

# Hegel's Naturalism, the Negative and the First Person Standpoint

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## *Abstract*

In this paper I attempt to move the discussion of Hegel's naturalism past what I present as an impasse between the soft naturalist interpretation of Hegel's notion of *Geist*, in which *Geist* is continuous with nature, and the opposing claim that *Geist* is essentially normative and self-legislating. In order to do so I suggest we look to the question of value which underlies this dispute. While soft naturalists seek to make sense of value as arising from material nature, those who support the autonomy thesis propose that value is something inherent to human spiritual activity. Following McDowell's suggestion that value is neither inhering or supervening on nature, but is rather something we have been estranged from and hence something to be recovered, I suggested that we adopt the first person perspective as the starting point for an examination of the relation between nature and value. The first person perspective is to be understood as a position within value which imbues value to what it encounters and hence is a process of the reenchantment of nature. Seeing things from this perspective allows us to place the question of nature as external materiality (which both the soft naturalist and autonomy view seem to share) in its proper context as something which develops as the result of the self-unfolding activity of consciousness as it encounters nature as negativity. Understanding *Geist* in this way allows us to see value as inherent in nature.

*Keywords:* Hegel, McDowell, Autonomy, First-person Standpoint, Naturalism, Negativity

## Introduction

In this paper I'd like to consider the question of Hegel's naturalism not just against the larger question of the relation between mind and nature but also by considering the perspective from which Hegel thought it proper to do philosophy. The question of naturalism thus becomes a question about the status of human subjectivity itself, or so I will argue. The thrust of much modern philosophy from Descartes on has been to come to terms with the fact-value distinction which it seemed incumbent on the modern subject to make. This distinction, however, brought with it the further question of whether this exclusion of value from nature is to be embraced and philosophy should simply become a subfield of natural

science (as thinkers from La Mettrie to Jerry Fodor have held), or whether this exclusion is itself a cultural or ideological phenomenon which should be understood as prompting the project of a reconciliation of human values with nature. By working through the debate about Hegel's naturalism I shall ultimately argue that the latter is the case in Hegel's philosophy and that the only coherent form such a project of reconciliation with nature can take is that of a first-person account.

A place to begin entering into the debate is to ask what Hegel means by mind or *Geist*. This debate is conceived primarily as a question of how to understand what Hegel is doing in the *Encyclopedia* when he moves between its three parts, Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and Philosophy of Spirit. The question within this more specialized field of Hegel studies which has recently received a lot of attention centers on what is at stake in the transition point into and out of the Philosophy of Nature. The questions underlying the debate about these transition points, however, to the larger one of what Hegel is to be understood as holding some sort of scientific naturalism, that is, as claiming that *Geist* develops *out of* nature. The two views at stake here are what I shall call the continuity view and the autonomy view.<sup>1</sup>

While the continuity view holds that Hegel's conception of *Geist* beholden to nature in some deep sense, the autonomy view holds that what constitutes *Geist* is its proper separateness from nature, its ability to legislate *independently* from nature. The former view is associated with writers who attempt to place Hegel in the context of Aristotle's thought that the soul is continuous with nature, while the latter view is most strongly associated with Robert Pippin's interpretation of Hegel. I will suggest that this debate can be clarified by drawing on John McDowell's account in *Mind and World* which effectively splits the middle, synthesizing both.<sup>2</sup> As a middle position McDowell's position does much to clarify but not to resolve the debate at the epistemic level.

I propose to move the debate forward by looking beyond the *Encyclopedia* to Hegel's position in the *Phenomenology* which, I argue, frames the discussion in the *Encyclopedia* from the standpoint of the development of consciousness. Picking up on McDowell's suggestion that the debate around nature is one of overcoming the disenchantment we have fallen into as a result of the scientific revolution, I propose the *Phenomenology* account as an attempted reconciliation between *Geist* and nature. Such an account, I argue, can only take place from the *first-person* perspective. The first-person perspective of the *Phenomenology* reveals that *all* knowledge, including that achieved in the *Encyclopedia*, is to be understood from the perspective of the subject in such a way that we cannot meaningfully speak of a nature which exists outside or independently of the subject in anything but a notional way. The relation between *Geist* and nature is in this way, I shall argue,

<sup>1</sup> I should note the parallel (and highly relevant) discussion of a similar set of issues in contemporary philosophy of mind by Matt Boyle and in Kant studies by James Conant. Both of these debates challenge what I am calling the continuity view or what Boyle calls the additive view (cf. Boyle 2016, Conant 2016).

<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps odd to suggest that McDowell synthesizes these two approaches since, as a historical matter, at least one central impetus for the debate arose from the publication of McDowell's Aristotelian/Kantian work *Mind and World* in which Hegel turns out to be the point of synthesis.

always already a value-relation since it arises from consciousness' attempt to make sense of itself and its environment.

## Part I: The Naturalism Debate

In the first part of the paper I'd like to present what I take to be three ways of understanding Hegel's discussion of the relation between *Geist* and nature: the continuity view which contends that we can understand *Geist* as emerging out of nature on an Aristotelian view, the autonomy view which argues that for Hegel *Geist* is to be understood as essentially discontinuous with nature and rather as a normative self-relation and, finally, the middle position, associated with John McDowell, which seeks to accommodate both claims. But let me not overstate the point: recent debates around Hegel's naturalism have only run the somewhat tight gamut between what might be called the soft naturalism of the continuity theory and the fairly strong idealism of the autonomy thesis. The purpose of this section is thus to set up a debate which is in need of resolution by attending to the larger question of the perspective from which to understanding of our exclusion from nature.

### 1. Soft Naturalism

The project of giving a naturalistic account of Hegel has attracted many few takers than has the project of giving a metaphysical realist account of his philosophy. Sebastian Gardner has usefully distinguished between soft and hard naturalism in this debate. Gardner sees hard naturalism as substituting natural science for the insights metaphysical has traditionally been said to provide. The move to the idea that natural science contains the answers to questions of value, however, meant that human values not authorized by nature had to be rejected as somehow supernatural. The various attempts to make value intelligible as somehow inhering *in* nature should, according to Gardner, be characterized as soft naturalism because they seek to add value back into nature.<sup>3</sup> Soft naturalism or non-reductive naturalism tries to show that "there is nothing within naturalistic commitment as such that threatens the value-interests of natural consciousness" (Gardner 2007: 28).

The paradigm for soft-naturalism is the Aristotelian claim that:

the soul is in the primary way that by which we live and perceive and think, so that it will be a sort of organization (logos) and a form, but not matter and a substrate. For substance [is either form or matter or] another what is from both; and of these the matter is potentiality and the form actuality. Since what is from both is an ensouled thing, the body is not the actuality of the soul, but the soul is the actuality of some body (Aristotle 2016: 26, 414a12-18).

<sup>3</sup> Gardner 2007: 24. For the thesis that soft naturalism adds value back in see p. 31. This point is also made by Grier (2013: 233-37) who, in the context of an analysis of Hegel's understanding of the mind-body problem, argues that contemporary writers in the Anglo-American tradition on the mind-body problem who are non-reductivist must contend with various problem in adding back in something non-natural to the view of the brain as material.

Evidence for this soft naturalism can be found in Hegel's claim that the basis paradigm of *Geist* developed in the *Phenomenology* even applies to animals:

Nor are the animals excluded from this wisdom. Instead they prove themselves to be the most deeply initiated into it, for they do not stand still in the face of sensuous things, as if those things existed in themselves. Despairing of the reality of those things and in the total certainty of the nullity of those things, they without any further ado simply help themselves to them and devour them (PS §109, 66-67; PG 9: 69).<sup>4</sup>

The secret Hegel refers here is the wisdom of knowing that the sensuous passes, and hence, in the larger sense, that we as subjects are ourselves part of the cause of this transformation.<sup>5</sup>

The general strategy of this approach is to read Hegel's treatment of nature as continuous with the psychic life of *Geist*. This strategy is particularly attractive within the confines of the *Encyclopedia* where Hegel's transitions from Logic to the Philosophy of Nature is represented as that of the same entity and therefore as *continuous* with the previous section.<sup>6</sup> A particularly strong version of this claim is made by Beiser who writes: "Hegel assumes throughout his *Naturphilosophie* that nature exists apart from and prior to human consciousness, and that the development of humanity presupposes and only arises from the prior development of the organic powers of nature".<sup>7</sup> The central claim is that by reflecting on the development of mind out of nature a non-dualistic account of mind can be developed which nevertheless does justice to the essential mindedness of spirit. This approach can also be seen in the discussion of habit which forms a key transition point from the Philosophy of Nature to the Philosophy Spirit in the final part of the *Encyclopedia*.<sup>8</sup>

A different soft naturalist approach has recently been proposed by Alison Stone who argues that we can understand Hegel's naturalism on a spectrum, lying between the two axes of (1) the continuity between the natural science and philosophy and, (2) the level of the rejection of the supernatural. Citing Hegel's claim

<sup>4</sup> In text references to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* will be to Hegel 2018 (as PS with § and page number); reference to the German edition *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, will be to Hegel 1968b (as PG followed by volume number of the *Gesammelte Werke* and page number).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, McCumber's discussion of this passage also with reference to Pippin's discussion of the same passage (McCumber 2013: 80, Pippin 2008).

<sup>6</sup> There has been significant discussion of the status of these transitions, especially the transition from Logic to the Philosophy of Nature. Recent writers have generally agreed with Houlgate that the transition cannot be understood as merely the *application* of the Logic to the Philosophy of Nature but must be seen as dialectical, with the Philosophy of Nature clarifying the metaphysical basis of science and natural science articulating some of the details that the Philosophy of Nature cannot engage with. Houlgate writes: "absolute reason discloses itself actually to be nature itself by proving logically to be immediately self-relating being" (Houlgate 2005: 107). See also Rand (2007: section II) who argues against the a priori nature of the Philosophy of Nature as well as Stone's (2005: 2) claim that Hegel's position is itself not entirely consistent.

<sup>7</sup> Beiser 2005: 68. Other who are tempted by the developmental approach include Winfield who argues that mind develops directly out of nature in a series of three stages: psyche, consciousness and intelligence. Winfield 2007: 107-108.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of habit, see Testa, forthcoming. For a more general approach to this issue see Illetterati 2016.

that “Not only must philosophy be in agreement with our empirical knowledge of Nature, but the *origin* and *formation* of the Philosophy of Nature presupposes and is conditioned by empirical physics”, Stone suggests that for Hegel there is no sharp distinction between science and philosophy since in origin and formation philosophy depends on natural science but in terms of method, science depends on philosophy<sup>9</sup> (PN §246R, 6; 20: 236).<sup>10</sup> On the continuity between natural science and philosophy, Stone argues that Hegel is more of a naturalist than Kant for whom final ends are merely regulative ideals, while on the naturalism-supernaturalism axis Hegel is more naturalistic than Schelling for whom the development of nature and philosophy depends on supernatural polar forces acting on the universe. For Stone, Hegel's concept of life is an immanent natural conception of the relation between nature and mindedness (Stone 2005: 73-74).

Peters, from whom I borrow the characterization of the soft naturalist approach as the continuity approach, suggests that while for Aristotle soul was indeed continuous with nature, this cannot be the case for Hegel who also holds an autonomy view under which nature must be consciously incorporated into subjectivity just as a proposition contains both subject and predicate (Peters 2016: 115, 120). For Peters, there is something irreducible about *Geist* which emerges out of nature.

Gardner has some more general reasons for being skeptical of the explanatory power soft naturalist approaches can offer. Gardner argues that the “having one's cake and eating it too” approach of soft naturalism is inherently unstable because in order to add value back in to the naturalist picture, soft naturalism must rely on a dual aspect view which considers value as both irreducible to nature as well as merely nature depending on which view one takes. But the very question of where to locate value, Gardner argues, is what is in need of either metaphysical or naturalistic explanation: how can a phenomenon be both one of value and also not (Gardner 2007: 30). Indeed, it is precisely the strength of hard naturalism as a substitute for metaphysics that makes soft naturalism questionable as a position. Rather, as Gardner suggests, what soft naturalism is actually trying to do is to approximate idealism's ability to make sense of value but without giving up on some version of the preeminence of the modern science (ibid.: 28). If naturalism is not the answer, then we should look to idealism.

## 2. Idealism and Autonomy

An alternative position to soft naturalism has long been prominent in the interpretation of Hegel and is associated with the positions of Pippin and, I shall argue, to some extent with that of Terry Pinkard. In moving to this interpretation we are moving from an interpretive paradigm which seeks to account for value in terms of what can be learned about nature to one which is thoroughly normative. According to Pippin, the autonomy position endorses the claims “that we are better off leaving nature out of the picture altogether and that doing so begs no questions” (Pippin 2005: 189). Pippin's comment comes in the context of a debate with McDowell about the meaning of just the appropriation of Aristotle by Hegel that was at issue in the continuity approach. For Hegel, Pippin argues,

<sup>9</sup> Stone 2013: 65. For a similar conclusion, see Houlgate 2005: 116.

<sup>10</sup> Hegel 2004: 1968a.

Spirit must be conceived [...] as some sort of collectively achieved, normative human mindedness if it is to be properly rendered intelligible, but doing *this*, as already noted, seems to require some very unusual formulations: that spirit is its own “self-liberation from Nature”, that spirit “is a product of itself” [...] and that its actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) is that it “has made itself into what it is” (PS, 1: 6-7).<sup>11</sup>

Against the continuity approach, Pippin argues that *Spirit* must be conceived as self-authorizing. Underlying this claim is Pippin’s further claim that *Geist* is only “intelligible” as self-authorizing and that other descriptions of *Geist* as nature are “inappropriate” (Pippin 2005: 16). The claim about intelligibility, I believe, fits directly into the debate about whether epistemology can bear the weight of intelligibility: is the something, the item, which perception refers to somehow *determinately* involved in the conceptual response which follows it, *without* being non-conceptually contentful. Put differently, can perception be the ground of intelligibility? The dilemma Pippin poses to McDowell and any others who seek to employ an Aristotelian paradigm is this: either nature is contentful by itself and so can explain the activity of *Geist* (this is essentially the position of the continuity thesis) *or* nature is not itself contentful and hence we do not need to worry about how nature is taken up into *Geist*.<sup>12</sup>

Pippin characterizes the terms of the dispute quite lucidly in a footnote:

It seems quite wrong to deny that a fairly rich, determinate “having the world in view” (McDowell) can come into focus directly in a sensible exchange with the world, without my yet being able to resolve just what it is I am seeing, without my affirmative judgment. But these initial presentations of such a view are wrongly described, I think, as simply “wrung out of us”. I think that we can call such views “a way the world is taken to be” without fearing that this will look like takes on an independently given sensible “material” (Pippin 2016: 69).

Pippin’s point, as he puts it in an earlier version of the debate, is that “the relevant image for our “always already engaged” conceptual and practical capacities in the German Idealist tradition is *legislative power*, not empirical discrimination and deliberative judgment”.<sup>13</sup>

The important point for the general dispute sketched here is that Pippin sides with a normative interpretation against the naturalist view. This view pits the continuity view’s *ontology* against the *normative* account of the autonomy. Pippin, paraphrasing Sellars (I think), puts the point thus: “As in Sellars, so, I think, in Hegel. The core idea: to think of someone as a person is not to ‘classify or explain, but to rehearse an intention’” (Pippin 2008: 61). The key point for Pippin is that the normative must categorically *frame* the natural in the sense that whatever nature we come in contact with must *already* be in some way intelligible to us in terms of our actual normative commitments. Nature, for Pippin, can in this way drop out of the picture as something that cannot be discussed on its own, as the continuity view holds.

<sup>11</sup> Pippin 2005: 16. The references to Hegel are to Hegel 1978: 1, 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Pippin (2016: 65) makes the stronger claim, in agreement with Gardner’s claim just above about the untenability of a soft naturalism, that if we concede that first nature is related to second nature, then second nature must ultimately be reducible to first nature.

<sup>13</sup> Pippin 2005: 197. For a discussion of naturalism which privileges Pippin’s side over McDowell in the context of the naturalism debate see Papazoglou 2012: 25-27.

### 3. McDowell's Middle Position

The two sides of the debate so far outlined consist on the one side of the claim that Hegel's naturalism is to be understood as the development of consciousness from *within* nature in accordance with the categories laid down by the Logic. The other alternative, which I've suggested we call the autonomy view or idealism, is the thought that Hegel is no kind of naturalist at all since for him it is consciousness' relation to itself which is central.

Having delineated both of these positions, it is now time to look at a proposal which walks the line between the two and to which both lines are in a sense responding namely, McDowell's position as it is articulated in *Mind and World*. We can think of McDowell's position as an attempt to draw together the ontological aspect of nature with the normative aspects of mind as judging in such a way that each becomes intelligible only in terms of the other. McDowell writes:

My alternative holds on to the thought rejected by bald naturalism, that the structure of the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*, as compared with the structure of the logical space within which natural-scientific description situates things. Even so, my alternative makes room for us to suppose [...] both that the very idea of experience is the idea of something natural and that empirical thinking is answerable to experience (McDowell 1996: xx).

McDowell seeks to make intelligible the continuity thesis, that is, the immanent relation of what he calls the space of nature to the space of reason but in such a way that it is possible to understand that the space of nature is, by being placed fully *within* the space of reason only intelligible *in terms of* the space of reason but without thereby losing the distinction between the space of nature and the space of reason.

McDowell seeks to mediate between these positions by suggesting that at the epistemic level, nature cannot make sense without the work of conceptual uptake. McDowell articulates this point by using the terms of nature and second nature, arguing that natural-scientific intelligibility is something that humans come to by being initiated into the space of reasons through what he calls second nature.<sup>14</sup> The point then is to understand the acquisition of experience as the process of nature the way science would describe it, being brought *into* the space of reason in the process of "second nature". "Human beings acquire a second nature in part by being initiated into conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong in the logical space of reasons" (ibid.).

Peters has sketched a Hegelian version of this particular thought which is able to go some way in reconciling the continuity view with the autonomy view. Pointing out both that Hegel praises Aristotle for holding a view of the soul as activity and that Hegel also understands the soul as self-differentiating, Peters argues for an autonomy view which is nevertheless beholden to nature in a determinate way. Taking as her example the first moment of the Philosophy of Nature, mechanism, Peters argues that we can understand the externality operating in the mechanism of, in her example, writing letters, as persisting while also understanding the activity of writing as the fully internalized process of *Geist*. Peters argues that the unity which is created between *Geist* and mechanism can be understood as the external having become, *as external* a reflection of *Geist* (Peters 2016: 126).

<sup>14</sup> For an account of first and second nature in McDowell see Testa 2007.

This is an attractive view in the sense that it explicates the necessity of drawing on nature in our spiritual activity in a way that constitutes an acknowledgment of our determination *by* nature as, here, needing to write in order to communicate.

Pinkard's recent account of Hegel's position in *Hegel's Naturalism* has deepened the debate significantly. As Pinkard aptly puts it, "The philosophy of nature thus deals with the kinds of conceptual problems that arise when anything 'finite' is asserted to be the 'unconditioned'" (Pinkard 2012: 20). Pinkard considers the real question of Hegel's philosophy of nature to be the task of rethinking "the nature of our own mindful agency, *Geist*, that we come to see nature as the 'other' of *Geist*. In Hegel's more dialectical terms, 'we' as natural creatures make ourselves distinct from nature" (ibid.). But in pursuing this question, Pinkard argues, Hegel distinguishes sharply between the natural and the sort of awareness which is to be found in self-consciousness. Only the latter, because it is capable of taking its inwardness *as* inwardness, has the capacity for making inferences (ibid.: 29, 27). And this means, for Pinkard, that the human soul is no longer really a soul at all but rather self-conscious agency (ibid.: 30).

This middle position understands the relation between nature and *Geist* in such a way that nature is mediated by the *work* or *activity* of consciousness rather than being given by the "brute facts" of nature. But the middle position is nevertheless careful to acknowledge that this activity is always *prompted* by consciousness' determinate embeddedness in nature.

#### 4. Disenchantment

I said at the outset that I wanted to take the discussion of Hegel's naturalism as the opportunity to reflect on some of the larger questions connected to our modern exclusion from nature and what this means for the question of values as either arising out of nature or being the product of human activity independently of nature. To make some headway here let us look at the question which McDowell's account of nature is intended to address at a deeper level, namely the question of disenchantment. This disenchantment consists, says McDowell, in the experience of being faced with a nature which is excluded from the space of reason as the result of something like the scientific revolution. The choice has either been to accept this disenchantment as bald naturalism does or to side with supernaturalism or, as McDowell puts it, with "rampant platonism [which] has what intelligibility it has as a desperate attempt to keep meaning, conceived as able to come into view only within a *sui generis* logical space, while acquiescing in the disenchantment of nature" (McDowell 1996: 110). Both views, for McDowell, accept disenchantment or, what Gardner characterized as the disappearance of value from nature.

By remaining at the epistemological level the mediating position McDowell advocates still leaves us undecided between the continuity view and the autonomy view.<sup>15</sup> For it, on the face of it, is equally plausible to construct the complete overlap between nature and mind McDowell suggests as proceeding from the perspective of nature, as in the continuity view, and as proceeding from mind, as the autonomy view suggests.

<sup>15</sup> See Peters 2016: 120. Cf. Grier (2013: 225-26) who sees Hegel's answer to the problem of mind-body interaction as lying in his claim that mind and body, spirit and nature, must overlap to a significant extent without taking a side in the debate between the continuity and the autonomy view.



However, if we attend to McDowell's metaphor of disenchantment, we can see in which way to take the idea of a second nature. McDowell argues that using the concept of second nature allows us to "refuse to equate that domain of intelligibility with nature, let alone with what is real" by constructing a "knowing" alternative to disenchantment (McDowell 1996: 109). This alternative, McDowell suggests, would be equip Kantian spontaneity with something like second nature.<sup>16</sup> This would allow us to see that "an experiencing and acting subject is a living thing, with active and passive bodily powers that are genuinely her own; she is herself embodied, substantially present in the world that she experiences and acts on" (ibid.: 111). Second nature should to be understood in an experiential or *first personal* way rather than as something that merely *happens* to the subject. Yes, second nature is still the experience of finding ourselves affected by nature and of responding to this first nature but this response is now conceived of as *the activity of the subject*. Second nature is now revealed to be active, the equivalent to Kantian spontaneity, while first nature is conceived of as Kantian receptivity.

The fundamental point is that it is only from a first-person perspective that something like a reenchantment can even begin to make sense because the project of *owning* or *authorizing* one's response to nature can only ever be something which the subject can do for herself. Bald naturalism can be exorcized only if we realize that the account of spontaneity or of meaning making is itself sufficient to generate the meaning we need. To be tempted by more meaning, meaning which goes beyond nature, would then to be to return to supernaturalism but to settle for less would be to sell ourselves short.

### 5. Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the First Person Standpoint

I have just argued that the proper way to read the dispute between those who argue for the continuity thesis and those who argue for the autonomy thesis in the debate about what Hegel means by nature can be resolved by understanding the debate itself to be framed by the question of whether a third-person or a first-person view is to be privileged.<sup>17</sup> I've just suggested that McDowell argues for the latter. I will now argue that Hegel's *Phenomenology* frames the *Encyclopedia* account as a first-personal account.

What is at issue, fundamentally, is the question of how we understand value. Is value something which exists somehow independently of us in nature and which can be grasped, does it exist in a supernatural realm which can be grasped as a "fact", or is value rather something what we imbue to nature. The first option is, with qualifications, that of soft naturalism, the second that of a theological perspective which we have not discussed. The third position is held both by autonomy and the middle position. The contrast between the first two perspectives and the third can be elucidated, I claim, in terms of two types of perspectives on nature they hold. Reversing the order let us take the autonomy/middle position first.

Let me call the autonomy/middle position the engineering model and the soft naturalism position that of philosophical naturalism.<sup>18</sup> The engineering

<sup>16</sup> For a reading of McDowell on Kant, see Bird-Pollan 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Peters (2016: 121) has noted the fact that the *Encyclopedia* can be read equally from a first and a third person perspective but that the standpoint of *Geist* is essentially that of the first person.

<sup>18</sup> For a similar distinction to the one I am proposing between naturalism and engineering, see Kuhn 1977. The distinction I am tracking is also the one employed by Heidegger

model of science takes it, as the name suggests, that our investigations into nature are essentially in the service of human projects like building better bridges, producing better crops or developing new techniques for teaching literacy. Here it is science which is made relevant to the human values which precede it. Value is not something that escapes us but something that we bestow upon nature by turning nature to our ends.<sup>19</sup> I characterize this model as first-personal because nature is here seen as continuous with human projects, hence as essentially intelligible *from within human life itself*.

The second model, philosophical naturalism, might be characterized as the radicalization of the engineering model, moving from the occasional failure of our construction projects to the Cartesian notion of radical doubt which presents nature as essentially other to us and as therefore standing in need of being given meaning *as a whole*.<sup>20</sup> The reason I characterize this perspective as third-personal is that here the conception of nature is one of an outsider looking *in*, inspecting something of which she is not part.

McDowell puts the distinction I've been drawing thus:

According to my picture, an important element in this clarification of the proper target of natural science was an increasingly firm awareness that we must sharply distinguish natural-scientific understanding from the kind of understanding achieved by situating what is understood in the logical space of reasons; that is, precisely, that the structure of the logical space of reasons is *sui generis* (McDowell 1996: xxii).

Reenchantment, as McDowell argues, consists of exorcizing the thought that the proper way to understand nature is from a perspective which is *sui generis*, that is, *independent* from that of human activity. We need to return to something like the engineering model.

I'd now like to suggest that the same worry underlies Hegel's thinking in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* in which he considers the problem of how to understand a science of consciousness in a way which avoids the picture of the subject looking in on nature and itself from the outside. The project is to reenchant nature by making it intelligible that *Geist* is essentially engaged in the project seeking to become at home with itself. By this I do not mean to suggest that we should conceive of Hegel as sanctifying all aspects of the present but merely as suggesting that certain kinds of anxieties about our relation to nature have been concerning us in a way which has prevented us from attending to the full potential of human freedom.

## Part II: Hegel's Introduction: The Path of Consciousness

I'd now like to turn to Hegel's account of the project he proposes to undertake in the *Phenomenology*. The aim is to substantiate the claim that Hegel is interested in showing that the modern conception of the opposition between consciousness and nature needs to be replaced by a conception of the reconciled subject and that

in his distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand (cf. Heidegger 1962: §22).

<sup>19</sup> For a historical perspective on this model see Shapin 1996: ch. 3.

<sup>20</sup> This move has been noted by writers in the Anglo-American tradition as well as by those in the German tradition. See, for instance, Williams 2005: 22; Klein 1936: 208.

this account is essentially given from what I've been calling the first-person point of view which is compatible with the view that nature is the site of value.

The task will thus be twofold: first I'll argue that the first three paragraphs of the Introduction (§§73-75) give an account of the problem of disenchantment or alienation of the subject from nature much as it appeared in McDowell. That is, I shall argue, following for instance Georg Bertram, that the position we find ourselves in at the beginning of the *Phenomenology* is not the position of any particular historical position but rather, as Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer puts it, that of a "philosophical mystification" of ourselves with regard to the world.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, I'll argue that the program articulated in the Introduction should be read as proposing that only a first personal standpoint can make sense of the subject's relation to nature. In proposing to understand Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* as a first-person account I follow suggestions made both by Pinkard and by Stekeler-Weithofer. Pinkard's interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as the "sociality of reason" which holds that self-consciousness

is not the awareness of a set of internal objects (sensations, mental occurrences, representations, whatever). To use a metaphor, self-consciousness is at least minimally the assumption of a position in "social space". We locate ourselves in "social space" when, for example, we reason in various ways; or when we assume various roles; or when we demand a certain type of treatment because of who we think we are (Pinkard 1994: 7).

For Pinkard (ibid.: 8), Hegel's account of knowledge is one of the authorization of the standards which govern meaning in the community through reason-giving and the immanent critique of that reason giving. As self-authorization this account is essentially first-person *plural*. There is no external standard beyond the community of reason-givers to which one can appeal in understanding the nature to which the *Geist* is subject.

Similarly Stekeler-Weithofer suggests that we should construe what Hegel means by science as a first-personal communal knowing. As he puts it, "das Kriterium des subjektiven Wissens im Ich-Modus ist ein Wissen im Wir-Modus. Ein solches Wissen setzt entsprechende Wir-Kriterien der Wahrheit voraus, und das je zu der Zeit oder Epoche, die zu betrachten ist" (Stekeler-Weithofer 2014: 360). I take it that the position articulated here by Pinkard and Stekeler-Weithofer is also consistent with positions endorsed, for instance, by Robert Brandom (2019) and, of course, by Pippin. In turning to the question of the first-person interpretation of the relation between consciousness and nature we are leaving behind both soft naturalism and the family squabble between McDowell and Pippin in order to focus on how consciousness is to understand itself as reconcilable with nature.

## 1. The Disenchantment of Modern Philosophy

Hegel begins the *Phenomenology* with a rejection of the problem that he had inherited from philosophical naturalism:

<sup>21</sup> See Bertram 2017: 35; "Was also tun wir Sinnvolles, so lautet die Frage, wenn wir unserem Wissen eine Welt gegenüberstellen und unserem Erkennen eine objektive Natur an sich, die ist, wie sie ist? Und warum tendieren wir dazu, diese Gegenüberstellungen metaphysisch zu mystifizieren und damit misszuverstehen?" (Stekeler-Weithofer 2014: 364).

It is a natural supposition that in philosophy, before one gets down to dealing with what is at issue, namely, the actual cognition of what, in truth, is, it is first necessary to come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded as the instrument by which one seizes hold of the absolute or as the means by which one catches sight of it (PS §73, 49; PG 9: 53).

Hegel is quite clear that he does not regard this “natural supposition” of the division between subject and nature as innocent. For, as he suggests, the idea that we should employ tools or a method for the investigation of nature is itself based on a “fear of error” which undermines the more innocent notion of science (as engineering) which concerns itself with laws only to the extent that they help us explain phenomena. The fear of failure is what ratchets up the need for intermediaries, paradigmatically the application of mathematics to sciences.<sup>22</sup>

[I]f the concern about falling into error sets up a mistrust of science, which itself, untroubled by such scruples, simply sets itself to work and actually cognizes, it is still difficult to see why on the contrary a mistrust of this mistrust should not be set up and why one should not be concerned that this fear of erring is already the error itself (PS §74, 50; PG 9: 54).

It is a pathology of philosophical naturalism to think that science must search for more and more severe methods of ensuring its truth. The problem is that the error cannot be guarded against by a method or tools which are themselves independent of the very problem they are meant to address. Hegel summarizes the problem thus:

[The new science] presupposes that the absolute stands *on one side* and that *cognition stands on the other* for itself, and separated from the absolute, though cognition is nevertheless something real; that is, it presupposes that cognition, which, by being outside of the absolute, is indeed also outside of the truth, is nevertheless truthful; an assumption through which that which calls itself the fear of error gives itself away to be known rather as the fear of truth (PS §75, 50; PG 9: 54).

For the moment, let us follow Stekeler-Weithofer’s (2014: 363) suggestion that we should think of the “absolute” simply as the generic object separate from its particular appearance. Hegel’s point can then be understood to be saying that philosophical naturalism wants to have it both ways: it wants, on the one hand, to claim that *it* has the power of knowing how nature is qua generic object (hence stripped of the way it appears) which means that philosophical naturalism has arrogate to itself the *power* of cognition. On the other hand, philosophical naturalism wants to claim that what it cognizes is *not* a product of its own activity but lies somehow *in nature* ready to be taken. The point is that cognition cannot at once be the authoritative source of knowledge and also the passive recipient of knowledge.

<sup>22</sup> This is how I read the passage at the end of §73: “if the testing of cognition which we suppose to be a medium made us acquainted with the law of its refraction, it would be just as useless to subtract this refraction from the result, for it is not the refraction of the ray but rather the ray itself through which the truth touches us that is cognition, and if this is subtracted, then all that would be indicated to us would be just pure direction or empty place” (PS 50; PG 9: 54).

## 2. Natural Consciousness and the First Person Perspective

We now arrive at the second element in Hegel's account I propose to investigate. After looking at the problem of the disenchantment which Hegel diagnoses in the position of traditional philosophical attitudes, we turn to the question of the reenchantment of nature by addressing the problem of the standpoint of Hegel's investigation. It has been my argument that only from the first person standpoint can something like the attribution of value make sense because the first-person standpoint exists *prior* to the separation of facts from their meaning for our projects.

It is, Hegel says, not enough to have pointed out the mistakes of the position just encountered, a new understanding of reality will have to be developed. Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* is to make plausible the first-person standpoint by showing that only it can make sense of the relation between consciousness and nature. In proposing such a position, Hegel is fully aware of the temptation of the model of philosophical naturalism and so offers the reader a way of thinking about philosophical naturalism as something to be overcome through the development of the new model of first-personal consciousness. It is not enough, in other words, to move from the naturalist paradigm we have just seen to take refuge in the engineering paradigm I outlined earlier. In these matters “*one* arid assurance is just as valid as another” (PS §76, 52; PG 9: 56). The point is rather to *show* that only the first-person standpoint can be successful in accounting for our relation to nature. To do so would be to offer a partial reenchantment of nature in the sense of revealing that human subjectivity is *already* involved in the meaning of “nature”.

To this effect, Hegel offers a new beginning in what he calls “natural consciousness”. Natural consciousness is supposed to be a position which does not take for granted anything or which, we could say, is still devoid of the temptation to do so.<sup>23</sup> Hegel says:

This standpoint [from which the exposition starts] can [...] be taken to be the path of natural consciousness pressing forward towards true knowing, or it can be taken to be the path of the soul wandering through the series of ways it takes shape, as if these were stations put forward in advance to it by its own nature, so that it purifies itself into spirit by arriving at a cognition of what it is in itself through the complete experience of its own self (PS §77, 52; PG 9: 55).

The key point here is that Hegel places the two basic elements, *Geist* and nature, cognition and what is, which traditionally are conceived as spatio-temporally separated, *into the subject itself*. He is thereby repeating Kant's Copernican turn of understanding mind as constituted by spontaneity's response to receptivity (Kant 1996: A50/B74). This means, in an initial expression of the first person perspective, that the subject has only itself to look to as a source of self-understanding.

Of course this move to the first person perspective hardly settled the issue since from the perspective of natural consciousness precisely nothing is yet decided. However, and this is the important point for us, the idea of the *internal*

<sup>23</sup> Fulda (2008: 24-25) suggests a long list of preconceptions about natural conscious' position that are to be avoided, chief among these are that natural consciousness is not to be supposed to have an “object” independent of itself and that what “truly is” need not be or belong to nature at all.

relation of mind to nature is, for Hegel, the correct perspective from which to launch the investigation.

### 3. Appearance, Negativity and Skepticism

Hegel characterizes the “scientific” position natural consciousness finds itself in as an appearance, and suggests that science must free itself from this appearance by “turning against appearance” (PS §76, 51; PG 9: 55). Turning against appearance is something that, Hegel says, *happens* to the subject immanently: “while [natural consciousness’ immediately] regards itself rather as real knowing, this path has negative meaning for it, and what is the realization of the concept will count instead, to it, as the loss of itself, for on this path, it loses its truth” (PS §78, 52; PG 9: 56). The point is straightforward in the sense that natural consciousness must regard certain things as true and can do so by applying a concept. However, because the concept is only limited (an appearance of truth) it will eventually be revealed to fail but will do so on *immanent* terms, that is as the failure of a conception that consciousness has itself posited. This failure will then be prompting natural consciousness to renew its efforts to make sense of its position.

Hegel’s strategy synthetic in that he works through other position to achieve his own. Accordingly, in the Introduction he presents the process of achieving knowledge in terms of a conception which is already familiar to his readers, that of skepticism.<sup>24</sup> Hegel characterizes skepticism in two ways, as a meta-conception connected to philosophical naturalism and as closer to the trial and error model implicit in the engineering model.

Skepticism is first taken up as the *meta*-insight of the subject who finds that repeated failures to grasp the world constitute not just particular failures against a background of stability or trust but rather a “path of despair” (PS §78, 52; PG 9: 56). Hegel elaborates:

this path is the conscious insight into the untruth of knowing as it appears, a knowing for which that which is the most real is rather in truth only the unrealized concept. Thus this self-consummating skepticism is also not what earnest zeal for truth and science surely thinks it has prepared and equipped itself with so that it might be ready for truth and science (PS §78, 52; PG 9: 56).

The meta-insight offered by skepticism thus returns us to the conceptual level of philosophical naturalism. Skepticism or philosophical naturalism demands knowledge without having worked through nature to achieve this knowledge. Knowledge is thus *posited* as something of which humans are both capable and incapable. Skepticism is the positing of a radical spontaneity of mind incapable of interfacing with nature on the one hand and a concomitant claim that this spontaneity should also be able to bridge the gap thereby set up to nature. This is the same thought as the thought that humans are both authorized (actively) to make claims about nature and that nature (passively) lays itself bare for human investigation, just with emphasis on the necessary failure of this project rather

<sup>24</sup> For a helpful review of the many different interpretations of Hegel’s notion of skepticism see Speight 2010. Speight himself suggests that Hegel’s notion combines the insight of Pyrrhonism that thought should take nothing for granted with a more modern existential sense of skepticism (cf. Speight 2010: 149). This approach sits well with the interpretation I offer here.

than on its success. This dilemma is what I take Hegel to mean by saying that skepticism is “self-consuming”.

In the second “engineering” sense, however, skepticism captures a more pedestrian notion of the persistence of the negative.

[T]he skepticism which is directed at the entire range of consciousness as it appears, makes spirit for the first time competent to test what truth is, by this kind of skepticism bringing about a despair regarding the so-called natural conceptions, thoughts, and opinions (PS §78, 53; PG 9: 56).

The persistence of doubt about whether consciousness has in its *particular* claims found the right concept is what allows a movement toward truth. Progress is made, Hegel says, by consistently testing or evaluating knowledge claims which arise immanently (are “natural conceptions”) in terms of the projects consciousness seeks or is driven to undertake. Here values proceed knowledge claims, making knowledge claims testable in terms of the values the subject wishes to achieve.

The experience of “appearance” (what is thought to be true) turning out to be *merely* appearance (*merely* a claim) is the basic motor of Hegel’s thinking in the *Phenomenology* and elsewhere and constitutes determinate negation.<sup>25</sup> Through determinate negation, skepticism—rightly understood—is shown not only to be negative but also to have a positive result:

while the result [of skeptical inquiry] is grasped as it is in truth, as *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation, the transition is made whereby the progression through the complete series of shapes comes about on its own accord (PS §79, 53; PG 9: 57).

Skepticism, Hegel argues, should not simply be understood as the annihilation of content but rather as a stepping back from content in order to allow new content to become available to be considered in its own right.

The idea of determinate negation is already implicit in Kant’s claim that spontaneity responds to receptivity in the sense that spontaneity, in subsuming intuition under a concept, gives the intuition a determinate content. Determinate negation is also implicit in McDowell’s claim that in order for the cognition to even *be* involved in the understanding of nature, nature (as receptivity) must be drawn on *in* cognition thereby rendering the impingement of nature something determinate.

If determinate negation is indeed the process which drives the development of Hegel’s thought this leads to a new conception of the natural. We have already seen that Hegel’s turn to the first person perspective means that there cannot, at the outset at least, be talk of the opposition between consciousness and nature as external since the relation of material externality, such as it is assumed in philosophical naturalism, is still unfounded. I would thus like to suggest that for Hegel the idea of nature can therefore best be understood in its most generic sense, as determinate negation, that is, as the continued “appearance” of an incongruence with the currently employed conceptual scheme. This is the core of the claim I attributed to McDowell against Pipping, namely that the failure of consciousness’

<sup>25</sup> Brandom (2019: ch. 2) characterizes determinate negation as Hegel’s central metaphysical assumption. See also Stekeler-Weithofer 2014: 356. For an overview see Moyar 2011: 28-29.

self-conception arises immanently, that is, in such a way which cannot be normatively explained.

It is the task of Hegel's *Phenomenology* in general to reconstruct the various relation between negativity and consciousness which lead us to talk about materially external relation as well as socially external relations. But the *Phenomenology* does not presuppose these relations, it developed them out of the notion of determinate negation as the mere disturbance or impingement of nature on consciousness.

#### 4. Bildung

From this perspective, then, the process of seeking and constructively failing to grasp the natural can be understood as what Hegel calls *Bildung*, and what we earlier saw McDowell describe as second nature. "The series of the figurations of consciousness which consciousness traverses on this path is the full history of the cultivation [*Bildung*] of consciousness itself into science" (PS §78, 52; GW 9: 56). Hegel's point is that the succession of attempts is itself the development and extension of the conceptual schema of *Geist* in general. This is a way of understanding nature as negativity as not merely prompting but also anchoring or grounding the development of our shared way of understanding the world.

Indeed, the notion of *Bildung* makes important contact with many of the issues raised in the discussion of Hegel's naturalism. There, as we saw, one of the chief questions was to what extent *Geist* should be understood as an actualization of some natural properties, as in the soft naturalism reading, or as the achievement of a certain sort of self-consciousness which is particular to spirit but not to animals, for instance, as the autonomy view held. McDowell himself seems to remain neutral here, modeling *Bildung* on initiation into a language in which "a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene" (McDowell 1996: 125). The point of *Bildung* in the sense that I am interpreting it is that it is to be understood as the status of a certain orientation which the subject achieves for itself. On this view, the idea of an "initiation" has the status both of something that the subject *does* and that she *undergoes*. A subject may, after some time of learning French, *find* herself speaking and understanding French. What matters here is that this experience will be something that is intelligible essentially from within the first-personal experience of the subject.

The idea of speaking a language as an achievement allows us to see that while speaking a language cannot be conceived of as something that one either does or does not do, according to some external standard, there is nevertheless a strong sense in which speaking a language is dependent on being able to perform certain recognizable functions within that language. These tasks are a matter of an intersubjective agreement of what competence in a language consists in. The notion of *Bildung* here allows us to see that the first person perspective replaces the internal-external distinction to be found in the soft-naturalism perspective with a first-person *singular*-first-person *plural* distinction.

The development of consciousness can thus be seen as a sort of self-legislation, just as Pippin suggests, in the following sense: consciousness resolves the problem (negativity) it faces by proposing a conceptual solution. This conceptual solution, however, is meant to be universally valid, that is, valid not just for itself



but for any consciousness. Hence it is meant to be valid in the first-person plural. But as valid only from a universal perspective, it still may fail to do justice to the particular of consciousness' own undergoing and so be called into question again by the very consciousness which posited the solution. So the dialectic of making sense of the negative swings back and forth between the first person singular and plural. The way in which this model diverges from Pippin's autonomy model, and the way in which it does not leave nature behind, is that the model I am attributing to Hegel following McDowell *does* include an indigestible remnant of negativity which is not subsumable fully into normativity. Self-legislation is always, on this model, done in terms of a need which cannot be given a conceptual articulation. The notion of this negativity most forcefully expressed in T. W. Adorno's notion of the non-identical.<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusion

In this paper I've tried to move the discussion of Hegel's naturalism past what I presented as an impasse between the soft naturalist interpretation of Hegel's notion of *Geist* developing out of material nature and the opposing claim that *Geist* is essentially normative and self-legislating. In order to do so I suggest we look to the question of value which underlies this dispute. While soft naturalists seek to make sense of value as arising from material nature, those who support the autonomy thesis propose that value is something inherent to human spiritual activity. Following McDowell's suggestion that value as neither inhering or supervening on nature, but is rather something to be recovered, I suggested that we adopt the first person perspective as the starting point for an examination of the relation between nature and value. The first person perspective is to be understood as a position within value which imbues value to what it encounters. Seeing things from this perspective allows us to place the question of nature as external materiality (which both the soft naturalist and autonomy view seem to share) in its proper context as something which develops as the result of the self-unfolding activity of consciousness as it encounters nature as negativity. Understanding *Geist* in this way allows us to see value as inherent in nature.

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<sup>26</sup> "To define identity as the correspondence of the thing-in-itself to its concept is hubris; but the ideal of identity must not simply be discarded. Living in the rebuke that the thing is not identical with the concept is the concept's longing to become identical with the thing" (Adorno 1992: 149; 1970: 152).

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