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Criticism and normativity.
Brandom and Habermas between Kant and Hegel

1. TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF RECOGNITION. In this paper, making reference to Robert Brandom's philosophical proposal - and against the background of Brandom's debate with Jürgen Habermas - I shall endeavor, first, to define the relation between recognition and normativity and then between recognition and criticism; in the final part of the paper I shall suggest a perspective that approaches recognition in terms of capacities. On this basis I attempt to see the critical attitude as something that is founded more on individual potentials than on formal criteria and that is essentially connected with a power of redescription: a dialectical anthropology of recognition is thus the most promising base to account for that which substantiates our critical powers.

1.1 THEORETICAL CONVERGENCE WITH HABERMAS. Brandom shares with Habermas, as the latter emphasizes in his long review of *Making it Explicit*, a linguistic, pragmatic and interactional-dialogical understanding of human being (Habermas 2000; see Testa 2003, pp. 561-562). For Brandom that which defines human anthropology is the fact that human beings essentially take part in the practice of giving and asking for reasons (see Brandom 1994, pp. xi-xxv): the structure of human intentionality, of language, and the very infrastructure of the life-world, is *argumentative*. Language is analyzed on the basis of the discursive practices that Brandom, like Habermas, deems basic with respect to other language games. For Brandom, in fact, language games are those practices in which some speech acts can have the meaning of an assertion: asserting (things are thus and so) is thus the fundamental speech act, on which the other speech acts depend. But assertions are that which are capable of acting as reasons or that have need of reasons: that is, they are premises or consequences of inferences. The center of linguistic practice is thus constituted by the game of giving and asking for reasons: that is, by making claims of which one can ask for justifications on the basis of reasons that for Brandom, as for Habermas, are in principle addressed to all members of the community.

1.2 NORMATIVE PRAGMATICS. Brandom's rationalism is connected with a pragmatic conception on the basis of which: a) what we say or think must be understood in terms of what we

do, and therefore - in a linguistic paradigm - in terms of the speech acts we perform; b) there is a primacy of the pre-predicative dimension (Wittgenstein, Heidegger): in the life-world we are guided by rules that are known implicitly, in the form of "know how"; and c) there is primacy of social practice over private intentions.

Brandom seeks to illustrate the way in which, genetically, social practices institute intentionality and language. At the same time this history illustrates how social practices institute the normative structure of language. Brandom thus develops a normative pragmatics that shows how the practices that institute language contain norms that regard the correctness of the use of expressions (see Brandom 1994, pp. 3-66). The basic idea is that the deontic status of implicit norms can be clarified in terms of a social status: that is, of a status instituted by the attitudes of those who attribute and acknowledge this social status. To make this idea explicit, Brandom introduces two fundamental concepts, corresponding to two fundamental types of normative status, namely "commitment" and "entitlement," and then develops a model of the practices of attributing such deontic statuses that is based on baseball scorekeeping (Brandom 1994, pp. 141-198).

Language is thus for Brandom an exchange of communicative acts, in which each participant attributes assertions to the others and assesses the validity claims put forward by these assertions, keeping track of how many points each speaker scores in terms of credibility. Methodologically, then, according to a motif that goes back to Mead (and that can also be found in Habermas and Tugendhat), Brandom analyzes communicative exchange from the viewpoint of a communicative partner who interprets the speaker's acts and takes a position with a yes or a no. Hence:

a) the interpreter ascribes to his partner a speech act that makes validity claims;
b) the act thus ascribed is understood by the interpreter as a commitment the speaker undertakes: in saying that 'p', I commit myself to give reasons for 'p', and I commit myself to a certain number of other claims 'q', 'r', 's' that follow from 'p' and from which 'p' follows, which, accordingly, have an inferential connection with 'p';
c) the interpreter takes a position on the speaker's validity claims, acknowledging or not acknowledging the speaker's entitlement to make that claim and thus to undertake that commitment.

Brandom, then, analyzes and reconstructs Habermasian validity claims by means of a formal pragmatics that, instead of reconstructing an ideal dialogical situation defined by abstract criteria as the quasi transcendental presupposition of validity of all linguistic interactions, seeks rather to account for the structure of validity as a product of the interaction of commitments and

entitlements. In this way Brandom accounts for validity not as a counterfactual dimension (Habermas) but rather as objective structure, as normative factuality.

On the basis of this model, as we shall see, normative-deontic status is instituted entirely by the normative social attitudes that consist in attributing commitments and in acknowledging the entitlement of such commitments. This means that norms are such not by any natural or metaphysical property, but only insofar as they are acknowledged.

1.3 SEMANTIC INFERENTIALISM AND PRAGMATICS. Brandom utilizes this model to develop his theory of meaning and this, as Habermas himself acknowledged (see Habermas 2001, p. 168), may well be the most original aspect of his philosophical project. For Brandom, as for Dummett, the question of what it means to understand the meaning of a proposition must be posed from the viewpoint of the interpreter who correctly assumes that someone is making a validity claim. Now, based on the above model, understanding the meaning of an assertion means knowing both the conditions on the basis of which it can be made, and the consequences that arise for those who participate in the interaction. Understanding the meaning of a claim, according to the inferential-argumentative model, is equivalent to understanding its inferential relation with other claims (inferentialist-semantic holism: see Brandom 2000, pp. 15-16). The inferential dimension, which is proper to all language, and so to all linguistically structured human experience, is thus for Brandom the rational, conceptual - logical, in the Hegelian sense - dimension of linguistic practices. In Brandom normative pragmatics founds and institutes semantics. The idea is that conceptual norms, and correct semantic inferences, are entirely a result of practice. This, precisely, is where the material conception of inference comes into play (see Brandom 1994, pp. 94-116): materially valid inferences are instituted by the practice with which we treat inferences as correct or incorrect. It is the institutionalized form of individual normative attitudes, of particular positions, that institutes correct material inferences. In short, material inferences have to presuppose neither a semantics nor a formal logic, since the meanings are instituted by these inferences: formally valid inferences, which concern the linguistic subset of the logical vocabulary, can be defined and derived on the basis of material inferences. Here, Habermas objects that some criteria have to be presupposed: the correctness of the application of the concepts has to presuppose some criterion of rationality (see Habermas 2000, pp. 328-329). Here, already at the semantic level, Habermas's Kantian element clashes with the Hegelian element in Brandom. The Hegelian viewpoint holds that norms, as regards their validity and their content, are entirely the outcome of the institutionalization of the acts of ascription and recognition of validity of those who participate in the discourse. The notion of recognition is central here: being a norm means being recognized as such and being produced by

recognitive interactions (see Brandom 1999). In the debate between Brandom and Habermasian critical theory the problem of the normative dimension is therefore decisive, and it is precisely on this plane that Brandom's Hegelianism in relation to Habermas's Kantianism have to be assessed.

2. INSTITUTION AND OBJECTIVITY OF NORMS. The Brandom-Habermas debate thus regards, first, the following problem: a) *are norms presupposed by the language game or are they instituted by the very game that applies them?* Secondly, the debate regards: b) *the problem of the objectivity of norms.* In fact, Habermas poses the problem of whether Brandom's position is not ultimately phenomenalist (see Habermas 2000, pp. 326-327): if the starting point for understanding the nature of normativity are the attitudes with which the participants in an interaction attribute commitments and acknowledge the entitlement of such commitments, then will one not ultimately have to admit that the speakers acknowledge to be valid that which *appears* to them to be so? If the validity of norms is conferred by acts of ascription (without recourse to the presupposition of formal rules, in Habermasian terms, of an ideal discursive situation), how is it possible to account for the objective validity of the norms themselves? (see Habermas 2001, p. 169). Brandom is aware that his position could give rise to objections of this type, and nonetheless believes that his inferential semantics is reconcilable with a form of pragmatist and conceptual realism, on the basis of which one can legitimately speak of the objectivity of concepts and admit that they are articulated by objectively valid inferences.

Brandom's strategy for dealing with these problems will consist in showing how the community of actors institutes a sense of correctness that depends on facts, and is therefore independent of the deontic attitudes of individual actors (see Brandom 2000a). Objectivity has to be explained as the authority the community confers upon facts: this means that objectivity is itself reconstructed on the basis of reciprocal action within inferential social relations. Social practice institutes a normative plane that goes beyond the attitudes of the individual subjects who take part in it[1].

2.1 NORMATIVE KANTIANISM AND HEGELIANISM. This strategy is not only central for assessing the merits of Brandom's claims, but proves to be essential also for comprehending how Brandom, unlike Habermas, proposes not a Kantian but a Hegelian interpretation of normativity. For Brandom, Kant did in fact discover the normative character of concepts (see Brandom 2002, pp.

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[1] A great deal has been written on the Brandom-Habermas debate. The following essays approach the question from a perspective different from the one presented here: Fultner 2002;
> Giovagnoli 2003; Sharp 2003, Hendley 2005, Strydom 2006, Swindale 2007.

21-24): concepts are something to which we bind ourselves and to whose applications we are responsible, submitting ourselves to an assessment of the correctness of our judicative acts. Kant moreover, through the thesis of autonomy, for Brandom discovers the recognitive character of the authority of conceptual norms (see Brandom 1999): conceptual norms have an authority that is distinguished from force and coercion by its holding only insofar as it is freely recognized as such. This position is quite similar to the reading of the connection between authority and recognition Habermas proposed in his polemic with Gadamer (see Habermas 1967; on this see Testa 2001). However, not only the binding force of norms - their validity - but also their origin and very content depends on recognition. The theory of recognition is thus for Brandom an answer to the question - left unanswered by Kant - of the conditions of possibility of conceptual norms and therefore regards both their genesis and their validity. To this question, Hegel and the neopragmatism he inspired (see Brandom 2002, pp. 31-32; on this see Testa 2003 and 2005) respond that the normative status of norms is a social status, i. e., is a state that is instituted in processes of interaction mediated by mechanisms of recognition. In other words, for Brandom a Kantian perspective keeps the plane of the institution of conceptual norms distinct from the plane of their empirical application - the transcendental level from the empirical level. Hegel, by contrast, in particular in the *Phenomenology*, provides us with a model in which experience is not only the application of pure concepts but is also the development of their determinate content: in other words, empirical conceptual norms are instituted in the very process in which they are applied. On this basis the dialectic of reciprocal recognition, understood as a process of reciprocal authority, in Brandom provides a model for explaining not only the intentional structure of agency - self-consciousness - but also for making the genesis and recognitive validity of norms explicit (see Testa 2002). The Hegelian theory of self-consciousness is, then, a response to the problems left unsolved by the Kantian theory of normativity: in fact, Kant had already shown that attributing the property of being an 'I' to something signifies taking up a normative attitude to it, treating it as a subject that is capable of undertaking commitments. But Hegel, for Brandom, goes on to show that this *normative status* of the self is *social* and depends on reciprocal recognition: the self is capable of recognizing and applying norms insofar as it is treated as a self in the interaction processes in which it is involved (see Brandom 1999). For this reason, as we have seen, for Brandom the question of the conditions of possibility of normativity and the question of its genesis are essentially intertwined. As a result, this interpretation of the theory of recognition is also Brandom's response to the first query that arose in his debate with Habermas, since his claim to show that normativity does not presuppose formal meta-rules but is entirely developed in the very process that institutes it depends on this model's consistency.

There was a second question that arose in the debate, regarding the objectivity of norms. Here, Brandom's strategy consisted in an attempt to reformulate the Hegelian notion of objective spirit and to show that, in this way, it is possible to account for the objective validity of norms. In relation to his interpretation of the dialectic of recognition, Brandom had already come to grips with the risk of a phenomenalist drift of his perspective, reformulating the Wittgenstein-Kripke paradox as follows: if normativity implies being recognized as such and is instituted by recognition, how is it possible to distinguish between following a rule and believing one is following a rule, between that which *seems* and that which *is*? (see Brandom 1999). Brandom's idea is that clarifying the intrinsic logic of recognition, which manifests itself as a structure of reciprocal authority, will make it possible to solve the problem of the objectivity of norms posed by the paradox of following a rule and thus accounting for the shared dimension of normativity. In fact, if norms are such, and are instituted as such, insofar as they are recognized as binding, then individuals have a certain authority in recognizing them. Let us not forget that for Hegel the dialectic of recognition reveals that which he calls "dependence and independence of self-consciousness" and which Brandom interprets as follows: individuals, while they exercise their authority, lending their recognition to norms, simultaneously bind themselves to an authority that transcends them and is independent of their attitudes; and this is so essentially because their authority does not go as far as the content of the norms they autonomously recognize. The content of norms, then, manifests a certain independence of the authority with which individuals are endowed in lending their recognition: this, however, does not depend on some intrinsic property of the norms themselves, but rather on the fact that in exercising my authority (the independence of self-consciousness, in Hegelian terms) at the same time I bind myself to others, I make myself dependent on their normative attitudes, since to be able to commit myself to a norm I have need of others to recognize my commitment and hold me to it. It is therefore the presence of others that allows me autonomously to undertake commitments and to keep them: my authority invests the capacity of autonomously recognizing the validity of norms, while the authority of others manifests itself in administering them.

2.2 NORMS AND FACTS. Let us now consider in what sense Brandom's theory is normative and how he conceives the relation between facts and norms. His theory is not normative in the sense that it claims to prescribe what has to be done: it is normative, rather, in the sense that it retrospectively makes explicit those prescriptions, those normative commitments that constitute the implicit infrastructure of our linguistic practices. Here, then, normativity is not a transcendental structure, neither is it grounded in an ideal dimension of language: normativity, rather, is something that spontaneously institutes itself in discursive practices, as normative fact that stems from the

institutionalization in an objective inferential structure of commitments undertaken and of acknowledgements of validity carried out within linguistic interactions.

In Brandom, as was still the case in the Habermas of *Erkentniss und Interesse*, genesis and validity are intertwined. But Habermas, having abandoned that approach ever since the *Postscript* to *Erkentniss und Interesse*, in his debate with Brandom now, as we have seen, raises the objection that pragmatics has to presuppose - at least formal - rules that make the institution of meanings and hence of normative contents possible. For Habermas, taking part in discourse always already presupposes a normative structure: in other words, Brandom's model of formal pragmatics cannot serve to account for the institution of rationality, but rather presupposes rational-formal norms. For Brandom, by contrast, even at the normative level rationality is instituted entirely by the pragmatic dimension. This, then, configures the relation between norms and facts in non-Kantian terms, as Brandom claims also in his reply to Habermas, at least in the sense that the type of inquiry required to settle factual questions is not, for Brandom, specifically different from the type of inquiry required to settle normative questions (see Brandom 2000a, p. 364 ff.; Testa 2003, p. 563). This is not to say that prescriptions can be immediately derived from states of affairs, as if there were an objective way of ascertaining such facts independently of our practices of action and of discussion. If norms are fundamentally *conceptual* norms - and this model is applicable also to moral and political norms, with respect to which conceptual norms are more basic (see Testa 2003, pp. 565-566) - and if the authority of norms derives from recognitive interaction, then in such authority no distinction can be made between an element that derives from our decisions and an element that depends on states of affairs: the objectivity of such norms is in fact the product of the logic of our interactions, and it settles in an objective inferential structure that does not ultimately depend on the will of the individuals whose interactions produce the structure itself. Normative facts are thus inferential facts, are the set of material inferential consequences objectively entailed by our claims - and are therefore facts that regard what follows from what, what counts as evidence for or against certain claims and so forth.

Here, it is interesting to note that one of Brandom's criticisms of Kant can also be leveled against Habermas: Brandom, in fact, criticizes the Kantian idea that behind every implicit rule there has to be an explicit rule, which is to say that only if there are already fully and definitively determined norms is it then possible to distinguish between correct and incorrect applications (see Brandom 2000). Against this conception Brandom Hegelianly maintains, with explicit reference to Habermas, that it is not we who comprehend concepts, but rather concepts that comprehend us. This means that there is an assent, in discursive practice, by which the same norms are binding for all. If then, as Habermas himself maintains, dialogical interaction is founded on a preliminary assent between the

participants, it must however be noted that for Brandom there is in fact a *dissent* about what, from the standpoint of content, these norms are: and it is precisely this tension (as, in a certain sense, is the case in Gadamer) that allows us to speak and argue. Then, we also note the important objection Brandom raises against those assertibility semantic theories that, to cope with the need to deploy criteria of semantic adequacy, appeal to some sort of ideality condition, understanding, for example, assessments of truth in terms of assessments of the assertions one would be entitled to make if one were in an ideal condition of knowledge, however specified: these positions seem to fall into a defect of circularity, since they presuppose that notion of truth which they attempt to explain in terms of guaranteed ideal assertibility. It is perhaps not fortuitous that Habermas later corrected his position, introducing a formal concept of truth and, on the ontological plane, a formal notion of the objective world that, taking objections of this kind into account, moves in a perspective of post-metaphysical formal realism that takes a very different direction from the solution Brandom adopted (see Habermas 1999a, pp. 7-64). Brandom, in fact, to solve the same problem posed by assertibilist conceptions, introduces, through the use of the normative notions of commitment and entitlement alone, a sense of inferential objectivity that goes beyond the propositional attitudes of speakers and can be the basis of the very notion of truth. Brandom's position thus corresponds exactly to that which Habermas, in his essay *From Kant to Hegel and Back Again*, described as a strong reading of recognition - one, that is, designed to model the subject-object relationship entirely in terms of intersubjective relations, and thus to comprehend the objectivity of spirit in terms of the intersubjectivity of a shared social world (see Habermas 1999, pp. 324-325). Habermas pits against this a weak reading of recognition - which, in a certain sense, is already a reply to Brandom - on the basis of which the participants that find themselves in relations with one another in a shared life-world have at the same time to presuppose and assume that every other participant presuppose an independent world of objects that is the same for all of them.

3. CRITICISM AND NORMS. Up to now I have dealt, fundamentally, with the connection between recognition and normativity, illustrating a model according to which the validity and content of norms is the product of recognitive interactions. Hence I have not yet dealt with the problem of criticism directly: How, then, is a critical attitude - and the criticism of normative relations that have been instituted by practice and that at a certain point we believe have to be modified - possible? What, then, is the connection between criticism, recognition and normativity? Only occasionally has Brandom dwelled on these themes. So, in posing the problem, it will be our task to develop his position and, also, to suggest some corrections in his paradigm.

First, let us note that analysis of the normative fine structure of rationality by means of the normative notions of commitment and entitlement already individuates a "critical dimension" in our practices (see Brandom 2000, pp. 69-72 and 193). All those who make assertions - who undertake normative commitments - implicitly recognize this critical dimension. Undertaking a commitment, in fact, means taking on the responsibility, under certain circumstances, of submitting the commitment to an examination of reasons: we can be asked to justify our entitlement to undertake it. The normative status of the entitlement can thus be characterized as the constitutive critical status of our linguistic practices. While all this accounts for the fact that our linguistic practices are made in such a way that giving reasons is constitutive of their normative infrastructure, it is also clear that this does not of itself imply the a priori specification of material or formal criteria that establish what is rational, what is a good justification. Here, rather, we have a critical normativity without preliminary criteria, in the sense that the criteria cannot be established outside the practical institution of the normativity itself and outside the historical reconstruction of this process: in the final analysis, this depends on the material inferences our practices have instituted.

Secondly, we note that Brandom's individuation of this critical component of normative structure is not, however, of itself sufficient to account for the exercise of criticism. How does it happen that certain factual normative relations - the inferential consequences of certain assertions, for example - are called into question and reasons for them are asked? The problem, in the Hegelian context we have described, arises above all from the fact that one denies the possibility of appealing to some form of rational criticism from outside the normative conceptual articulation of our practices; a criticism, i. e., that avails itself of formal normative criteria on the basis of which to criticize factual normative commitments. How, then, is it possible to criticize the factual normative relations instituted by our practices if all we have at our disposal to exercise such criticism are criteria that are produced by those very practices and are justifiable only on their basis, without being able to appeal to a viewpoint that escapes them?

To judge the solidity of Brandom's answer to such questions we must first of all note that, in his view, we can criticize our commitments only in the perspective of their connection with other commitments (see Testa 2003, p. 564). To be able to submit something for criticism and ask the reasons for a normative commitment previously taken generally as valid (see Brandon 2000, p. 70) - for example the descriptive use of the term "Boche" (or "nigger") - one must first be able to bring to consciousness factual normative relations that were not previously evident in all their consequences - i. e., the material inferential commitments that are implicitly undertaken by one who even only descriptively uses that term (seeing that such material inferences, in Brandom's semantics, articulate the term's very content). A this point the previously implicit normative relations are expressed in an

open form and can thus be criticized on the basis of other normative commitments; i. e., it is possible for a speaker to suspend his recognition of the validity of such commitments and ask his partner to account for them.

3.1 REDESCRIPTIVE POWERS AND RECOGNITIVE POWERS. In my opinion, then, to grasp what the exercise of criticism consists in the question of criteria is less decisive than the availability in individuals: a) of expressive potentialities; and b) of recognitive potentialities. Along this line, however, Brandom will be able to accompany us only so far, since his texts offer only a few hints whose re-elaboration could lead to important changes in some aspects of his paradigm.

As regards the expressive powers connected with the exercise of criticism, they consist essentially in the capacity to modify our previous descriptions of the world. Criticism is thus connected, in my opinion, with the availability and the exercise of an expressive power that can be described in terms of a capacity of redescription or of explicitation. As we have seen, since external criteria that escape our practices are not available, some of our commitments can be criticized only on the basis of other commitments that are undertaken in our practices. But to do this we have to be able to redescribe the factual normative relations implied by the commitments that come in for criticism on the basis of a different normative context: for example, to criticize the justice of normative relations that are social from the viewpoint of normative relations that are sexual or racial. The choice of the pertinent context is, once again, something that cannot depend on viewpoints that are external to our interactions, and is therefore entrusted to the expressive power and normative authority of the individual participants in human discursive practices (see Testa 2003, p. 567).

Now, we need to observe how the expressive power of redescription is connected internally with that which I have called recognitive power and which, as such, has to be a prerogative of individuals. Norms, as we have seen, would not be such, and would not be distinguished from brute force, if their binding force were not recognized by individuals. Man, then, is a normative being, who has normative capacities, because he has essentially, as an individual, recognitive capacities: it is precisely in these capacities that his normative authority resides, in the sense that without the authority with which individuals lend recognition to norms, norms would not be such. (This does not mean however, as we have seen, that the content of such norms depends directly on individuals, since their recognitive acts are immediately inserted in the interactional logic of a reciprocal recognition that binds them to other speakers.) This recognitive capacity is directly interconnected with the capacity of redescription, insofar as, to be able to redescribe a normative situation, I first have to be able to recognize it as such - able to recognize the situation to which the norms apply and the validity of the application - and then be able to suspend my recognition of its validity in light of

the recognition of other norms. Redescriptive power, recognitive capacity and criticism are, therefore, structurally intertwined.

Recognitive capacities are then further intertwined with criticism, insofar as the standards by which certain practices of ours are criticized must, in their turn, on pain of inefficacy, be able to be recognized by us as valid. These standards, then, while presenting themselves at first as external to the object criticized - otherwise there would be no critical distance - must, however, be able to be recognized from within to be efficacious. The question of recognizability is thus connected with the question of justifiability: in fact, acknowledging a commitment as valid implies the commitment to show the entitlement to undertake that commitment. To justify these standards, however, we have no external viewpoints, which means that once again we can count on our expressive powers alone: through them we can reconstruct the history of our practices, redescribing them so as to show that such standards were already implicitly contained in them and are the result of their development. The historical reconstruction of the rationality of such criteria is thus the only way we have of rendering recognizable internally those criteria that at first presented themselves as external and that are now shown to be the product of the internal and dialectic development of our practices. This is precisely the type of philosophical justification that Hegel proclaimed, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, to be the self-recognition of Spirit - Absolute Knowing. This model, I believe, can be seen in Brandom in the notion of "explicit interpretive equilibrium" - understood as social self-consciousness of the rationality of our practices (see Brandom 1994, pp. 641-644). It can be seen, in another perspective, also in Axel Honneth's *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit*, insofar as Honneth utilizes the type of historical justification Hegel presents in the *Philosophy of Right* to account, in his turn, for the normative structures of interaction that are the basis of his reconstruction of the pathologies of modern society (see Honneth 2001). Apart from the question of whether or not this type of justification of critical standards is acceptable, we note that, once again, it presupposes the redescriptive and recognitive capacities of the individuals in whom such social self-consciousness may manifest itself. Hence it is precisely on the question of individual capacities that I wish to dwell, at the conclusion of an itinerary that has endeavored to analyze the connection between criticism and recognition.

3.2 THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF RECOGNITION. Brandom's notion of post-Hegelian criticism, as I have remarked, presupposes, as its conditions, the expressive capacities and recognitive authority of individuals. This, in a certain sense, was the key point at issue when Habermas accused Brandom of phenomenalism - How can what appears correct to individuals who have recognitive authority be distinguished from what is correct in the objective sense? - as it was when John

McDowell spoke of the presence in Brandom of a form of methodological individualism (see McDowell 1997 and 1999). I, however, am convinced that in emphasizing this connection Brandom tells us something important about criticism - something, moreover, that reconfirms the connection between criticism and individual self-consciousness that characterized early critical theory - even if I feel that, in the final analysis, the way he understands all this is insufficient. Brandom, in fact, understands the individual's recognitive performance exclusively as social status: the self is capable of recognition insofar as it is recognized as such, so that normative activity does not depend on the individual's primitive properties but rather is pragmatically ascribed. But if this were so - if the individual depended entirely on what is outside him - he could not have that recognitive authority upon which, ultimately, both the possibility of being bound by rules and the possibility of criticizing them depend. Brandom, in my opinion, has an abstract and disembodied understanding of recognitive discursive practices. To solve this problem I believe it would be opportune to adopt, resolutely, an approach to recognition in terms of capacities or potentials - a language that is extraneous to Brandom (even if his new reading of recognition, subsequent to the debate with Habermas, could be developed along these lines: see Brandom 2004). But then again, if it is true that linguistic normative recognition is unthinkable unless it has a social status, it is also true that such performances, too, presuppose more elementary forms of recognition (perceptive recognition, in particular) that cannot be described as normative. The approach to recognition in terms of capacities is thus, in my view, also better able to account for the presence in us both of merely natural, non-normative forms of recognition and of eminently social forms of normative recognition. The very centrality of the recognitive phenomenon in all our biological processes and in cognitive and social processes ought to suggest that there are no good reasons for pitting, as Brandom does, knowledge as the exercise of natural capacities against knowledge as normative status. McDowell has rightly observed that there was no contraposition of this kind in Aristotelian naturalism - which, indeed, was an approach in terms of capacities - or in Hegel's "second natural" naturalism either (see McDowell 1994, pp. 78-86). Rethought in terms of second nature - of habit - normative recognition can be understood, in my opinion, as a capacity we gain through education by socially developing natural potentials. Following a rule, as Wittgenstein showed, in essence means participating in a form of life: it is not an interpretive question but rather something that has the mediated immediacy of a second nature and that is rooted in a form of ethical life (whose immediacy is the result of a process of mediation). In the final analysis it could be said that only in terms of an anthropology of recognition can a consequent comprehension of our normative and critical functions be developed.

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