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Willem A. deVries

BRANDOM AND THE SPIRIT OF HEGEL

In his essay "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism," Robert Brandom notes a problem that seems to strike at the very core of Hegel's philosophical enterprise. According to Brandom, Hegel is committed to three jointly incompatible theses:

- (1) Spirit is a self-conscious self.
- (2) Self-conscious selfhood is an essentially *social* achievement, requiring actual recognition *of* and *by* an *other*, to whom the individual self achieving self-consciousness in this way is then bound in a cognitive *community*.
- (3) Spirit has no other; there is nothing "outside" it (228).¹

In the course of his essay, Brandom believes he shows us "how to respond to the puzzle I raised about how to understand Hegel's talk of spirit as a whole as a self-conscious individual *self*, in the context of his insistence on the irreducibly *social* character of the achievement of self-consciousness" (234). I am going to argue that the response to this problem that Brandom has in mind is, in fact, inadequate.

Obviously, before I can argue that Brandom's proposed response is inadequate, we need to understand the problem more fully, especially the complex second claim in the inconsistent triad and the notion of a "cognitive community." The first section of this paper reviews Brandom's story concerning selfhood, recognition, and the other. The second section discusses how this general story applies to Hegel's concept of Spirit. In the third section the adequacy of Brandom's proposed response to the problematic triad will be found wanting. The fourth considers the lessons to be taken.

¹ Parenthetical citations in the text will all be to R. B. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, Cambridge/Mass., 2002.

1.

The idealist thesis Brandom investigates in his essay is that the unity and structure of the concept is the same as the unity and structure of a *self*. Post-Kantian Idealists, whatever they thought Kant might have gotten wrong, recognized the brilliance of his treatment of the self, and extended and adapted that treatment to other objects of philosophical concern, including concepts, community, and the Absolute itself. Brandom's main concern is how this strategy might still be useful in modern semantic theory, especially how it might help the pragmatist illuminate the claim that it is the *use* of concepts that determines their *content*. So the notion of self is at the core of his reflections.

According to Brandom, for both Kant and Hegel, being a self is essentially a matter of possessing a certain *normative status*. Despite its surface grammar, possessing a normative status is not like being solid or having a mass; that is, a normative status is neither a monadic nor a natural property that something can have regardless of its context. Having a normative status is ultimately, like being tall, a complex relational property, a property something can have only by having not just one, but a complex of relations to other things; that is why it is only superficially a monadic property.

Furthermore, the context in which the relations essential to having normative status must exist is a *social* context. Perhaps still more important is that having a normative status is attitude-dependent. Brandom says, "Normative statuses are a kind of social status" (216). Like other social statuses, something's having a normative status is a matter of the attitudes people in the society have towards the thing. "[T]o call something a self, to treat it as an 'I,' is to take up an essentially *normative* attitude toward it. It is to treat it as the subject of *commitments*, as something that can be *responsible*—hence as a potential knower and agent" (216). As a first approximation, something's *being* a self, its *having* that particular normative status, *is* its being *treated* as an "I" or a potential knower and agent. Selves are constituted by social institution. That is why having a normative status is not what we would normally call a natural property.

This formulation is only a *first* approximation in that a society is not unconstrained in what it can treat as a self or person. Society is

itself a collective of selves and does not stand overagainst them as an absolutely foreign other, for society is constituted through the mutual recognition of selves as belonging to a common context in which there is a shared recognition of authority. Among other consequences, this means that society cannot be entirely arbitrary in what it treats as a self. The significant condition—a normative condition—on society's (properly) treating something as a self or person is that the thing so treated be capable of reciprocating and treating the others in society and society itself as selves.

The practical attitude of taking or treating something as able to undertake commitments and be responsible for its doings ... Hegel calls "recognition" [*Anerkennung*]. The core idea structuring Hegel's social understanding of selves is that they are synthesized by *mutual recognition*. That is, to be a self—a locus of conceptual commitment and responsibility—is to be taken or treated as one by those one takes or treats as one: to be recognized by those one recognizes. (216–17)

Brandom thus asserts that we find here a social theory of the self in two senses: (1) selves can be achieved only by social beings, and (2) selves and societies are constituted by the same process. I will return to point (2) in a moment, for there are some problems with Brandom's claim that self and community are constituted by the "same process." But we need first to finish exploring the relation of reciprocal recognition among individuals before worrying about the status of communities.

There is more at stake in the story of mutual recognition than the selves involved, for there are really *two concurrent* stories here. One is the story of the constitution of selves and communities; the other is the story of the constitution of *authority*. The recognition by which the normative status is awarded that is constitutive of being a self is *itself* normative. It is subject to standards of appropriateness and of correctness. Acts of recognition can be done correctly or incorrectly; they can also be misdirected, for instance, when the thing recognized is not the kind of thing capable of reciprocity. In an act of recognition, the recognizer at least implicitly arrogates to herself the *authority*, the *right*, to act on, implement, or invoke that background of commitments and responsibilities, those rules that define and constitute the authority essential to the being of the normative. How does one come

by such authority? What is at stake is the very being of the normative itself.

Authority is itself a problematic property. Brandom rightly points out that Hegel is a son of the Enlightenment in this regard.

Enlightenment conceptions of the normative are distinguished by the essential role they take to be played by normative *attitudes* in instituting normative *statuses*. Commitment and responsibilities are seen as coming into a disenchanted natural world hitherto void of them, as products of human attitudes of acknowledging, endorsing, undertaking, or attributing them. (218)

Now Hegel's world is not the disenchanted natural world of his Enlightenment predecessors, but he does accept the line of thought, developed by Rousseau and Kant, according to which the distinction between a merely coercive and alien *force* that would dictate one's behavior and a legitimate *authority* that imposes a normative constraint on one is precisely one's *endorsement* or *acknowledgment* of the authority as binding on one. No one has authority by nature, except over himself—*power* is natural, but the question of its *legitimacy* is always germane. The only thing that can bind one normatively is oneself, via one's acknowledgment, endorsement, or acceptance of some rule or standard. It is, ultimately, the recognition of the authority as an authority that constitutes its authority.

Thus, in recognizing another as a self or person, one arrogates authority to oneself, but if one could simply give oneself authority by arrogating it to oneself, then the crucial acts of *making* a commitment and *taking* responsibility that are tied to normativity and authority would turn out to be empty. "If whatever I acknowledge *as* correct—as fulfilling the obligations I have undertaken—is correct, then in what sense is what I did in the first place intelligible as *binding* myself?" (219). Authority is, in fact, objectively present only to the extent that it can be made determinate and non-arbitrary. And it turns out that one cannot make one's authority determinate and non-arbitrary all by oneself. That is why the recognition that is constitutive of the self must be reciprocal.

It is up to the individual whom to recognize. But it is not up to the individual whether those individuals then in turn recognize the

original recognizer. Only when this “movement” is completed is a self constituted (217).

If I bind myself, I make a *particular* commitment; I undertake some responsibilities, but not others. My authority is not plenipotentiary. According to Brandom, the mutuality of recognition affords an answer to the problem of the determinacy of one’s commitments and standards. Demanding that recognition must be mutual in order to exist at all enables us to distinguish between the *force* of a particular commitment or rule and the *content* of the commitment or rule. *That* one is committed to something or endorses a certain rule or standard is up to one; but the content of the commitment one thereby makes or the content of the rule or standard one accepts is *not* up to one. If I promise to wash up after dinner, for instance, it is up to me to enter into that commitment. But it is not up to me then to stop short in acting on that commitment and say “But I meant only the plates and flatware; I didn’t mean I’d do the pots and pans.” That’s not what I said and not the commitment I entered into.

Hegel’s idea is that the determinacy of the content of what you have committed yourself to—the part that is *not* up to you in the way that *whether* you commit yourself to it is up to you—is secured by the attitudes of *others*, to whom one has at least implicitly granted that authority. His thought is that the only way to get the requisite distance from my acknowledgments (my attitudes, which make the norm binding on me in the first place), while retaining the sort of authority over my commitments that the Rousseau–Kant tradition insists on, is to have the norms *administered* by someone else. (220)

What one is committed to by word or deed is never a matter of one’s arbitrary or subjective decision or belief. One’s word or deed commits one to what the community, that is, oneself and those who recognize one, takes it to commit one to, and this can be a complex matter to establish.

The actual *content* of the commitment one undertakes by applying a concept (paradigmatically, by using a word) is the product of a process of *negotiation* involving the reciprocal attitudes, and the reciprocal authority, of those who *attribute* the commitment and the one who *acknowledges* it. (221)

Being a self or person with specific or determinate commitments, responsibilities, obligations, etc. is possible only in a social context of mutually recognitive beings.

According to Brandom, mutual recognition is essentially involved in the synthesis or constitution not only of selves, but of societies as well.

At the same time and by the same means that *selves*, in this normative sense, are synthesized, so are *communities*, as structured wholes of selves all of whom recognize and are recognized by one another. Both selves and communities are normative structures instituted by reciprocal recognition. (217)

Unfortunately, Brandom does not expand further on the social constitution of communities by mutual recognition. Selves are constituted by reciprocal recognition of other selves; but the thought does not seem to be that communities are constituted by reciprocal recognition of other communities. Rather, the endnote Brandom includes at this point, which indicates that “[f]or Hegel, true general recognition is an equivalence relation: symmetric, reflexive, and transitive” (387), hints that communities are simply equivalence classes of mutually recognizing individuals. That is, a mutual recognition event forms a community between the recognitive individuals. Since true general recognition is an equivalence relation, through any mutual recognition event one automatically enters into a community of all those recognized by those one recognizes as well. But such a community is clearly only an *implicit* community at best. It certainly does not seem to be the case that the community must recognize itself *as* a community, nor does it seem to be necessary that the individuals in this implicit community recognize their community to be the entire equivalence class.

Some things Brandom says mask this important fact.

In recognizing others, I in effect institute a community—a kind of *universal* common to those others, and if all goes well, to me too. If they recognize me in turn, they constitute me as something more than just the particular I started out as—a kind of *individual* (self), which is that *particular* (organism) *as* a member of the community, *as* characterized by that universal. (218)

It is tempting to read the idea that others constitute me *as* a member of the community to mean that these others have the concept of a community (a universal that applies to both of us) and explicitly apply it to me (as well as to themselves). But nothing Brandom offers us forces this move. In virtue of recognition, I am in a community with my recognizer and, implicitly, all those others she recognizes and those recognized by them. But I need not be aware of that community as such; there does not even seem to be a requirement that I have the concept of community in any explicit form in order to engage in recognition. There need be no self-consciousness of the community within the community.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, Brandom asserts that communities are constituted by the “same process” that constitutes selves, and here’s how Brandom explicates that claim:

The (recognizing) particular accordingly exercises a certain sort of authority over the universal, and the universal then exercises a certain sort of authority over the individual. It is at something like this level of abstraction that we find a common structure between the social institution of selves and communities by reciprocal recognition and the relation between concepts, as universals, and the particulars that fall under them, yielding the characterized individuals (particulars *as* falling under universals) that are presented by judgment. (218)

This is actually a fairly important move for Brandom, for the overall claim of his article—that Hegel’s idealistic claim that concepts are structured like selves has much to teach us—in my view plays more on an analogy between the self–community relation and the word–language or concept–conceptual framework relation than it does on any structure strictly analogous to the self–self relations that lie at the root of the whole scheme. The basic relation of mutual recognition between selves is, let me call it, a *horizontal* relation between two beings of the same kind. The relation between self and community is clearly different; we can call it a *vertical* relation for contrast, because the community is composed of the recognitive individuals it contains and stands as a universal overagainst them. There is a kind of base–superstructure form present here.

Now, Hegel does often treat selves, persons, as universals that, for instance, synthesize their manifold sensory experiences or their

many inclinations and desires. But the recognition relation is, at base, individual to individual, and analogues that relate universals as such to individuals need to have that difference acknowledged. Brandom recognizes this and provides for it later in the paper, when he points out that

[t]he model of the sort of reciprocal recognition that institutes *selves* and their *communities* applies to the institution and application of concepts in experience at two levels. First, it describes the relations of reciprocal authority that relate *particulars* to the *universals* or determinate concepts that they fall under Second, it describes the relations of reciprocal authority that relate determinate concepts to one another. (224)

But here again, we find a blithe assurance that it is the *same* relation involved at both levels.

Individuals, which are particulars characterized by concepts,² and determinate concepts are simultaneously instituted or synthesized—just as in the model, individual self-conscious selves, *as* members of a community (as characterized by a universal), and their communities (universals) are simultaneously instituted or synthesized. (224)

Brandom's set-up of the issues concerning recognition and authority seems deliberately to mask the differences between the horizontal and the vertical recognition relations.

I am not complaining that Brandom is *wrong* in his claims here. I think it is correct that the community exercises a kind of authority over its members that is distinguishable from the authority its members exercise on their own behalf. This is an authority *we* exert, rather than an authority that *I* exert. Similarly, the authority *I* exercise over my community is distinguishable from the authority *I* exercise over particular comrades. Now, *our* authority is no less constituted by its being recognized as authoritative than is *my* authority, so the fundamental principle of constitution by mutual recognition still applies.

² I find the characterization of individuals as particulars characterized by concepts (or universals) very troublesome. If nothing else, it encourages the belief that there are (or could be) particulars that are *not* characterized by concepts—bare particulars. I cannot believe that Hegel would have had any truck with such nonsense.

The point is that there is a larger story to tell about the dialectics of community recognition, and Brandom's discussion occludes this story. He certainly could not include this larger story without changing his paper, probably into a book, but he need not have written as if it does not even exist.

2.

Hegel claims that Spirit is also to be understood as having the structure of a self. One of the attractions Brandom claims for his interpretation of Hegel is its ability to give us an intelligible reading of Hegel's difficult conception of Spirit.

I understand the *geistig* as the realm of conceptually articulated norms, of authority and responsibility, commitment and entitlement. Spirit as a whole is the recognitive community of all those who have such normative statuses, and all their normatively significant activities. It is, in other words, the topic of the pragmatist's enquiry: the whole system of social practices of the most inclusive possible community. (227)

Spirit is a kind of super-community, and it also is constituted by a particular normative status. There are many problems one can generate concerning Spirit: if its normative status is, like normative statuses generally, dependent on recognition, does that mean that until Hegel came along to tell us about Spirit and thereby make it possible for us to recognize it, Spirit effectively did not exist, and at least had no normative standing at all? The answer to this particular problem is clearly no: Spirit existed and had standing before Hegel came along to tell us about it. There are two reasons why. First, though Hegel may have been the first to have unfolded and made explicit the concept of Spirit, it is certainly the case that in Hegel's eyes, there is a long tradition of recognition of Spirit, but recognition of it in some form in which Spirit is not yet fully explicit. In works of Greek art, in the picture-thinking of religion and its mythology, in the ordinary man's notion of God, we can see a recognition of Spirit.

Second, recognition is, as I noted, itself subject to standards. It can be done rightly or wrongly. Though recognition must finally be mutual, even if someone or some community does not in fact recognize another, it is not thereby a settled issue that that other is not

a self. The lack of recognition might be improper. Asymmetries of recognition are what the master–slave dialectic is all about. Hegel can perfectly well think of Spirit as something we *ought* to recognize, something perhaps we are *fated* to recognize in the course of Reason’s self-development, however badly its status, perhaps even its existence, may be occluded by the blooming confusion of natural life.

Brandom, however, has faced us with a deeper problem concerning Spirit. Spirit is supposed to have the structure of a self. But, as we have now seen in some detail, being a self involves having a normative status, and having a normative status requires participating in a structure of reciprocal recognition by a distinct *other*. But Spirit is a totalizing conception: there is no *other* distinct from Spirit that could engage in a mutual recognitive relationship with Spirit.

Brandom realizes that his reading of Hegel is non-standard in many regards. But, as he also realizes, the problem he voices here is not a problem generated by an idiosyncratic interpretation of Hegel. The inconsistent triad Brandom cites can be generated from any number of interpretive standpoints. Yet, as Brandom also notes, there is little discussion of this problem in the literature. Interestingly, Brandom proposes that

the extent to which a reading acknowledges and provides a convincing response to this issue should serve as a fundamental criterion of adequacy for assessing it. (228)

This makes it all the more important that Brandom’s attempt to resolve inconsistency hold up under scrutiny.

Brandom identifies three different forms in which the recognitive structure that is the essence of normativity is realized:

1. Its paradigmatic *social* form by which literal selves and their communities are constituted;
2. An *inferential* form in which universals and particulars, concepts and objects, mutually constitute each other via their confrontation in a judgment and their normative relations in inferences;
3. A *historical* form, which “arises because negotiating and adjudicating the claims of reciprocally conditioning authorities, administering conceptual norms by applying them in actual cases (to particulars that immediately present themselves), is a *process*”. (229)

This third form, Brandom hopes, holds the key to resolving the inconsistent triad.

The key thought here is that, since reciprocal recognition and authority are always subject to a process of negotiation, there is, necessarily, a temporal structure to both recognition and authority. This temporal structure is developmental, and it affects the determinate content of the commitments and responsibilities that constitute selves and concepts. Our concepts and our selves have the determinate content they do because they have *developed* that content in a temporally extended negotiation process that involves other people and encounters with the world.

The temporal structure of recognition and authority is, moreover, an *historical* structure. That is, it is not a matter of "just one damn thing after another." It is not the case that there just happen to be different recognitive structures at different times. The recognitive structure is itself temporal. Past commitments and responsibilities exert a certain authority over present commitments and responsibilities. Who I am now and what I can now mean by a certain word are responsible to the prior commitments and responsibilities I and others have undertaken. But the historical involvement of selves and concepts is not one-way.

The authority of the past applications, which instituted the conceptual norm, is administered on its behalf by *future* applications, which include assessments of past ones. It is for later users of a concept to decide whether each earlier application was correct or not, according to the tradition constituted by still earlier uses. In doing so, the future applications exercise a reciprocal authority over past ones. (230)

Brandom illustrates this temporal process of negotiating authority by a discussion of the process of (idealized) common law adjudication.

It is this historical form of the reciprocity of recognition that Brandom proposes to exploit to resolve the inconsistent triad Hegel seems committed to.

The reciprocal recognitive structure within which Spirit as a whole comes to self-consciousness is *historical*. It is a relation between different time slices of Spirit, in which the present acknowledges the authority of the past, and exercises an authority over it in turn, with the negotiation of their conflicts

administered by the future. This is the cognitive structure of *tradition*, which articulates the normative structure of the process of *development* by which concepts acquire their contents by being applied in experience. (234)

3.

Brandom's proposal, then, is that the "others" demanded by the structure of mutual recognition that is essential to the constitution of selves, communities, and concepts, and thus crucial to the constitution of the super-community that is Spirit are none other than past and future stages of Spirit itself, specific and actual communities in history construing themselves as stages in the development of the ideal super-community, Spirit.

This interpretation or model of the structure of Spirit cannot reproduce everything Hegel attributes to Spirit, though. Part of the problem can be well seen in Brandom's example of the adjudicative process of common law. As Brandom points out, "this process has no endpoint in principle, no finally authoritative authority not dependent in turn on its acknowledgment or recognition" (233). Because of this fact, common law is never something finally, completely, or determinately achieved. Common law as a system of justice functions as a regulative ideal towards which individual judgments strive, never, though, finally achieving itself. This will not do as a model of Hegel's conception of Spirit, for several reasons: (1) Spirit really is a totalizing concept and is supposed to be complete and determinate, even though it develops itself in time and history. (2) Hegel systematically rejects the notion of a regulative ideal: an ideal that is *always* beyond reach is no ideal at all.

My claims are hardly self-evident, so I owe the reader and Brandom some argument and some text to establish my claims. A cheap argument might just quote the preface to the *Phenomenology*:

Spirit is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is *per se*; it assumes objective, determinate form, and enters into relations with itself – it is externality (otherness), and exists for self; yet, in this determination, and in its otherness, it is still one with itself – it is self-contained and self-complete, in itself and for itself at once. (*PhS*, Baillie Trans., p. 86)

That's cheap because it is the old Baillie translation, and, even though it makes unmistakably the point that Spirit is a complete and determinate totality, that turns out to be an artifact of translation. I cite it in part because it is commonly available on the web, and I worry that many students will use it, rather than some better translation. Miller is much more faithful:

The spiritual alone is the *actual*; it is essence, or that which has *being in itself*; it is that which *relates itself to itself* and is *determinate*, it is *other-being* and *being-for-self*, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is *in and for itself* (*PhS*, Miller Trans., ¶ 25: 14).³

In this translation, and in the original, it is far less clear that Spirit is complete, that it is in some way a *finished* product, rather than an on-going and perhaps never-ending process. So we must look elsewhere.

Here's a passage from the end of the *Phenomenology* that does seem incompatible with the framework Brandom has set up:

Time is the Concept itself that *is there* and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Concept, i. e., has not annulled Time. It is the *outer*, intuited pure Self which is *not grasped* by the Self, the merely intuited Concept; when this latter grasps itself it sets aside its Time-form, comprehends this intuiting, and is a comprehended and comprehending intuiting. Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of Spirit that is not yet complete within itself, the necessity to enrich the share which self-consciousness has in consciousness, to set in motion the *immediacy of the in-itself*, which is the form in which substance is present in consciousness; or conversely, to realize and reveal what is at first only *inward* (the in-itself being taken as what is *inward*), i. e., to vindicate it for Spirit's certainty of itself. (*PhS*, Miller Trans., adapted, ¶ 801: 487)⁴

³ Here's the original German text: "Das Geistige allein ist das *Wirkliche*; es ist das Wesen oder *An-sich-seiende*, – das sich *Verhaltende* oder Bestimmte, das *Anderssein* und *Für-sich-sein* – und in dieser Bestimmtheit oder seinem Außer-sich-sein in sich selbst Bleibende; – oder es ist *an und für sich*."

⁴ "Die *Zeit* ist der *Begriff* selbst, der *da ist* und als leere Anschauung sich dem Bewußtsein vorstellt; deswegen erscheint der Geist notwendig in der Zeit, und

The idea that there is an end to time or at least an end to history is not compatible with Brandom's structure of an on-going adjudication and validation of the past by the future. There is in this passage a clear indication that Spirit can and will reach a point in which it is "complete within itself," and that this point is one at which time ceases to apply to it. At that point the historical structure Brandom has made crucial to Spirit's self-consciousness is not applicable.

Passages discussing the end of history are not unusual in Hegel—it is a puzzling doctrine that has garnered a fair amount of attention. But if history can end, then it seems that the historical dimension of the recognitive structure within which the relation between selves and concepts must be understood does not seem to be, in fact, *essential* to selves and concepts. Or rather, the historical dimension *is* essential, in that Spirit could not achieve itself without history; but it does not seem to *remain* essential once Spirit has achieved itself. (Though here again, the concept of "remaining" essential, once time and history have been put aside, seems at best unclear.) It is like the ladder that can be cast aside once one has climbed the heights. But in Brandom's model, casting aside the historical structure in which the authority of the past over the present is administered on its behalf by the future is tantamount to casting aside normativity and authority themselves. Brandom's picture of the way in which history is essential to Spirit doesn't seem to be quite right.

As we have seen, Hegel speaks as if Spirit is at some point a completed totality. But Brandom's model can treat the structure of recognition that constitutes selves, concepts, communities, authority, and normativity as aimed in principle only at a regulative ideal that is never finally, once and for all, achieved. I have argued elsewhere that

er erscheint so lange in der Zeit, als er nicht seinen reinen Begriff *erfaßt*, das heißt, nicht die Zeit tilgt. Sie ist das *äußere* angeschaute vom Selbst *nicht erfaßte* reine Selbst, der nur angeschaute Begriff; indem dieser sich selbst *erfaßt*, hebt er seine Zeitform auf, begreift das Anschauen, und ist begriffnes und begreifendes Anschauen. – Die Zeit erscheint daher als das Schicksal und die Notwendigkeit des Geistes, der nicht in sich vollendet ist, – die Notwendigkeit, den Anteil, den das Selbstbewußtsein an dem Bewußtsein hat, zu bereichern, die *Unmittelbarkeit des An-sich* – die Form, in der die Substanz im Bewußtsein ist – in Bewegung zu setzen oder umgekehrt das An-sich als das *Innerliche* genommen, das, was erst *innerlich* ist, zu realisieren und zu offenbaren, d. h. es der Gewißheit seiner selbst zu vindizieren."

Hegel finds the Kantian notion of a regulative ideal hollow: an end without an end is no end at all.⁵ So I won't repeat the argument here. Fully achieved Spirit must be more than a regulative ideal for Hegel, and Brandom cannot account for that, and cannot model the final achievement of Spirit.

Given that his treatment of the spiritual is otherwise insightful, perhaps we should go back and rethink the original inconsistent triad. The third claim in the triad is that Spirit has no other, and if this is false, then there is no inconsistency. But Spirit *does* have an other—it is *Nature*. Technically, the third element of the triad, as Brandom states it, is indeed false. Unfortunately, the fact that Spirit has an other is not going to resolve our worry about the authority and normativity of Spirit, because Spirit has the *wrong kind* of other. Nature is not an other that can engage in an act of reciprocal recognition. Spirit can (and must) come to recognize itself in its other, but Nature is not an independent recognizer in its own right. The triad ought to be reformulated slightly, but that reformulation does not offer an escape.

4.

The inconsistent triad that Brandom confronts Hegel with remains a serious problem for the Hegel scholar, and more so for the true Hegelian. Brandom has not, in fact, given us sufficient weaponry to defeat the challenge. Or at least, Brandom has not done so *yet*.

The problem is that, given the structure of mutual recognition that underlies all authority and normativity, Spirit needs an *other*, but no appropriate other is to be found. Brandom would like us to believe that what we can call the '*internal other*'—historical stages of Spirit in time—can suffice to provide an appropriate or adequate other for Spirit. Given the basic syntax of recognition, I do not see how that can work, for the recognitive other needs to be a *peer*. As you will recall, I also complained about Brandom's rather blithe assertion that it is the *same* process of reciprocal recognition that constitutes both selves and the communities to which they belong. There are enough differences between self-self relations and self-community relations

⁵ DeVries, W.A.: *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*. Ithaca/NY 1988, pp. 193–94. Now available on the web at <http://pubpages.unh.edu/%7ewad/HTMA/HTMAfrontpage>.

that we should expect to see a separate treatment of the dialectics of self–community relations. Since Brandom thinks of Spirit as a kind of super–community, the most inclusive community of all communities, it is possible that an adequate development of the peculiarities of mutual recognition at the self–community level will reveal some interesting characteristics that allow us to address more adequately the problem posed by the inconsistent triad Brandom constructs. One of the lessons I would like to draw from my discussion is therefore a challenge to Brandom to return to these issues and rethink more thoroughly the reciprocal recognitive relationship between self and community, between the *I* and the *We*.

Another conclusion of my discussion may be the *modus tollens* to Hegel's *modus ponens*, so to speak. That is, Brandom's model runs into problems as an interpretation of Hegel where Hegel insists on the achieved completeness of Spirit. Brandom's model cannot reconstruct that aspect of Hegel's thought adequately. Perhaps, though, the right response is "so much the worse for Hegel." Despite the presence of pragmatist themes in Hegel's idealism, Hegel could never have accepted a "mere" pragmatism precisely because he rejected regulative ideals and insisted on both the actuality and the ontological primacy of the ideal. In the end, for Hegel, God's in his heaven and all's right with the world. Today, the post-modern thinker finds it virtually impossible to take that final step with Hegel. After the horrors of the last century, when any ideals have been hard to find, regulative ideals governing a process that is in principle without endpoint will do just fine.⁶

⁶ A conversation with Stefan Bird-Pollan helped clarify these issues for me. Thanks to him.