁵ But the functioning of these linguistic

³³ Ibid., § 189.

³⁴ Ibid., § 175.

³⁵ In this way there are clear parallels to be found with Wittgenstein’s quasi-pragmatist account of the “builder’s language” in which a “language game” articulates a “form of life” to give a model of the workings of language meant to contest traditional “naming” theories of language. Ludwig Wittgenstein,

interactions clearly depend on the possession of non-linguistic capacities to *act* in the appropriate ways when so ordered to cook a fish. First, as is obvious, the slave would here need to have mastered the techniques of cooking, and beyond those, others related instrumentally to achieve such goals—catching fish, lighting fires, and so on. And skills could be successfully deployed only in relation to certain types of knowledge—where to find fish, how to know when a fish was cooked, etc.. From this point of view we are encouraged to think of concepts as getting their meanings via the functional roles they play in these patterns of action and interaction between the interlocutors and each other, on the one hand, and interlocutors and the world on the other.

It is in the context of these sorts of life-forms, run through with concepts that can be logically linked via their expression in language and that allow subjects to act towards objects and others, that Hegel's accounts of the practical infrastructure of practical and theoretical reason in the master-slave dialectic resembles the pragmatism of Dewey and Mead. But there are *further* themes running through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that resemble more the forms of pragmatism found in Sellars and Brandom, and before them, Peirce. For Hegel, the *asymmetry* of the forms of interaction between master and slave ensured the ultimate collapse of this form of social relation. More *symmetrical* social relations, we might think, might involve interactions no longer resting on asymmetrical ones like force or domination (or even just unquestioned habit), but on the interlocutor's *rational* acceptance of the other's speech act by being given *reasons* to accept it. Thus Peirce, for example, had sketched different ways that different societies might establish the necessary "fixation" of the beliefs on which individuals acted necessary to ensure the integration of those actions within social life,³⁶ and, as Hegel interpreters such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard have pointed out, Hegel suggested that *modern society in particular* sought to justify social practices in this way.³⁷ In Brandom's work we find approach to meaning and the mind which builds on Sellars in order to link pragmatism and Hegel's idealism in a systematic way.

Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 2.

³⁶ C. S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief", in *The Essential Peirce, Volume 1*. There is already a strong hint of this quasi-political orientation to the fixation of belief in the final section to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Transcendental doctrine of method".

³⁷ See, for example, Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), who both make the link to Sellars's approach to the normativity of reason. For his part, Habermas went on to develop his own "post-metaphysical" approach to social philosophy grounded in the pragmatics of communication. See, for example, J. Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, trans. B. Fultner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

Not all readers of Hegel will find in pragmatism the key to unlocking the “secrets” of his version of idealism, but many of Hegel’s notoriously opaque claims might be illuminated by the comparison of his ideas with those of the pragmatists.³⁸

³⁸ I am grateful to David Macarthur for helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this essay.