



The Spirit of Pragmatism

Bernstein's Variations on Hegelian Themes

Jeffrey Stout

1. Pragmatism Old and New

C.S. Peirce invented pragmatism, William James gave it currency in the world of humane letters, and John Dewey transformed it into a vehicle for bringing democratic culture to self-consciousness. For a brief, shining moment, pragmatism became synonymous with philosophy in America. But as American philosophy became an increasingly professionalized discipline in the 1930s, James and Dewey came to seem more amateurish than enlightening. For many young American philosophers, Rudolph Carnap replaced Peirce as a model of rigor. Professional philosophy, it seemed, was destined to become a machine to think in, a machine useful, perhaps, for reconstructing the logic of mathematics and the natural sciences but bereft of implications for how a human being ought to live or how a society might flourish.

Then something curious happened. Two philosophers strongly influenced by Carnap initiated what in retrospect can be seen as a revival of interest in pragmatism. W.V.O. Quine, who had been discussing logical positivism with Carnap since a visit to Prague in 1933, criticized him in 1951 for endorsing a sharp distinction between analytic and synthetic truths. Carnap's system had left some room for pragmatic reasoning, Quine granted, but what philosophy really needed was "a more thorough pragmatism."¹ Three years later, Wilfrid Sellars, who first encountered Carnap's work in a seminar taught by Quine in 1937, declared that

if the pragmatist's claim is reformulated as the thesis that the language we use has a much more intimate connection with conduct than we have yet suggested, and that this connection is intrinsic to its structure as language, rather than a "use" to which it "happens" to be put, then Pragmatism assumes its proper stature as a revolutionary step in Western Philosophy.²

In 1956, Sellars broke with another doctrine central to positivism, which he nicknamed “the Myth of the Given.” Sellars provocatively referred to his reflections as “incipient *Meditations Hegeliennes*.”³ Whether wittingly or not, his arguments echoed Peirce’s critique of intuitionism as well as Hegel’s critique of “sense certainty.”

In the eight years after completing a Yale dissertation on Dewey in 1958, Richard Bernstein published articles on Dewey, Peirce, and Sellars, as well as a book on Dewey. Richard Rorty, who had been discussing philosophy with Bernstein since the two were students together at the University of Chicago in 1949, published an article on pragmatism in 1961. Much of what now counts as pragmatism took shape in conversation between these two men over the following decades.

Rorty had grown up in a circle of New York intellectuals who considered Dewey a great man. During the 1960s, Rorty devoted a good deal of attention to Peirce and Wittgenstein. By 1967, Rorty was trying to figure out how Quine’s attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction and Sellars’ attack on the myth of the given could be conjoined in a form of pragmatism still more thorough than Quine’s. A dozen years later, he set out his arguments in chapter 4 of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, a book that begins by declaring Dewey one of the twentieth century’s most important philosophers.⁴ Meanwhile, Jürgen Habermas, whom Bernstein first met in 1972 and Rorty first met in 1974, was bringing pragmatism into a European debate over how democracy could be reconstituted after the ravages of the Second World War. Over the next decades, Hilary Putnam, Robert Brandom, and many others joined Bernstein, Rorty, and Habermas in an increasingly lively debate over what should be made of pragmatism’s principal ideas. Pragmatism was ascendant once more.

In *The Pragmatic Turn*, Richard Bernstein traces these and many other related connections among several generations of pragmatists, while placing the entire movement within a broader philosophical tradition that goes back to Kant and Hegel.⁵ The book begins with an epigraph from Rorty and is dedicated to Richard and Mary Rorty. It ends with a moving chapter entitled “Rorty’s Deep Humanism,” which is equal parts appreciation and exasperation—and all love. Bernstein makes clear that he has been thinking all along about his dear friend and their quarrel, across nearly six decades, over the meaning of a tradition with which they both identify: “As I developed my own interpretation of pragmatism,” Bernstein writes, “I frequently felt I was addressing Rorty directly or indirectly—seeking to meet his penetrating challenges” (PT 200).

The prologue of the book concludes, appropriately, with an autobiographical reflection on Bernstein’s own “journey with pragmatism” (PT

25–31). The “book is not intended to be a history or survey of pragmatism” old and new. It says little about Quine and nothing about C.I. Lewis or Cornel West, to take only the most obvious omissions.⁶ It makes no attempt to convey the diversity represented among the younger pragmatists today. Its purpose is rather to reconstruct a conversation in which Bernstein himself has been participating, with an emphasis on the voices that have mattered most to him. “I want to share what I have learned” from the pragmatists, Bernstein writes (PT xi).

Philosophy as exemplified in this book is not something one does with one’s solitude; it is something that transpires among friends. Read as an extended dialogue with one friend in particular, the first three chapters aim to reclaim the classical pragmatists from Rorty’s highly selective appropriation of them. The most important of these is the third, which aims to recover what is radical in Dewey’s defense of democracy. The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters raise doubts about Rorty’s writings on the categories of objectivity and experience. The seventh, on Putnam, affirms the inextricability of fact and value, a position that Rorty would find congenial. The eighth chapter argues that Habermas’ “Kantian pragmatism” fails to take full measure of Rorty’s Hegelian objections.

Rorty emerges in the course of these chapters as a profound and creative intellect, determined above all to use his rhetorical gifts to make the world safe for self-reliance and social democracy. He is also someone who crafts powerful arguments from first to last, a skilled practitioner of immanent criticism. Yet Bernstein repeatedly finds himself wanting to pull back from the one-sidedness of Rorty’s provocations.

The virtues that Bernstein brought to this remarkably productive friendship are on full display in *The Pragmatic Turn*. Of the two friends, he is the more cautious reader and thinker. He is better at keeping his feet on the ground and at keeping his eye on a wider range of relevant considerations while sizing up a problem. Rorty’s detractors might be tempted to add: “And who, aside from Rorty’s post-modernist buddies, wouldn’t be?”—as if the comparison told us more about Rorty’s rhetoric of excess than about Bernstein. One might also be tempted to view the difference between the two philosophers as merely stylistic or temperamental. But succumbing to either of these temptations would be to underestimate what is at stake, philosophically, in these differences and the significance of Bernstein’s contributions to the discussion.

When Bernstein describes the danger of losing one’s intellectual balance as *one-sidedness*, he is using Hegelian language. His remedy for one-sidedness is a patience for dialectical interrogation that is both

Socratic and Hegelian, and thus an expression of a steadfast commitment to love of wisdom, theoretical and practical. Bernstein values Rorty's startling aphorisms for moving the conversation forward, but is always determined, as a matter of Hegelian principle, to reassert the importance of whatever truths those pronouncements occlude. It takes brilliance to create new vocabularies, novel candidates for assent and dissent. Yet brilliance is not a virtue in the sense that wisdom is. A lover of wisdom must ponder the novelties that brilliance brings into view, taking their measure and assessing their worth for life. It is hard to know whether brilliance or wisdom is in shorter supply among professional philosophers. Bernstein and Rorty are agreed that love of cleverness tends to be overrated in the guild.

The following passage comes from *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, but it could equally come from any of Bernstein's books since *Praxis and Action*:

Opposing claimants write and act as if their point of view is the only correct one and the others of "no account at all." If we are to escape from this type of intellectual skepticism, we must try to see how examining a position—what Hegel calls a form or shape of consciousness—with full integrity, how understanding it in its own terms, and probing it to locate its weaknesses and internal conflicts, can lead us to a more adequate and comprehensive understanding.⁷

The reference to Hegel in this passage is anything but idle. In *The Pragmatic Turn*, Bernstein takes Rorty and his objectivist critics as the "opposing claimants" to be examined. Bernstein's dialectical task is to demonstrate that each side of this intellectual standoff, by viewing the other side as of "no account at all," fails to account for the opponent's strengths. Earning entitlement to one's own point of view, for Bernstein, means trying to account for the strengths as well as the weaknesses in the strongest alternatives to it. Inheriting the strengths and eliminating the weaknesses of conflicting points of view is, for Bernstein, the labor of philosophical wisdom. Hegel, Bernstein believes, is the modern philosopher who most deeply appreciated what this labor involves and what sort of challenge it poses to the subject-object dualism within which much modern philosophy has been conducted.

If Bernstein's style is conversational, that is because the philosophy he enacts is conversational. Without a conversation that includes multiple voices, some truths that need to be taken into account will fail to gain a hearing. This is Bernstein's metaphilosophical principle as well as the key to his epistemology and political theory. It has been Bernstein's vocation to put philosophers from different times and places in conversation with one another, to draw attention to unnoticed com-

monalities of theme and argument, to remind the participants of the concerns that brought them to philosophy in the first place, and to draw attention to the strengths as well as to the weaknesses of what they say. His writing does for philosophy what good teachers of philosophy do on a smaller scale in the classroom.

Philosophy, for him, is a conversation to live in. It is largely *about* how to live. It emerges out of praxis and earns its way by informing praxis *wisely*. It is a movement into and out of one-sidedness, a dance in which we leap forward off one foot but always steady ourselves on two. It is something that friends of a certain kind do together, something that binds them together in a kind of love.

Given that the conversation concerns topics of great importance and proves philosophically illuminating, we have ample reason to pay close attention. Never mind what this retelling omits. What does it *reveal*? What sort of pragmatism does Bernstein wish to endorse after spending much of his adult life considering what pragmatism has been and can be? My short answer to these questions is “Hegelian pragmatism.” The thread that ties together nearly everything Bernstein has written on existentialism, Marxism, critical theory, hermeneutics, and analytic philosophy, as well as on pragmatism, is the question of what is living and what is dead in Hegel’s philosophy.

The following four points suffice to bring out the centrality of a concern with Hegel in Bernstein’s thinking:

(1) Like Hegel, Bernstein sees philosophy as an attempt, through conversation and critique, to comprehend one’s own age.

(2) Many of Bernstein’s criticisms of objectivism, existentialism, Kantian pragmatism, and Rorty’s “battery of facile distinctions” are modeled on arguments presented in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁸ But Bernstein neither pulls these criticisms together into a single dialectical progression, nor concludes his phenomenology by describing his own standpoint as absolute. His phenomenology is a loosely bound anthology of arguments without a triumphant concluding chapter.

(3) Bernstein holds, as Hegel does, that conceptual, epistemic, and ethical standards are rooted in historically evolving social practices in which reasons are given and demanded. Pragmatism, for Bernstein, is largely an attempt to disentangle this claim from an implausible metaphysics of absolute spirit. Bernstein differs from Habermas and Rorty on how this should be done; he thinks that each of his friends has exposed weaknesses in the other’s position without taking account of that position’s strengths. In other words, their positions are one-sided.

(4) Like Dewey, who adapted Hegel’s conception of philosophy to the age of Darwin and reformist politics, Bernstein regards radi-

cal democracy as the most promising epistemological, ethical, and political tradition of our own age—as the form of contemporary praxis most in need of comprehension and critical correction. The term radical here signals an allegiance to Dewey’s insistence on the importance of grassroots activism and social movements, over against Hegel’s excessive faith in governmental bureaucracy.

It so happens that I am sympathetic with Bernstein’s thinking on all of these points. In the remaining sections of this essay, I aim to clarify what these commitments involve, how they fit together, and the respects in which they reflect Hegel’s influence. *The Pragmatic Turn* can be appreciated most fully, I believe, when it is viewed both as an extended conversation among friends and as a further development of Bernstein’s references to Hegel in *Praxis and Action* and subsequent works.⁹

These tasks will require getting a clearer view of what Bernstein’s Hegelian pragmatism amounts to, how he relates it to the positions of Dewey, Sellars, Putnam, and Brandom, and how he differentiates it from the positions taken by Rorty and Habermas. My interest in the exercise has to do with the illumination it might cast on all of the philosophers featured in *The Pragmatic Turn*, as well as on Bernstein himself. Each of the following sections reconstructs arguments from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that play a central role, positively or negatively, in Bernstein’s thinking. For the most part, my reconstructions are intended to state straightforwardly something in Hegel’s text that Bernstein wishes either to appropriate or reject. When discussing what Bernstein says about Hegel’s critique of immediacy, his view of inquiry as self-corrective, and his idealism, however, I am calling for greater precision in framing the issues—and in construing Hegel’s treatment of them—than Bernstein has yet achieved.¹⁰ Ambiguities in Hegel’s text and in Bernstein’s response to it, as well as the profundity of the issues themselves, demand cautious clarification. I can only hope that Bernstein will respond by saying whether I am getting the issues and his philosophical commitments right.

2. What a Phenomenology of Spirit Is

What I am striving for, then, is a map of the dialectical terrain surrounding Bernstein’s pragmatism. That I am using a reconstructive interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as a key might seem odd, given that Hegel’s text is justly famous for its obscurity. Why use a murky idiolect to explicate a relatively clear one? But if I am right to read Bernstein as a metaphysically austere, praxis-oriented, democratic *Hegelian*, the risk must be taken. Aside from revealing a pattern of his-

torical influence, the potential value of the exercise is a more precise and more nearly comprehensive view of what the philosophical options are. In the present section, I will introduce Hegel's phenomenological project by delineating its basic features and glossing a few of its technical terms. This will permit me to begin the task of showing in detail how Bernstein retrieves, reformulates, and sometimes negates Hegelian themes.

Numerous formations of spirit, Hegel tells us, have already appeared on the historical stage, in the sense of being actualized in the lives of human subjects. A *phenomenology* of these formations considers them as they have appeared. But a phenomenology of this sort cannot fully explain, at the outset of the inquiry, what formations of spirit are. In the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel asks readers to be patient, for he cannot immediately satisfy their understandable desire for a substantive specification of the topic to be taken up.

He makes clear that this topic has something to do with the spiritual crisis or malaise of his day and thus with the question of how to move beyond it. The implication is that both the condition of malaise and its possible overcoming are formations of spirit. He hints that the movement from crisis to resolution would amount to a transition from one formation of spirit to another. He seems to have in mind, when speaking of a formation of spirit, something like what we now call a cultural epoch, and his question seems to be how his contemporaries could rightfully come to think of their own practices, institutions, and ideals as worthy objects of identification. This question, though not the idiom of spirit itself, is of great importance to Bernstein.

In the introduction, Hegel begins the book a second time.¹¹ Now the topic seems to be strictly epistemological—what philosophers have called the problem of the criterion in a theory of knowledge. This is the problem of determining what the standard (*der Maßstab*) of knowledge is, not merely in the sense of a standard that happens to be acknowledged, but in the sense of the standard (or set of standards) that ought to be acknowledged as binding on our pursuit of knowledge. From the vantage of epistemology, the appearances of formations of spirit are “the reality of cognition” (*der Realität des Erkennens* [¶ 81]), understood as a series of attempts to know this or that in accordance with some accepted standard or other. Hegel's hope is that the critical study of this series of appearances can produce knowledge of what the correct and worthy standard of knowledge is.

Without presupposing, in advance of inquiry, a given standard for judging these appearances, a phenomenology describes them in terms of the standards of cognitive and practical success they embody, explains them in terms of their conditions of possibility, and assesses

them in terms of their essences. Once Hegel's terminology is properly explicated, we can see that he and Bernstein are in agreement on these points. An important difference between Hegel's phenomenology and Bernstein's pragmatism is that the former is systematic, whereas the latter is deliberately piecemeal. This difference is not merely a matter of temperament, but a matter of principle, as Bernstein sees it. It pertains to Bernstein's quarrels with Hegel over the issues of idealism and fallibilism.

The phenomenological exercise of critique is *methodologically idealist*, in the sense of treating normative commitments as essential to formations of spirit, but *pragmatist* in the sense of taking norms or standards to be rooted in practice.¹² The exercise may be said to be *transcendental*, because it seeks to display the conditions of possibility for the appearance of actual formations of spirit. But the exercise culminates in a transcendental critique of what had previously been known as transcendental critique, for it treats existing transcendental philosophy as itself a formation of spirit made possible by previous formations of spirit and their discontents. The exercise is therefore also *historical*, because its inquiry into the conditions of possibility of formations of spirit takes into account their relations to one another over time.

The phenomenology is *reflexive*, because it finally takes itself as its own object, in the hope of making explicit what its own conditions of possibility are as a practice and what standards of success it embodies and avows. The phenomenological assessment of formations of spirit takes the form of *immanent critique*. Hegelian critique takes history as its agora and formations of spirit as its interlocutors. Phenomenology in this Hegelian sense is an exercise in Socratic criticism, rather than an exercise in pure description. It must therefore be distinguished from phenomenology in the tradition of Edmund Husserl. "What is lacking in [Husserlian] phenomenology, with its hierarchy of *epochés* and bracketings," Bernstein writes, "is anything that could serve as a basis for . . . critical evaluative judgments. What is worse, it turns this lack into a virtue—the presumed virtue of pure description."¹³

Just what a formation of spirit is emerges, I have said, in the course of the inquiry. A formation of spirit can be defined provisionally, from the vantage of epistemology, as a *formation of consciousness*—that is, as a relation between a conscious subject and a set of objects of which the subject is aware. We will eventually discover that this first approximation is insufficiently social and practical to explain what subjects, objects, and relations among them are, and insufficiently historical to explain the content, bindingness, and development of the standards that govern what subjects think, say, and do.

This transition from focusing on the isolated consciousness to focusing on historically and socially situated agents is of central importance to Bernstein, and it accounts for the large role assigned to Hegel in both *Praxis and Action* and *The Pragmatic Turn*. Because to assume the importance of social-practical and historical considerations at the outset of the inquiry would be to beg the question against the Kantian way of practicing transcendental critique, Hegel feels bound to vindicate the transition he is proposing. The need for this vindication fuses the epistemological project announced in Hegel's introduction with the program of cultural criticism announced in his preface. The isolated subject of Kantian epistemology will eventually be redescribed as a creature of modern social alienation. And the cultural malaise of Hegel's day will eventually be redescribed as an expression of the desiccated standard of belief and action it embodies.¹⁴

All formations of consciousness turn out, on inspection, to be *potentially* or *implicitly* reflexive. This potential is realized insofar as a subject relating to some set of objects becomes aware of the relation itself by making it, the relation, an explicit object of awareness.

In Hegel's vocabulary, the notion (*Begriff*) of a formation of consciousness is what the subject makes explicit in becoming aware of its relation to the objects of its awareness. The notion in its explicit form is a conception of the relation. Essential to that notion—and thus to the formation of consciousness associated with it—is an internal standard of successful knowing or doing on the part of the subject. The *essence* (*Wesen*) of a formation of consciousness, for Hegel, is whatever that formation of consciousness takes as its standard when treating this or that commitment or performance as an instance of cognitive or practical success or failure.¹⁵

Acceptance of a standard is merely implicit in the behavior of a subject if that subject behaves consistently with it but does not yet express it in the form of an ideal to be met or a rule to be obeyed. A subject's explicit formulation of a standard in some such form has the advantage of permitting the subject to endorse, criticize, amend, or reject the standard, as well as to follow it consciously.¹⁶

By observing how a formation of consciousness actualizes a type of relation between subject and object, one can discern that formation's implicit and explicit normative commitments, the standards it applies. If I accept certain beliefs and undertake certain actions for one set of reasons, and reject certain other beliefs and actions for other reasons, the various reasons imply something about my standards of cognitive and practical success. An observer can appropriately impute standards to me in order to explain my pattern of belief and action. The picture

becomes more complicated if I also explicitly avow standards of belief and action.

An observer might discern incompatibilities among my various reasons for believing and doing certain things, or between the standards I explicitly avow and the standards that implicitly inform my behavior. Actualized formations of consciousness are not guaranteed to live up to their own standards. As a particular set of standards is made explicit, the standards themselves can be found wanting on internal grounds. We must recognize, Bernstein writes, “that human beings are capable of bringing to consciousness the interpretations, evaluations, and standards that they tacitly accept, and can subject them to rational criticism.”¹⁷

This should be no surprise, given that actual subjects and the societies they form typically change their normative commitments and self-conceptions, as well as their behavior, for just such reasons. The conditions of possibility for a particular configuration of normative commitments typically include a prior history of normative discontent. The reasons for dissatisfaction with earlier commitments must be incorporated in the story. This element of the *Phenomenology* is indebted to what I have called methodological idealism, but it does not commit the phenomenological critic to the idea that normative commitments and their reappraisal are the only things that drive history forward.

Bernstein qualifies as a methodological idealist on my definition, but he rejects *reductive* methodological idealism, the idea that ideas alone drive history forward: “There is always a danger of thinking that intellectual criticism is itself sufficient to bring about fundamental change. We must learn again and again that it is not.”¹⁸ Bernstein also rejects *linguistic* idealism, a metaphysical view that implausibly takes physical objects such as planets, volcanoes, and microbes to be dependent for their existence on the fortunate happenstance that some of the animals that crawled out of the primordial slime developed linguistic means for designating items in the natural world.¹⁹ Linguistic idealism is the latter-day successor to a rationalist idealism that Bernstein sometimes attributes to Hegel. In §5, I will argue that Bernstein does not clarify what Hegel’s idealism is, what is mistaken about it, or the textual grounds on which it should be attributed to Hegel.

At one point in *Praxis and Action*, Bernstein credits Hegel with “radically challenging the very framework within which the idealist/materialist dichotomy arises” (PA 31). But when Bernstein characterizes Hegel’s idealism, it appears to be a position *within* the framework.²⁰ It is possible, of course, that Hegel simply failed to resolve a contradiction in his own outlook, in which case Bernstein’s pragmatism can be con-

strued as an attempt to resolve the contradiction by embracing the radical challenge *at the expense* of Hegel's idealism.

A possibility Bernstein never, to my knowledge, considers is that Hegel's idealism, when interpreted charitably, is consistent with a defensible account of the radical challenge. This possibility is under active consideration among Hegel scholars, but my interest in it, in this essay, has less to do with the question of what Hegel's considered view might have been than with the question of what carrying through on the radical challenge would actually commit us to philosophically. This latter question is Hegelian pragmatism's theoretical cutting edge. In *The Pragmatic Turn*, it emerges repeatedly, especially in connection with Brandom, but Bernstein never brings it into sharp focus.

Formations of consciousness turn out, on phenomenological examination, to be dialectically related to one another. Bernstein writes:

As Hegel taught us, the history of culture develops by the assertion and pursuit of what appear to be irreconcilable conflicts and oppositions. We can discern in these 'moments' a pattern that reveals how we grasp both their 'truth' and their 'falsity.' As we work through these moments, we learn how what is true in each of them can be integrated into a more comprehensive understanding that enables us to reject what is false, partial, one-sided, and abstract. Hegel's insight still helps us understand what is going on, including specifically what is going on in the restructuring of social and political theory. In the final analysis we are not confronted with exclusive choices: *either* empirical theory *or* interpretative theory *or* critical theory. Rather, there is an internal dialectic in the restructuring of social and political theory: when we work through any one of these moments, we discover how the others are implicated.²¹

To make sense of any relatively complicated formation of consciousness, according to Hegel, we must view it as a response to the manifest inadequacies of one or more predecessors or contemporary alternatives. This point applies reflexively to whatever normative commitments the phenomenologist ultimately avows. They too are to be made sense of, and justified, in light of normatively committed stories of dialectical progression. To earn entitlement to one's commitments is ultimately to tell stories of this kind, where the commitments confer the right sort of intelligibility on the manifest strengths and weaknesses of predecessor and competitor outlooks.²²

A critical phenomenology of formations of consciousness inevitably confers dialectical order on them. Each formation of consciousness—except the unreflective subject's most naive submission to a *given* object, to a *given* subjective state, or to the *given* standards of its community—is to be understood and assessed as a response, more or less successful on its own terms, to the problems its predecessors and com-

petitors have confronted when trying to think and act in accordance with *their* standards.²³

A dialectical view of fully earned rational entitlement emerges as a result of the inquiry. Rational entitlement to this view of earned rational entitlement is not assumed at the outset, but is vindicated, Hegel thinks, only insofar as it emerges from an immanent critique of alternatives to his philosophy. This meta-claim about earned rational entitlement is Hegel's answer to the question about the standard of knowledge he raises in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*, and given its close connection to the topic of absolute knowledge, it will be a crucial theme in the remainder of this paper. Because Hegel purports to survey *all* of the *possible* alternatives to his conclusions, the process of dialectical unfolding he presents is, in effect, an argument by process of elimination. If the argument succeeds, only one conception of earned rational entitlement and of the standard of knowledge it implies is left standing.

Bernstein, in contrast, engages only those alternatives to his own pragmatism that strike him as especially important, and does not claim to have eliminated all alternatives to his own position. Some of the alternatives he takes up are neighboring varieties of pragmatism, such as Habermas' and Rorty's. Others are positions that all card-carrying pragmatists explicitly deny, such as the myth of the given and the Cartesian quest for certainty. Bernstein leaves open whether additional alternatives, as yet unheard of or long underestimated and misunderstood, will come to light. He holds that a *principled* philosophical modesty is at odds with Hegel's claim to have achieved absolute knowledge. He takes such modesty to be essential to pragmatism as Dewey and Peirce understood it and to pragmatism rightly understood.

As Bernstein sees it, Dewey's account of human creativity disturbs the closure that Hegel claims to have achieved at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, just as Dewey's arguments for democracy undermine the faith in bureaucratic elites that Hegel expresses in the *Philosophy of Right*. Whether Dewey differs from Hegel on the first of these points to the extent Bernstein thinks he does hangs on what we take Hegel to mean by the absolute and what it is that absolute knowing, self-conscious spirit's resting point at the end of the *Phenomenology*, claims to know. These are questions to which we must return. For now, it will suffice to say that a Deweyan emphasis on conceptual creativity does seem to lie behind Bernstein's conviction that it is impossible to know that one has canvassed and refuted all promising alternatives to one's own philosophical outlook there could ever be—and thus impossible to complete the sort of argument that Hegel offers for the *Phenomenology's* claims about the ultimate standard of knowledge. All

it takes to produce another alternative, as Dewey sees it, is a little more negative thinking directed at existing options and the invention of some new distinctions. If that is right, Bernstein appears to think, the potential for producing fresh philosophical alternatives is endless and the pursuit of definitive philosophical closure is futile.

Bernstein also associates the demand for philosophical modesty with “Peirce’s doctrine of fallibilism” (PT 36; see also 29, 30, 52, 112).²⁴ While Peirce does speak favorably of fallibilism in various contexts and sometimes makes fairly sweeping claims about epistemic fallibility,²⁵ Bernstein does not persuade me that Peirce’s remarks on these topics add up to anything as precise as a doctrine.²⁶ If the doctrine is supposed to be about epistemic fallibility, we need first to be told exactly what is being said to be fallible. Is it the human cognitive faculties alleged to be fallible in Descartes’ first *Meditation*? Is it all beliefs, beliefs of a specific kind, human knowledge as such, all hypotheses, human inquiry as such, empirical enquiry in particular, or something else? Second, we need to be told what is supposed to follow from acknowledgement of whatever exact form of epistemic fallibility is being asserted. Peirce sometimes treats one or another sort of epistemic fallibility as a reason for concluding that we are never entitled to regard anything as absolutely certain. Fallibility and dubitability are not, however, the same thing, and neither Peirce nor Bernstein is especially precise about the connections between them. One source of confusion in modern epistemology is the tendency of classical foundationalism, in both its rationalist and empiricist forms, to conflate various kinds of allegedly privileged access: infallibility, indubitability, incorrigibility, this or that sort of immediacy or givenness, and so forth. The same conflation is often simply mirrored in critiques of classical foundationalism.²⁷ I will suggest in the next section that Hegel and Sellars demonstrate more awareness of the need for precise distinctions in this area of philosophy than Peirce and Bernstein do.

While this is not the place to draw the distinctions essential to an acceptable pragmatist epistemology, I do want to say a little more about how such a project could draw on Peirce. Suppose we take the principal components of a Peircean epistemology to be that *human inquiry* is: (a) an essentially self-correcting enterprise; (b) in which all *hypotheses* are to be treated as prone to error; and (c) in which all inquirers are obliged to take account of *available* evidence against their own beliefs and *plausible* alternatives to their hypotheses. This is a selective reconstruction of elements I take to be worth saving in Peirce’s discussion of fallibilism. I am reluctant for various reasons to refer to it simply as fallibilism. The three components pertain, respec-

tively, to the corrigibility of inquiry, to the fallibility of hypotheses in particular, and to the norms for revising beliefs as well as hypotheses.

The first thing to notice about the reconstructed position is that it does not take a stand on whether human knowledge is fallible. A pragmatist who endorses (a)–(c) can simply sidestep the difficulties associated with the paradoxical notion that *human knowledge* is prone to error.²⁸ The paradox derives, of course, from the fact that the word “knowledge” often functions in our epistemic discourse as a success term. To say that *S* knows that *p* is plausibly taken to imply that *p* is true. But if *p* is true, as opposed to merely being taken to be true, it is hard to see how *p* could also be prone to error (liable to be false).

Delimiting the pragmatist claim about epistemic fallibility as (b) does has the additional advantage of leaving open what is to be said on the more difficult topic of belief. In “The Fixation of Belief,” Peirce distinguishes between believing and hypothesizing.²⁹ He interprets believing something as a state of cognitive commitment incompatible with real doubt, and interprets inquiry as a process of fixing one’s beliefs (that is, one’s believings). If at time *t*, I believe that *p*, according to Peirce, then I cannot have any real doubt concerning *p* at *t*. If at time *t*, I entertain the hypothesis that *p*, then I have some degree of real doubt concerning *p* at *t*. Given that human inquiry, as Peirce understands it, involves subjecting hypotheses to critical testing and revision, and thus involves treating them as doubtful, prone to error, and potentially in need of correction, there do seem to be tight connections in his account among the dubitability, fallibility, and corrigibility of hypotheses. Moreover, these connections help explain why it makes sense to view inquiry as itself fallible in the sense of having largely to do with hypothetical *candidates for belief* that we currently have at least some reason to treat as liable to be wrong.

Inquiry, thus understood, takes place against the background of whatever is currently believed, i.e., whatever is *not* currently being treated as subject to real doubt. Whether Peirce is right to explicate believing in this way is worthy of further discussion, but his distinction between believing and hypothesizing plays a central role in the critique of Cartesian foundationalism that Bernstein takes to be Peirce’s great contribution to philosophy. Cartesians go wrong, Peirce thinks, in part because they pretend to doubt in philosophy what they do not really doubt in life. By adopting as their standard of justified belief an ideal of absolute certainty, and then employing hyperbolic doubt as a method for discovering what can be believed with absolute certainty, they unwittingly guarantee a skeptical result. The philosophical remedy, Peirce holds, is to recognize that all inquiry involves believing some things while doubting and investigating other things. The state of

believing something is incompatible with *simultaneously* having real doubt about it but not incompatible with the possibility of *someday* acquiring reason to doubt it. The immediate task of inquiry is to settle issues currently up for grabs. The process of inquiry resolves real doubts by fixing the commitments of the inquirers engaged in it. Often the commitments, once fixed, remain fixed, which is why the path of inquiry actually leads somewhere and why blazing the path is antithetical to skepticism. But inquiry also sometimes discovers reasons for doubting something formerly regarded as settled.

A satisfying reconstruction of Peirce's epistemological views would need to go on to explain how to put together his account of believing (as a kind of confidence incompatible with real doubt) and his claim that nothing is absolutely certain. I suspect that what he means by absolute certainty has less to do with an inquirer's degree of conviction in what is believed than with the question of whether anything believed (or any but a narrow class of candidates for believing) needs to clear the bar of hyperbolic indubitability in order to qualify as knowledge. He holds that nothing can clear that bar, and infers that the bar itself is irrelevant, because it draws a distinction that makes no difference to properly conducted inquiry. If we take his negative claim about absolute certainty simply as a reason for rejecting the resulting standard of knowledge as unrealistic, rather than as implying something about exactly how confident a believer in something should be, we should be able to integrate it with Peirce's way of distinguishing the kind of confidence involved in ordinary believing from the more tentative nature of all hypothesizing. In rejecting a standard of knowledge according to which nothing counts as knowledge unless it clears the bar of hyperbolic indubitability, Peirce distances himself from assumptions held in common by radical skeptics and Cartesian foundationalists, while refocusing attention on the self-corrective features of inquiry. Because this move does not require Peirce to treat hyperbolic doubt as a kind of real doubt, he need not commit himself to treating his denial of absolute certainty as advice against believing one's amply justified conclusions wholeheartedly.

How different, then, is Peirce's corrigibilist account of inquiry from Hegel's account of spirit's quest for an adequately capacious standard of cognitive and practical success? When Peirce refers approvingly to the "marvelous self-correcting property of Reason, which Hegel made so much of," he rightly implies his agreement with Hegel on (a), the corrigibility of inquiry.³⁰ Another important thing to keep in mind, for the purposes of this paper, is that both philosophers present their accounts *as examples of inquiry* that are *concerned with inquiry* as their object. The accounts are self-referential. So the question arises for Peirce as

well as for Hegel how the sort of corrigibilism being asserted can come to terms with the possibility that something in the account itself will require further correction. Each of the two philosophers is asserting an account that qualifies in his own eyes as a settled belief and thus as something no longer to be treated, in Peirce's terms, as merely hypothetical or *worthy* of real doubt. What is more, they claim to have achieved knowledge, and thus *true* belief, about inquiry, including epistemological inquiry. In affirming their conclusions, they appear to exhibit the degree of confidence that Peirce associates with belief and knowledge. The logical possibility of error plays a role here only by ruling out claims to absolute certainty, not by weakening confidence in conclusions reached. Absolute certainty is irrelevant to the process.

There does not appear to be anything inherently worrisome about the self-referentiality of a Peircean account once we recognize that it is not claiming for itself an exemption from the possibility of correction. Peirce believes (a)–(c), which on his interpretation of believing involves confidence—a kind of certitude—in the truth of what is believed. He is not saying, however, that the degree of confidence he has in his account *guarantees* its truth. In fact, he asserts the opposite, that one's degree of confidence in a belief, taken by itself, has little predictive value concerning the truth of what is believed. And if, contrary to his current expectations, considerations emerged that rendered (a)–(c) dubious, he would be committed to revising or rejecting the account, for that is what (c), the normative component of his account, commits him to doing under such circumstances.

If Bernstein does not regard Peirce's corrigibilist account of inquiry as problematical when interpreted in something like this way, he needs to explain why a similar reconstruction would not be available to a defender of Hegel's apparently similar account. In the final section of this paper, I shall use Brandom's reconstruction of Hegelian corrigibilism as a way of forcing the issue. It is important to recognize that what Brandom's Hegel calls the absolute—i.e., the self-sufficient standard of cognitive and practical success, the standard that absolute knowing takes itself to be rationally entitled to endorse—does not involve a claim on Hegel's part to absolute certainty in Peirce's sense. One should not be misled by the fact that Hegel gives the phrase “absolute knowledge” a positive valence, while Peirce gives the phrase “absolute certainty” a negative one. If the two philosophers do not have the same thing in mind, Hegel's affirmation of absolute knowing need not run afoul of Peirce's rejection of absolute certainty. Is the problem, then, *merely* that Hegel overestimates what a critical survey of existing alternatives to his account can prove? Or is there, for Bernstein, something else about Hegel's position that entails unacceptable consequences?

If the problem is supposed to be that Hegel exhibits excessive confidence in his position, one wants to know how his attitude differs from the confidence anyone shows when asserting sincerely held beliefs on the basis of a careful survey of alternative accounts of some topic. If the problem is that Hegel exhibits a dogmatic disinclination to entertain plausible alternatives to his position, in violation of (c), one wants to know what, if anything, *in Hegel's position* gives rise to the disinclination. The problem cannot be that Hegel, with the confidence appropriate to Peircean believing, takes the epistemological position affirmed at the end of the *Phenomenology* to be *correct*. Neither can it be that Hegel takes his critique of the subject-object dualism to be dialectically *decisive*. Both of these moves are in principle consistent with Peircean corrigibilism as I have reconstructed it.³¹ By endorsing Peirce's position, Bernstein implies that he regards it as correct. By touting its historic importance as an overcoming of the impasse between skepticism and classical foundationalism, he implies that it is dialectically decisive.

3. The Given or Posited Object as Absolute

Hegel's immanent critique of the succession of appearances begins with a case of extreme epistemic submissiveness, which issues in an outlook that Bernstein describes as "specious" and illusory (PA 23). This formation of consciousness implicitly treats *the given object immediately present to the subject* as an absolute standard—that is, a self-sufficient norm or set of norms—for the subject's commitments concerning it. Explicit affirmation of this view is what Bernstein, following Sellars, calls "the myth of the given" (PA 6, 72, 314; PT 19, 39, 47–52, 205–6). Because Bernstein tends to conflate ideas from various sources when arguing against the myth, my main purpose in this section is to differentiate those sources from one another, thereby clarifying the patterns of influence and ideas involved.

Hegel's critique of the myth turns on his claim that to treat anything as a standard is implicitly to treat it as having a determinate content. Without such content, that which a subject *treats* as a standard of successful cognition cannot *be* a standard *for* that subject. A putative standard that lacks determinate content is effectively empty. When a subject treats the immediately given object as an absolute standard for belief, the object necessarily lacks determinate content. An object, when treated in this way, cannot provide a standard for the subject, let alone an absolute standard.

To possess sufficient determinacy to function as a standard *for* a subject, an object must be distinguished conceptually not only from the subject, but also from other objects. The object, however, is not, in itself,

the source of these distinctions. Subjects draw distinctions.³² The subject that naively treats the supposedly given object before it as a standard is already implicitly distinguishing itself from the object before it and distinguishing the object before it from other objects.

By implicitly drawing such distinctions, the subject confers a degree of determinacy on the object before it, as the subject conceives of it. Thanks to that determinacy, the object can indeed function as a standard of successful belief from the vantage of the subject, because the object's determinate properties and relations are what the subject's beliefs about the object are aiming to characterize. But this sort of standard cannot be absolute, because it is not self-sufficient. Neither is it, in a particular case, indefeasible. The standard of successful cognition the object sets for the naively objectivist subject is therefore at odds with the notion of the formation of consciousness in which that subject participates. To acknowledge its own role in giving the object-as-perceived its determinacy, the subject must abandon the notion that the standard of belief resides simply in the given object.

For an object to achieve sufficient determinacy to set a standard of success for a subject's cognitive commitments, the subject engaged in distinguishing one object from another must have command of many sorts of linguistic expressions. Demonstratives alone are not enough to secure even the minimal determinacy required to re-identify an object that has been present to a subject on a previous occasion. The subject must also, for example, be able to make use of concepts that designate properties.

Brandom explicates Hegel's conception of determinacy as follows.³³ Suppose a subject attributes to object A properties that are materially compatible with the properties that the subject attributes to object B. In that case, according to Hegel, A and B are thus far merely "indifferent" to one another for that subject. The set of properties attributed to A and the set of properties attributed to B may not be the same properties, but because the two sets of properties are materially compatible, the two sets of properties fail to distinguish A from B. If A is red and hot, and B is short and stocky, for all we know, A and B are the same object (a firecracker, perhaps, or a man with a fevered brow).

For A and B to *be different objects*, some of the properties A has must be materially incompatible with some properties B has. To be different objects, A and B must be more than merely indifferent to each other in the sense just stipulated; their properties must be such that they cannot be instantiated in the same object. For a subject to differentiate A from B as objects, the subject thus has to attribute at least some properties to A that materially exclude (in Hegel's language, "negate") some

properties that the subject attributes to B. No subject can make sense of the concept of an object, according to Hegel, without making use of the conceptual tools of determinate negation.

Determinate negation and the conceptual determinacy essential to standards of cognitive success go hand in hand. For an object's properties to function as a standard for a subject's commitments about the object, the subject has to be able to distinguish it determinately from other objects. The object, whether or not it be a physical object, has to be determinate for the subject if it is going to be sufficiently contentful to serve as a standard of cognitive success for that subject. To achieve that determinacy, the subject must, in applying a cluster of property concepts to objects, establish relationships of exclusion and entailment among those concepts. The entailment relations, according to Brandom, can be explicated in terms of the exclusion relations.

What, then, of the object that is present before me now? Consider two distinct senses in which the desk at which I am sitting might be thought to be immediately present to me. My concern is that Bernstein appears to run these two senses together. In the first sense, I am immediately aware that the object before me is a desk if my awareness of this is noninferential. My awareness that the object before me is a desk is noninferential if I am not first noticing certain features of it (for example, that it has legs and a flat top) and then concluding, as a distinct act of reasoning, that the object is a desk. In the second sense of immediate awareness, I would be immediately aware that the object before me is a desk only if my awareness of this is something I could have *independently* of everything else I know, including the various things I learned while acquiring competence as a speaker of English.

As I read them, neither Hegel nor Sellars denies that there is noninferential awareness of the objects apprehended in perception. On the contrary, both of these philosophers hold that perception of physical objects is noninferential.³⁴ As Sellars puts the Hegelian point in his own terms, perceptions are noninferential "entry transitions" into a "game" that consists also of inferences and "language exit transitions" (i.e., actions).³⁵ While perceptions themselves are noninferential, they have their significance, according to Sellars and Hegel, in a broader standard-governed practice that also essentially involves inferences and actions. For these philosophers, my desk would be immediately present to me in the first sense distinguished in the previous paragraph but not in the second. This distinction does not come across clearly in Bernstein's writings.

Believing that some transitions in the perceiving-inferring-acting game are not themselves inferences does not commit a philosopher to what Sellars calls the myth of the given. The mistake that is definitive

of the myth involves committing oneself to immediate awareness in the second sense, immediacy as *self-sufficient* or *independent intelligibility*. In this sense, I would be immediately aware *that* the object before me is a desk only if my awareness of this did not depend on my having acquired a wide array of conceptual skills in the course of learning a language. Hegel and Sellars both hold that there is no such thing as awareness that something is thus-and-so for a subject who has not already acquired the capacity to employ concepts in characterizing objects, recognizing distinctions, making inferences, forming intentions to do this or that, and acting for a reason. There is no immediate awareness of the objective facts in this second sense of immediacy.

The ability to see (noninferentially) that the object before me is a desk depends on my having already acquired the concept “desk,” and this inherently involves acquiring the ability to distinguish desks from chairs and rugs, and the ability to make inferences of various kinds concerning such things. Full-fledged awareness, of the sort we have in perception, may be noninferential, but only someone skilled in inference can have it. To be a perceiver, as Sellars would put it, one must be a player of the perceiving-*inferring*-acting game. In Hegel’s idiom, to be a perceiver, one must participate in the purposeful activities constitutive of reason.

To perceive *that* something is thus-and-so is to make an entry transition into a game that necessarily includes inferential moves and proprieties. It is to undertake a commitment that stands in relationships of compatibility, incompatibility, and entailment with other commitments. At a glance, I can see that the object before me is a desk. I have undertaken this commitment noninferentially. Yet the commitment, that the object before me is a desk, entails that the same object is an item of furniture and that it is neither a hurricane nor a tulip. A commitment *that* something is thus-and-so can be undertaken noninferentially while still having inferential import—as indeed it must if the *that*-clause involved is to have any content. All commitments with inferential import have whatever significance they have in a context that essentially encompasses inferential moves and proprieties.

Sellars differentiates, then, between (a) the question of whether all judgments, including perceptual judgments, are undertaken as inferred conclusions and (b) the question of whether someone could make any perceptual judgment without first having acquired a fairly extensive set of inferential and linguistic capacities. Sellars gives negative answers to both questions. A positive answer to (a) would seem to create an unfathomable regress of inferences. What he calls the myth of the given, and rejects, is centered in a positive answer to (b).³⁶

Sellars takes all perceptual judgments *that* something is thus-and-so to be positions in the perceiving-inferring-acting game. All full-fledged players of that game reap the benefits of linguistic practices. Learning a language is essential to becoming a subject with commitments. Perceptual commitments, no less than theoretical, evaluative, and practical commitments, are positions in a language game, positions that one could not occupy without acquiring concept-applying and inferential capacities.

So the answer to (b) must be negative. But a negative answer to (b) leaves open how one ought to answer (a). The correct response to (a), according to Sellars, grants that perceptual judgments typically result not from inferences, but rather from what he calls language entry transitions. Because such transitions land the player in the logical space of reasons, where judgments qualify as commitments with compatibility, incompatibility, and entailment relations to other commitments, only a player with the capacity to move around in that logical space counts as maker of judgments.

Bernstein tends to follow Peirce more closely than Sellars or Hegel when discussing these matters. The trouble is that Peirce's stark declaration that we "have no power of Intuition" does not adequately distinguish questions (a) and (b). When he goes on to say that "every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions," he leaves unclear whether he is returning a positive answer to (a) or running (a) and (b) together.³⁷ He and Sellars are in agreement in holding that judgments of all kinds are corrigible. But on (a) and (b), Sellars appears to be following Hegel's lead, rather than Peirce's. The treatment of sense-certainty and perception in the *Phenomenology* pertains to (b), and it does not lead Hegel to avoid subsequent reference to a kind of immediacy or intuitive judgment.

It is instructive to recall that Hegel frames this treatment, in the introduction, by cautioning his readers against adopting the Kantian metaphor of cognition as a *medium*. He endorses Kant's dictum that intuitions without concepts are blind, but rejects Kant's characterization of the conceptual as a medium or interface between the perceiver and the world as it is in itself. Clearly distinguishing between (a) and (b) is the first step toward seeing how the endorsement and the rejection fit together in Hegel's thinking.

The second step would be to underline the importance of his idea that for anything to be a judgment, including a perceptual judgment, the *content* of the judgment must be something that someone *could have* arrived at inferentially. To explicate this idea, Hegel employs the concepts of mediation and determinate negation to spell out how content is determined in part by inferential role. In this context, *media-*

tion, a concept he borrows from Aristotle's treatment of the syllogism, stands for a kind of inferential relation.³⁸ A crucial objective of Hegel's semantic and epistemological project is to distinguish mediation in this sense from the Kantian misconstrual of the conceptual as a medium between subject and object. This is Hegel's way of differentiating two senses in which a judgment might be thought to involve immediate awareness.

By presenting Peirce and Sellars as if they were giving the same critique of the myth of the given, Bernstein gets caught up in Peirce's apparent conflation of (a) and (b). In describing Peirce's view, Bernstein first says: "all cognition involves or presupposes inferential processes" (PT 39). This implies a negative answer to (b) without implying anything about (a). Bernstein then adds, less helpfully, that there "is no direct, immediate, intuitive knowledge" (*ibid.*), leaving unclear which question he is addressing. He later says that Sellars rejects "the claim that there is immediate knowledge that doesn't involve any conceptual mediation" (PT 97). In both of these passages, the notion of immediacy being employed remains hazy. The trouble dissolves once we recognize that there are distinct senses of immediacy for each sort of mediation a reader might have in mind.³⁹ A judgment can be immediate in the sense of being arrived at noninferentially without being either incorrigible or independent of linguistic acculturation.

The Hegel-Sellars point about the (noninferentially) perceived object is not that it lacks any role in application of the standards by which cognitive success must be gauged, but rather that what weight perception does possess in the governance of belief is defeasible and dependent for its determinate content on the broader context of the perceiving-inferring-acting game. This means that the perceived object's role in determining what counts, in a particular case, as cognitive success is not self-sufficient (absolute). If, however, the properties of a perceived object placed no restrictions on what a subject may rightfully believe about it, the cognitive success of that subject's beliefs about the world would be merely up to the subject in a way that would empty the title of "cognitive success" of meaning. The defeasible epistemic significance of the perceived object strikes the mean between too much constraint and not enough.

What is true of the object of noninferential awareness is true also of objects that one knows about only inferentially, as I know about the theoretically posited objects of subatomic physics. It goes without saying that they too lack self-sufficient epistemic significance, for they obviously depend, for their intelligibility to a subject, on the subject's activity of positing them in order to take account of observational evidence. Indeed, the entire object side of the subject-object distinction,

including whatever laws of nature the inquiring subject might wish to discover, lacks self-sufficiency, for the same reason we noted in connection with the solitary object of perception.

Objects and the laws governing them alike must be determinate if they are to have epistemic significance for a subject, and subjects confer determinacy in part by drawing distinctions between subject and object and among kinds of objects, and also by inferring one thing from another and by acting in one way or another on the basis of their commitments. These activities of distinction drawing, inferring, and rational agency belong to the full story that needs to be told about the standards of cognitive success. According to that story, perceived objects have the significance of *needing, other things being equal, to be accounted for*, and the actual properties of an actual object have the significance of a topic that can be *gotten right or wrong*.

4. The Individual Subject's Attitudes or Will as Absolute

Does this mean that the individual subject is the seat of absolute epistemic or practical authority? It does not. Hegel is at pains to show that what is true of the object side of the subject-object dualism is also true of the subject side: neither side is the self-sufficient locus of normativity. Bernstein agrees with this conclusion, and repeatedly borrows from or alludes to the arguments Hegel marshals in support of it. My main purpose in this section is to show how Hegel's arguments against locating the absolute solely in an individual subject provide the "background" for Bernstein's influential accounts of Marx and Kierkegaard in *Praxis and Action*.

Bernstein follows Hegel in holding that the individual subject's given desires, preferences, satisfactions, moods, fears, and other subjective states are no more determinate, when taken in themselves, than the objects given immediately in perception. To be binding for the subject, they need to acquire determinate content, which involves coming to stand in relations of exclusion and entailment with one another.

The same indeterminacy also undermines authoritativeness when one subject takes another subject's given subjective states as absolute. Perhaps I can, by submitting to an earthly master's subjectivity, escape the punishment or death he would otherwise impose on me. In my perfect submission, his desire becomes my desire; his wish is my command. The same is true, in effect, if I submit to the wishes of an otherworldly master, real or imaginary. If the subjectivity to which I submit is *merely* given, rather than being something that can be inferentially articulated and questioned, it remains without content, regardless of whose subjectivity it is: my own, my lord's, or my Lord's.

On the other hand, if the subjectivity to which I submit does have sufficient determinacy to have implications, that must be because the relevant subjective states include propositional attitudes: feeling *that* such-and-such, desiring *that* such-and-such, believing *that* such-and-such. These attitudes are positions in the perceiving-inferring-action game. They are inextricably bound up with conceptual and volitional activity, and as such they partake in relations of exclusion and implication. One such attitude can imply something only because it excludes attitudes that are incompatible with it. Subjectivity has determinate conceptual content only because it makes room for attitudinal conflict.

At least some conceptually contentful desires, fears, and states of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, bliss, and revulsion are arrived at noninferentially and possess a *prima facie* (but defeasible) import for the subject's practical reasoning. The sway a desire has over practical reasoning parallels the sway that noninferential perceptual judgments exert over the subject's beliefs about objects. In both cases, the influence exerted is defeasible. The subject is free to discount it, or even to disregard it, in light of other desires and considerations. Perceptual and emotive responsiveness to the environment are two characteristic ways in which experience creates opportunities for attitudinal conflict, as well as opportunities for learning, for the subject.

Emotive responsiveness is, of course, notoriously promiscuous. Every subject has a vast surplus of first-order desires, many of which are practically incompatible with others. The subject, in deciding what to do, must incorporate some desires, at the expense of others, into its plans, while also resolving perpetually arising conflicts among beliefs. Desire generates a need for further conceptualization by making some features of the environment salient to the subject.

Every subject capable of thought, desire, and experience inevitably acquires conflicting attitudes and therefore finds itself facing a difficulty insofar as it takes its own given attitudes as a standard of belief and action. Which of the conflicting attitudes will prevail? A set of conflicting attitudes implies too much, and therefore too little, to give guidance on any matter affected by the conflict. Determinacy of conceptual content in the relevant attitudes is a necessary but not sufficient condition for authoritativeness. The brute strength of one attitude relative to another can, of course, determine how a subject comes to think or feel. But the outcome is not always satisfactory from the subject's reflective point of view. As the case of a desperate addict shows, in the realm of desire, might does not make right. The same holds for such other attitudes as preferences and fears. Attitudinal strength is not equivalent to attitudinal authority.

Conflicts among attitudes arise not only within a single subject, but also between subjects. In a famous passage of intense interest to Bernstein, Hegel discusses a scenario in which one subject, under threat of death from another, is compelled to treat the other subject's attitudes as if they were authoritative for it. The master and the slave, as we may call them, both have attitudinal conflicts to resolve. For the master, this requires, among other things, giving his own desires enough determinacy and coherence to aid in the selection of ends for the slave to carry out. One of the master's desires is, however, especially problematical, for he presumably desires to assert his own will as self-sufficiently authoritative, as the independent standard of practical success for the slave. To be a master is essentially to be recognized as such by another. It is such recognition that the master has tried to compel. Bernstein describes the problem as follows: "In his desperate attempt to become an independent self-consciousness, a true master, he has actually enslaved himself, made himself dependent on the slave for his own existence *qua* master" (PA 27).

The master's attempt to force the slave into treating the master's will as authoritative is more precarious than it might seem. The slave can always end the relationship of domination simply by refusing to submit. The master hopes that imposing a high cost on disobedience will induce submission, but soon discovers that imposing the high cost has its own costs and risks. Bernstein is interested in how the significance of this discovery can be elaborated from the vantage of a Marxist concern with the sociology of domination and the critique of ideology.⁴⁰ Even a modest degree of solidarity among the dominated poses a threat to masters. So masters have a standing incentive to claim a basis for obedience that is not purely coercive. The arbitrary will or desire of the master cannot, however, provide such a basis. To make a normative case for his superior position, the master must invoke reasons that count as reasons *for the slave* and yet take a form distinct from a threat.

To take that discursive step would implicitly be to treat the slave as someone with the *authority*, as well as the responsibility, to *recognize* the master's will as a fitting practical standard. Such implicitly mutual recognition is a glimpse, albeit in a glass darkly, of the sort of sociality Hegel considers essential to spirit. As Bernstein puts the point, Hegel is anticipating a future in which "all forms of objectification and alienation are *aufgehoben*" and foreshadowing "Marx's vision of a humanized society" (PA 25). The master who sets out to secure his position implicitly aims to have things both ways: to be recognized as an authority *for reasons* by one he *recognizes as another authority*, while also

remaining in a position to exercise power *arbitrarily* over the other *regardless of what the other's reasons and concerns are*.

A pragmatic phenomenology practices immanent critique on various formations of consciousness. Among the most important of these, from Bernstein's point of view, are formations of consciousness that function ideologically, by fostering misrecognition of basic social relationships and by rationalizing domination. The advantages of being recognized *for reasons* lead the dominant to articulate standards and address them to the dominated. Because the potential for contradiction between the standards and the relationships they are meant to justify is high, however, the opportunities for immanent critique from below are ample. Whether immanent critique suffices as a way of defending the ideals of democracy is the question that divides Bernstein from Habermas, and will be taken up briefly in §7 below.

Referring to contemporary forms of domination, Bernstein writes that we are living in "a society that keeps creating its own opposition, in which there is breakup: the spontaneous generation of movements of protest where suddenly individuals decide to take their fate into their own hands in the face of what appear to be overwhelming forces opposing them."⁴¹ The ideology of the dominant inevitably places a normative language in the hands of the dominated. The dominated can then employ that language critically, for example by negating the master's principles, applying them in novel ways to cases, or re-signifying the concepts they involve. The dominated can also fashion their own concepts, principles, and ideals in an effort to make sense of their own experience of domination. To be on the receiving end of domination is to have experiential evidence that being dominated is horrendous.

In the Hegelian dialectic, slaves have advantages that do not initially meet the eye (PA 27–8). One is that carrying out the ends stipulated by the master initiates an increasingly complicated and productive relation between the slave and the natural objects on which he works. The slave must, in the first place, adopt beliefs about those objects that are appropriately responsive to the actual properties those objects have, a strategy at odds with the notion that the standards for successful believing can be specified solely by making reference to the subject side of the subject-object dualism. In addition, the slave must select means for the transformation of natural objects in accordance with the ends set by the master. These means, unlike the master's stipulated ends, cannot be selected arbitrarily if they are to prove reliably successful. They must instead be chosen in light of beliefs and plans that are themselves appropriately responsive to the objects being worked upon.

By enacting the resulting intentions as a laborer, the slave finds its own subjectivity, as well as the master's arbitrarily imposed ends, objectified in the properties of the artifacts of the slave's labor. This objectification of subjectivity blurs the subject-object dualism in a way that goes beyond appropriate responsiveness to objects in the formation of beliefs and the selection of means. It also provides a model for understanding all forms of objectification, including the production of cultural practices and institutions. All cultural production is like work in giving objectifying expression to subjectivity, but also in doubling back to reshape the productive subject, a theme that Hegel eventually takes up under the heading of "spirit" and Marx takes up under the heading of "praxis" (PA 55–83).

While the ironic enrichment of the slave's consciousness ultimately prepares the way for a transition to self-conscious spirit for Hegel and a transition to self-conscious praxis for Marx, Hegel next examines what he calls stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness. He has two reasons for considering these formations of consciousness in this context. The first is that he is trying to work through what he regards as an exhaustive typology of subject-centered conceptions of cognitive and practical standards before moving on to a treatment of reason-centered and spirit-centered conceptions.

The second reason is that from the vantage of his historicized version of transcendental philosophy, which he wants to emerge as a justified conclusion of his phenomenological inquiry, these remaining subject-centered formations all have the master-slave relationship as a *sociological* condition of their possibility. That is, he holds that what makes sense of these three formations is that they all respond in some way to the felt dissatisfactions of a subjectivity shaped by the experience of slavery. Bernstein regards the movement from the first of these formations to the last as a paradigmatic instance of Hegel's dialectic, and describes this movement in some detail when introducing his critical discussion of Kierkegaard (PA 86–94).

The slavish consciousness overtly treats the master's will as if it were authoritative, but cannot *truly* make sense of doing so for any reason other than a desire for self-preservation. Obeying the master's will simply in order to save one's own skin implicitly treats the master's will as merely arbitrary. The next set of dialectical possibilities emerges when the slave distinguishes between arbitrariness and genuine authority (a distinction that might well also be drawn in the ideology the master wishes, paradoxically, to impose *and* have recognized). Once this distinction has been accepted, the subject's attitudinal slavishness is in some sense already left behind, because the subject now, at least

in the secrecy of his own heart, attributes authority to something distinct from the master's essentially arbitrary commands.

What Hegel calls stoicism results when the subject identifies its own capacity to relocate authority outside the essentially arbitrary as the self-sufficient freedom that sets the standard of cognitive and practical success. The stoical subject treats this freedom, this independence of contingency, as worth having, despite its abstractness, even while masters go on issuing arbitrary edicts and slaves go on behaving *as if* those edicts had authority. Stoicism, whether adopted by a master or a slave, identifies with an independence of contingency posited within the subject by the subject. Yet this assertion of independence, because it is mere assertion, has the character of an empty protest against what remain the contingent bonds essential to the master-slave relationship. As Bernstein writes, "Stoical consciousness begins to 'crack' when it realizes that it can never succeed in completely denying and ignoring the contingent determinate reality from which it is trying to escape" (PA 88).

What Hegel calls skepticism takes stoicism's implied denial that the actuality of slavery *ought to matter to the subject* and transforms it into an explicit strategy of *denying authority to whatever claims authority*. What is it then that authorizes this strategy from the vantage of skeptical consciousness? The strategy is implicitly committed to taking the subject's capacity for mere negativity as normative, and it too therefore runs aground, because mere negativity lacks content.

The doubts being expressed themselves lack determinate sense when completely abstracted from the broader process of inquiry in which some commitments can be put in jeopardy, but not all at once. Even if they had sense, the subject would lack entitlement to raise them. Mere denial of authority by repeatedly asking "Why should I accept *that?*" of any putative authority, and refusing to accept any conceivable answer, leads rapidly to the question: "Why should one count *this* pattern of refusal as superior to all that is being refused?" Radical skepticism consumes itself. It has no principled way of blocking the application to itself of its own method of doubting. It is empty, Hegel thinks, because its negativity is indeterminate.

Hegel's preferred form of negativity as an immanent critic is *determinate* negation, a way of raising doubts from within conceptions of what the genuinely binding standards are while learning something specific from each such conception found wanting on its own terms. He speaks of his alternative to skepticism as a pathway of doubt, but his way of doubting is not indiscriminate. The introduction of the *Phenomenology* counsels "mistrust" of such mistrust (§74).⁴²

The implication is that doubt is itself something that sometimes requires justification, a conclusion that enters pragmatism independently through Peirce (via Thomas Reid) and through Dewey's plain-spoken, down-to-earth translation of Hegelianism.⁴³ Putnam lists this conclusion as one of pragmatism's most important theses, and goes on to suggest that combining antiskepticism and fallibilism "is perhaps *the* unique insight of pragmatism" (quoted in PT 154). At the end of §2 above, while granting that "fallibilism" is a term Peirce sometimes uses as a general label for his epistemological views, I suggested that it is misleadingly imprecise when used in that way. I referred instead to an agreement between Peirce and Hegel on the corrigibility of inquiry. Now I am saying that Hegel rejects skepticism. But if Hegel, no less than Peirce, is committed to an account of inquiry that is both corrigibilist and antiskeptical, the insight Putnam is trying to draw to our attention does not belong uniquely to pragmatism—unless, of course, we count Hegel as a pragmatist *avant la lettre*. American pragmatism's contribution might then be to differentiate the insight from what Bernstein regards as the excessive confidence or dogmatism on display at the end of the *Phenomenology*, where Hegel seems to be saying that he has attained a standpoint beyond the need for further correction of his views, where spirit can simply be at rest.

Whether Hegel in fact adopts such a posture depends, as I have said, on what it is that absolute knowing purports to know. As far as I know, Bernstein does not consider the possibility that Hegel is himself, finally, a corrigibilist with respect to inquiry. If absolute knowing turns out to be compatible with antiskeptical corrigibilism, or even affirms it, then the gap between Hegel and pragmatism would narrow. In §7, I will return to the question of what the remaining gap might amount to.

In his discussion of skepticism as a form of subjectivism, Hegel takes the subject's realization of skepticism's incoherence to issue in a determinate successor formation of consciousness. This is what he terms "the unhappy consciousness," a category Hegel uses strictly to designate a third form of subjectivism historically rooted in premodern societies marked by slavery and serfdom. In this formation of consciousness, the subject distinguishes what is contingent from what is not, identifying primarily with the former while projecting the latter beyond the contingent world in which the subject, as a creature of desire, exists. Bernstein regards Kierkegaard's theistic existentialism as a modern variant of the unhappy consciousness, in which alienation from a conformist bourgeoisie replaces alienation from the condition of slavery as the social prerequisite for projection of the ideal into a beyond (PA 96–122). In §5, we will find further Hegelian resources for criticizing existentialism.

In the unhappy consciousness, once again, the subject adopts a posture analogous to that of the slavish consciousness, who bows down before the master and abases himself as unworthy. In this case, however, the lowly subject takes the master-subject to be in an otherworldly beyond. By locating the true master there, outside the realm of contingency, the lowly subject aspires to find a divine subject to serve and obey. As I have already implied, however, the otherworldly location of a master, his supposedly complete freedom from contingency, does not give his will any more determinate content than the subject finds in her own contingently given desires and attitudes.

Neither does it explain how authority can belong to the master without also attaching to the slavish subject attempting to recognize him. The subservient subject takes herself to be responsible to the heavenly master. She is obliged to exhibit devotion to the one with divine authority. But who or what is that? It is one supremely *worthy* of devotion and thanksgiving. Here Hegel appears to have in mind a thought reminiscent of Plato's *Euthyphro*. The devoted soul must implicitly be *singling out* as an object of devotion, and *recognizing* as worthy of devotion, the heavenly master. This means that some epistemic and evaluative authority is being exercised implicitly on the supposedly merely contingent side of the relationship between devoted soul and heavenly master. Hence, the notion of the relationship is out of kilter with the actuality of the relationship as lived.

The lowly subject's sense of this discord, between the need to exercise at least some authority within the relationship and the conviction that all worthiness resides on the divine side of the relationship, gives rise to an intense experience of guilt, which leads in turn, Hegel suggests, to a search for some sort of appropriate mediator between the heavenly master and the contingent individual. This is a development that produces its own complications. Because Bernstein does not pursue them, there is no need to discuss those complications here, except to say that the unhappy consciousness remains, by stipulation, as bereft of self-attributed authority relative to the mediator as it had been relative to the heavenly master—a point that Bernstein appears to regard as a decisive count against Kierkegaard.

The dialectic of subjectivism is thereby exhausted. Hegel takes himself to have shown that so long as the individual subject treats some aspect of its own or someone else's subjectivity as independently authoritative, the notion of the resulting formation of consciousness will inevitably be at odds with its actuality. The relationship between the contingent individual and the universal remains at issue as Hegel turns his attention to purposive action, which he calls *reason*.

5. Agency and Reason, Considered Abstractly

In this section, I have three main objectives, all of which are connected with the “Reason” chapter of the *Phenomenology*. The first is to examine Bernstein’s rather abrupt dismissal of the position Hegel dubs “idealism” at the beginning of that chapter. The second is to show how Bernstein’s critique of existentialism echoes Hegel’s critique of appeals to the agent’s will as an absolute standard. The third is to show how Bernstein’s critique of Habermas echoes Hegel’s critique of a Kantian conception of rational agency. On the first issue, I am raising doubts without attempting to resolve them definitively. On the second and third issues, I am endorsing as well as explicating the uses Bernstein is making of Hegel.

The argument up to this juncture has consisted of immanent critiques of object- and subject-centered conceptions of successful belief and action. All of these are officially committed to taking either the object or something about a subject’s attitudes as the absolute, which we are defining for the purposes of this inquiry as the self-sufficient standard for knowing and living, whatever that standard might be. Each formation of consciousness considered so far has proven one-sided, because its actualization implicitly involves blurring the subject-object dualism in some way. In other words, operating within the dualism—assuming that the standard and what is required to apply and understand it are to be located simply on one side of the dualism or the other—proves self-defeating.

If the argument is successful, Bernstein thinks, it shifts the burden of proof against objectivism and subjectivism, but without eliminating the need to consider versions of these positions yet to be invented. Shouldering the burden of proof, on behalf of some new or old form of objectivism or subjectivism, would involve finding a way around the problems associated with immediacy and indeterminacy that repeatedly undermine the attempt to account for the standard of belief and action by making reference only to one or the other side of the dualism. What it takes to supply the sort of determinacy essential to a standard that can function as such for a subject appears to involve *activities* on the part of a subject, activities that are not nested securely on either side of the dualism.

Consider the activities associated with observation and theory-construction. The observable object’s role, as something to be observed and thus taken up into the perceiving-inferring-acting game, gives that object a kind of sway over the attitudes of the subject. Notice that evidentiary weight is attributed to the object-as-perceived and must be attributed to it by anyone who counts as actively engaged in this partic-

ular game. Evidentiary significance for a subject is not something an object could have had if there were no subjects engaged in observation, theoretical reasoning, and problem-solving behavior. Before there were players of the game, there were objects.⁴⁴ But in those days, the objects did not possess epistemic significance for anyone's cognitive attitudes. The bindingness and content of the relevant standards are creatures of the game.

The epistemic weight attributed to perceptions by players of the game is defeasible, which means that it may be, and in some cases should be, withdrawn in light of other considerations. Because the other considerations are not lodged in the object, but include the subject's theoretical and epistemological commitments, the weight attributed to the perceived object is not self-sufficient. Moreover, the determinacy of a perception's conceptual content is inextricably tied up with the distinctions the subject draws between subject and object and among various sorts of objects, as well as with the license the subject takes while making transitions into, out of, and within the game.

In various ways, then, the subject is exercising authority, even when attributing epistemic significance to an object that is present to it. But the authority that the subject exercises cannot simply be located in the subject's given attitudes, for reasons relating, on the one hand, to the need for determinacy and, on the other, to the need to distinguish authoritativeness from arbitrariness. The subject, as a player of the perceiving-inferring-acting game, is also essentially involved in the world. Perception of objects is a way of being related to objects as well as a way of differentiating oneself from them. The objects perceived, no less than the subjects perceiving them, are in the game. Neither the game nor the standards it applies can be fully described without making reference to them.

The game is not, however, exhausted by perceptual input and the inferential moves required to make sense of that input. It also essentially involves action in a sense distinct from perceiving or inferring. Action in this sense is often action on objects. In physical labor, as a paradigmatic form of action (PA 55–66), the subject objectifies itself, impressing its mark on the world by changing objects found in the world into artifacts. By *taking* the given object to be thus-and-so and by producing new objects out of objects at hand in the natural environment, the subject participates in the creation of a world that is intermingled with its own subjectivity.

In subjectivism, the subject attempts to withdraw its standards of judgment from the world. The standpoint Hegel calls *reason* is achieved when consciousness realizes that the subjectivist withdrawal (from the actuality of slavery) is actually a failure. This is bad news for subjec-

tivism, but good news for consciousness. Hegel's term for the good news is *idealism*, which initially takes the form of reason's "certainty that it is itself reality."⁴⁵ Bernstein finds this claim disturbingly audacious, but what has Hegel actually asserted here? This *certainty*, Hegel says, is a mere assertion or an immediate apprehension on reason's part that it is itself reality. Reason's *truth*, in Hegel's vocabulary, would be the full development of this notion. At the beginning of Hegel's account of reason, this full development is what we do not have. So there are grounds for being cautious about identifying Hegel's own position with the idealism being introduced under the heading of "reason."

Many readers, including Bernstein, have taken Hegel to be asserting a grand and extremely implausible metaphysical thesis here—the nineteenth-century ancestor of what I referred to in §2 as linguistic idealism—as if the subject had just suddenly decided to end the misery of the unhappy consciousness by imagining itself to have swallowed the entirety of reality. Bernstein quotes more than a full page of the relevant passage in the *Phenomenology*, but, contrary to his usual practice, offers no explication of it, except to describe Hegel's optimism as "unbounded" (PA 95).

Bernstein does not say what he takes this optimism to be. Instead, he launches directly into his close readings of Kierkegaard and Sartre, as if the idealism introduced at the beginning of "Reason" were not only obvious in content but also obviously absurd. It is true that Kierkegaard and Sartre respond to Hegel's view of reason in this dismissive way and that this response motivates their existentialism, so perhaps Bernstein felt no need to say more, given that he was setting up his account of what they go on to claim. But there is more to be said.

Another interpretive strategy would be to ask what reason's "certainty that it is itself reality" would need to be if it were actually supported by the arguments Hegel has been making against objectivism and subjectivism. Given that he presents those arguments as determinate negations, Hegel must be assuming, as the starting point for his dialectic of reason, the rather complicated structure of normativity that is instantiated when an individual subject, the objects of its awareness, and the objects on which it acts are jointly caught up in what I have been calling the perceiving-inferring-acting game. It must be this structure that reason (that is, the formation of consciousness of that name) intuits as simultaneously *reality* and *rational agency itself*.

At this point in the *Phenomenology*, we know not only that the subject-object dualism must be transcended if normativity is to be made intelligible, but also that what subjects do when interacting with objects already implicitly exceeds that dualism. This excess is what reason intuits but does not yet comprehend. Reason, or purposive action,

initially experiences this overcoming as an identity of itself and reality, as a negation of the distinction that defines the dualism.

We have already been told that the abode of consciousness, the natural setting in which reason emerges, is a realm of propertied objects governed by natural laws. In other words, the natural world *encompasses* the conscious subject and the activities in which it engages. Now we are being told that reason's activities (perceiving, inferring, and acting) *encompass that realm*. This double encompassment is what reason intuits as an identity. We have not yet been told how these two forms of encompassment can *cohere*, let alone what might be meant by taking reason and reality to be *identical*. Hegel's idealism, in contrast to the merely intuited idealism at the outset of the "Reason" chapter, attempts to answer these questions.⁴⁶

Few people doubt that reality, whatever that might be, encompasses reason in the sense of rational agency, for only a befuddled philosopher would deny that reality includes the natural world *within* which rational animals currently do their perceiving, inferring, and acting. Encompassment of this kind seems a matter of simple ontological inclusion, hardly in need of explanation. But an account of the natural world as a congeries of propertied objects governed by natural laws, where human beings are counted among those objects, leaves unexplained the bindingness (in Hegelian language, the *rational necessity*) of the standards that appear to be in force in the perceiving-inferring-acting game of reason.

That game is a standard-governed, purposive activity. Otherwise, it would not involve cognitive and practical success and failure. Yet the laws of nature are not norms of the sort that subjects follow, criticize, and revise when playing the game; they are not *standards*. Nature is where the game is played, but a scientific account of nature is not yet an account of the game. It cannot, by itself, tell us what the game's authoritativeness consists in. Hegel argues for this conclusion in the portion of the "Reason" chapter entitled "Observing Reason," which Bernstein does not, as far as I know, discuss. Reason, understood as the *practice* of natural science, cannot account for itself. Natural science employs standards, and its activities are guided by them, but it does not say either what one's standards should be or what makes a particular set of standards binding.

In what sense, then, does reason, or purposive activity, encompass reality? The moral of the phenomenological story so far is that the subject has no reason to think of itself as trapped on the subject side of the subject-object dualism. Subject, objects, and standards alike need to be understood in terms of the perceiving-inferring-acting game—the activities of reason—in which they are all caught up. The activities of reason

are carried out by a *subject-in-the-world*, by Dasein, not by a subject cut off from the world by the subject-object divide.

The subject, reason, does not obliterate that divide by swallowing the world. The subject makes sense of its exercise of authority, its attributions of authority, its reasoning, and its interactions with objects as a knower and doer by envisioning a context large and variegated enough to encompass all that there is to think about, the one doing the thinking, and the standards implicit in the thinking and doing. What there is to think about necessarily includes the realm of propertied objects governed by natural laws.

Viewed from one angle, that realm gives rise to individual subjects and to the perceiving-inferring-acting game in which they participate. Viewed from another angle, the game incorporates the objects of which subjects are aware and on which they act. Because the game involves entry and exit transitions, it cannot be described without reference to the objects. The game is not on the subject side of a subject-object divide. It is the integrated repertoire of object-related and inferential activities in which reason consists. Reason is inherently tied up with the natural world in which its activities arise and remain situated, a world on which those activities also have effects.

The formation of consciousness called *reason* takes normativity to be a function of the *individual* subject's participation in a panoply of interactions with the environment that provide the subject with reasons for belief and action. Hegel's discussion of reason is, however, an attempt to show that we have not yet arrived at a self-sufficient standard.

Reason is correct to affirm that the subject and its objects of awareness actually interact in the real world. But, when understood in individualistic and synchronic terms, reason is still not able to offer a fully satisfactory account of its own standards pertaining to belief and action. Because Hegel defines reason as purposive action—in the broad sense in which observing, reasoning, and acting on objects all qualify as purposive action—he proceeds to consider various ways in which the individual subject's agency can be thought to be a source of standards for the subject.

The first of these ways takes mere individuality as the *given* basis for purposive action, as that which action expresses and that which provides it with whatever authority it has. This way is defective, however, for the same reasons that similar attributions of authority to the given have proven defective at earlier stages of Hegel's phenomenological inquiry. Mere individuality is no more determinate and no better able to distinguish authoritativeness from arbitrariness than mere desire.

What, then, about the agent's will? With this question, we arrive at the second topic of the present section, Bernstein's critique of the exis-

tentialist picture of the will. Mere will, according to Bernstein, is yet another mask worn by the given. If the subject is perfectly free to choose any values whatsoever, if its fundamental choices are unsituated and criterionless, and in that sense without determination, why would the result be binding?

Considered abstractly as a pure capacity to choose, mere will, according to Hegel, is indeterminate. Only when the will has already been determined can it give the subject guidance.⁴⁷ By what, then, is it determined? There are two possibilities. If the will is determined by something else, in the subject or outside of it, then that replaces the will as the crucial factor. If, however, the will determines itself, as existentialism claims, we are left, at bottom, with a pure capacity to choose—and thus, indeterminacy.

If the will really were radically self-determining, every subject would be only one radical choice away from another set of values. And wills do change. A subject subservient to a changing will is living arbitrarily, not in accordance with what it *recognizes* as binding. As Bernstein puts it, “Such a modification is always a possibility for me. In *this* respect, all choices are ultimately gratuitous, for at any moment of my existence I can choose such a ‘radical conversion’” (PA 147; emphasis in original).⁴⁸ Bernstein does not endorse this picture. He is saying that the will, thus conceived, is essentially indeterminate, which is to say, empty. The bindingness of a standard is precisely what the mere will cannot have.

From within the existentialist picture, all claims to bindingness exhibit bad faith, because they express, while simultaneously suppressing awareness of, the ultimately arbitrary basis of values and standards. What the existentialist proposes, according to Bernstein, is living out a brave refusal of bad faith. When asked why this particular form of courageous authenticity is to be valued, given that it leaves the subject imagining itself perpetually staring into the abyss of a contentless capacity to choose, the existentialist has trouble saying anything without exhibiting bad faith.

It cannot be that courageous authenticity is demanded by *recognition* of the subject’s *nature* as an expression of will, for any answer of that sort abandons the appeal to *mere* will in favor of appeal to a *conception* of human nature as authoritative for the subject’s ultimate choices. That shift would take us back into the riddles of observing reason. Adherence to a self-determining will requires the subject simultaneously to admit and abhor bad faith, to remain committed to a form of consciousness inherently at odds with its own notion. As Rorty once summarized this existentialist thought to me in conversation,

“Consciousness is always one step ahead of itself, and consciousness doesn’t like it.”

Abiding with this thought would be mandatory if the existentialist account of radical conversion were mandatory. But from the vantage of existentialism, there would appear to be no reason not to abandon whatever prior choice of standards, values, and outlook makes that account of radical conversion appear mandatory. It is significant that Bernstein, when discussing this issue, makes reference to both Hegel’s critique of the given and Wittgenstein’s critique of the assumption that ostensive definition can serve as “the foundation for our learning of language” (PA 159). Wittgenstein’s point is that “we must already master a language game in order to understand ostensive definitions” (ibid.). Hegel, I have suggested, was trying to show that the immediately given, whether in the form of a particular object present to the subject or in the form of the subject’s own attitudes, individuality, or agency, is already tied up in a larger story about the standards of cognitive and practical success—and must be if it is to have the determinacy implicitly being attributed to it.

There are radical conversions. The question is how to make sense of them, how to explain what makes them radical. It is of course sometimes true that a subject undergoing such a conversion imagines himself to be staring into the abyss and needing to make a foundational, criterionless choice. Bernstein’s purpose, in invoking Hegel and Wittgenstein, is to suggest that the decision to undertake a relatively earthshaking adjustment of one’s commitments is always, if rational, made in light of *some* considerations not currently in doubt. Even the framing of a dilemma at such a moment presupposes a broader context of commitment and practice. Otherwise, one could not make sense of the dilemma’s horns as having sufficient determinacy to be in conflict and sufficient *prima facie* weight to pose a problem.

What is misleading about the existentialist picture is its unexamined foundationalism. The picture assumes that all choices can be traced back to a basic choice, which by definition cannot have grounds. In *Praxis and Action*, Bernstein hints that this assumption is not mandatory, indeed that it must be abandoned if one is to make sense of radical conversions and the dilemmas that occasionally induce them. I am trying to turn the hint into a forthright Hegelian diagnosis of what Bernstein calls the “solipsism and nihilism” that threaten existentialism (PA 312). Conversions are radical insofar as they require us to reconsider what we care most about, but not because they take us into a vacuum in which there are no commitments or considerations that need to be taken into account when making up our minds.

Existentialism is an unhappy or disappointed foundationalism. Hegel, Peirce, Dewey, and Sellars all reject the foundationalism underlying the disappointment. All forms of foundationalism, in the sense at issue here, attribute self-sufficiency and determinacy to something that cannot bear the weight of the attributions.

Bernstein's Hegelian-pragmatic alternative is a sort of holism concerning normativity and authority, according to which any commitment a subject adopts can be put in jeopardy, but not all can be put in jeopardy at once without making nonsense of one's life. Making nonsense of one's life is psychologically possible, because many people have actually done it, and it certainly produces an unhappy result. But it is neither mandatory nor wise. Bernstein rejects the idea that the bindingness or acceptability of a standard is to be traced to an indefeasible foundation, whether it be experiential episodes, deliverances of reason, or acts of will. It is because normative significance is more broadly distributed than any foundational picture can capture that even radical conversions can be understood as decisions undertaken in the light of reasons.

Rationality therefore has to do with *shifting* relationships of interdependence, coherence, and incompatibility among *various* bearers of normative significance: the object I observe before me, the laws and unobservable entities I have posited to explain previous observations, my commitments concerning what materially follows from what, my epistemological principles, my first-order desires and fears, my second-order desires, my plans, and so on. The idea that these relationships involve multiple bearers of normative significance implies that they need to be understood holistically. The idea that these relationships can and do shift implies that they need to be understood diachronically, as belonging to an experiential process (PT 125–52) that requires me to resolve outright conflicts and somewhat milder forms of tension arising among my commitments. If there is not a timeless, context-free order of dependence among my commitments, if the normative significance of any particular item within the holistic system is defeasible in light of other potentially conflicting considerations, then normativity must belong to a self-correcting process in which I adjust my commitments to one another over time.

The full understanding of these holistic and diachronic features of rationality, according to Hegel, must await the introduction of the socio-historical category of *spirit*. Before turning to that category, however, we must consider another synchronic way of taking agency to be the self-sufficient provider of its own standard. This involves focusing not on mere will but rather on rational will, conceived as a self-constraining giver, follower, and appraiser of universalizable laws.⁴⁹ And

this brings us to the third topic of the present section, Bernstein's rejection of Habermas' Kantianism.

Hegel does not deny that self-legislation, in the sense of committing oneself to principles, plays an important role in rational agency. Neither does he deny that some principles we have reason to commit ourselves to are universal in scope, in the sense that they are rightly taken *to apply to everyone*. As examples of such principles, we could mention the prohibitions of murder, rape, and enslavement. It makes perfect sense for me to say, even when speaking of my very distant ancestors, that when engaging in murder, rape, or enslavement they *wronged* their victims. In saying this of my ancestors, I apply my principles to them, without necessarily implying that my ancestors endorsed those principles or were even familiar with them.⁵⁰

Applying my principles to everyone in this way would not commit me to thinking that merely by an act of self-legislation, a universalizing rational will suffices to give content to a principle or, for that matter, to earn rational entitlement to acceptance of it. In denying both of these things, Hegel also denies that the individual's self-legislating, rational will can qualify as the self-sufficient ground of a standard's bindingness.

According to Bernstein, Hegel's reasons for denying this are also reasons for rejecting Habermas' Kantian pragmatism. "Many of my criticisms of Habermas's Kantian dichotomies," Bernstein writes, "are in the spirit of Hegel" (PT 199). Those dichotomies, as analyzed meticulously in chapter 8 of *The Pragmatic Turn*, are: (1) "a formal-pragmatic statement of the unavoidable conditions of speech and action"; (2) "a sharp (categorical) distinction between the right and the good" that presents the former as universal in a sense explicated in formal-pragmatic terms; and (3) "a strict distinction between theoretical and practical reason" (PT 181). Bernstein takes (1), in particular, to be ruled out by Hegel's immanent critique of rational agency, abstractly construed.

Bernstein's reasons for objecting to (1) can be clarified by attending, as Brandom does, to the semantic dimension of Hegel's critique of Kant.⁵¹ Abstracted from historically developing practices involving perception, inference, and action, the concepts employed in an individual's principles have no substance. The concepts of *murder*, *rape*, and *enslavement* have content because our predecessors have applied them to cases in the past and have licensed certain material inferences, including material practical inferences, involving them. When agency, understood as the capacity for self-legislation, is abstracted from the history of the relevant practices, it has only the formal law of noncontradiction to constrain it. Principles that rule out self-contradictory the-

ories and maxims hardly provide the sorts of substantive constraints that the picture of a self-legislating will aspires to justify and explain.

This Kantian picture does represent an advance beyond the existentialist picture of mere will, but only because it tacitly relies on the historical dimension of the relevant practices.⁵² To account for the contentfulness of principles, and thus to secure for them the determinacy that the deliverances of an unconstrained will lack, Hegel holds that the historical determinants of content must be brought into the picture. The historical determinants of content appear to be neglected in Habermas' Kantian pragmatism.

If I say that the object before me is a desk, the content of what I am saying is not entirely up to me. It depends on what things the concept "desk" has been applied to in the past and on what material implications have been thought to follow from the assertion or belief that something is a *desk*. In these two ways, past usage exerts authority over current usage, but the authority being exerted is, once again, defeasible.⁵³ When computers were invented, the concept of a desk came to be applied to a somewhat broader class of middle-sized objects, and the subjects who negotiated this change in application of the concept were exercising their authority over it—and doing so in sufficient continuity with prior usage to be recognized as making somewhat novel use of the same concept their ancestors had used to refer to writing tables and such. A different sort of conceptual change occurred when some users of the concept began to license inferences from the claim that something is a desk to the claim that it is composed of subatomic particles.

The full account of any concept's semantic content has a historical dimension. It needs to include a *story* about concept application and inferential behavior over time. Rectification of the concept "desk" in the age of computers and advanced physics was driven in part by the need to resolve attitudinal and assertional conflicts concerning the things being talked about. But while the need to resolve contradiction is the engine of the process of conceptual rectification and attitude revision, it is obvious, Hegel thinks, that merely avoiding contradiction would be an inadequate strategy for any subject to pursue, for the simple reason that there are many ways of eliminating contradictions from one's view of things.

On Brandom's reading of Hegel, what holds for desk-talk would also hold for murder-talk. What counts as murder is not entirely up to me. It is largely but not entirely settled by prior applications of the concept over a long history. Prior applications of the concept do not strictly determine what is to be counted as a murder in the contemporary intensive-care unit or abortion clinic. There are new possibilities to be

considered and new beliefs about brains and fetal development to factor in. The principle prohibiting murder remains an explicit license for making a material inference from regarding a particular action as murderous to regarding it as wrong or unjust. The same pattern of material normative inference can also be made explicit by defining murder as unjust killing or by endorsing a conditional of the form “If *X* is murder, then *X* is unjust.”

Utilitarians might challenge that inferential pattern in the name of their own principles, definitions, and conditionals.⁵⁴ A critic of capitalism might challenge the conception of private property presupposed by Kant’s prohibition of theft.⁵⁵ Those challenges may be unwise, but they are among the many possible self-consistent ways to resolve conflicts over what one’s material practical inferences ought to be. Avoidance of contradictory principles cannot by itself settle the question of which principles are binding on us. That, according to Hegel, is a matter of employing immanent criticism to discern the strengths and weaknesses of alternative normative outlooks and adopting a normative stance that is able to inherit the strengths while minimizing the weaknesses of those alternatives. If my stance is self-consistent—as, for example, eschewing all material normative inferences and principles would be—it might nonetheless be so weak as a source of practical guidance as to be obviously unsatisfactory.

6. Spirit, Mutual Recognition, and Democracy

Turning now to Hegel’s chapter on “Spirit,” I will try to show how it prepares the way for the historical and social-practical dimensions of Bernstein’s pragmatism. I will also consider the relevance of Hegel’s arguments in that chapter to Bernstein’s endorsement of Dewey’s radical democracy and Bernstein’s criticisms of Rorty’s “ethnocentrism” and elitism.

The formation of consciousness called *reason* begins in the realization that normativity is holistic in a way that exceeds the limitations of the subject-object dualism. Reason ultimately discovers that it cannot make sense of itself without imagining the context of its activities in historical and social terms. Concepts acquire their significance by being applied over time. This process is not enacted by the individual subject, taken in isolation, but rather by many subjects, interacting with one another at particular times and across time. The context of normativity is a collection of standard-governed practices in which there must be *multiple* players, in the *past* and the *future* as well as in the present, who attribute authority to *others* as well as themselves.

Reason's characteristic activities, when reconceived socially and diachronically, are what Hegel calls "spirit." Spirit is the only locus of normative considerations that is sufficiently encompassing to qualify as self-sufficient. Because Hegel treats the absolute as a self-sufficient and warranted standard, he is prepared to conclude that spirit is the absolute. His argument for this conclusion consists in trying to show that the alternatives to it—namely, objectivism, subjectivism, and rational agency considered in abstraction from society and history—are too narrow or one-sided to make complete sense of the standards of belief and action they acknowledge as both conceptually determinate and able to cope with attitudinal conflict non-arbitrarily.

Paragraph 440 of the *Phenomenology* declares that "all previous shapes of consciousness are abstract forms" of spirit. All formations of consciousness considered up to this point are actually forms of embodied social-practical engagement in which multiple selves participate over time. If they did not implicitly trade on the social and historical distribution of authority to variously situated selves, those formations of consciousness would not have been capable of adopting standards with sufficiently determinate content to constrain thought and action. Self-conscious spirit explicitly acknowledges the social-practical and historical dimensions of normativity that remain merely implicit in objectivism, subjectivism, and reason (abstractly considered). The analogue to this conclusion in Bernstein's pragmatism is the idea of praxis that acknowledges itself as praxis. Bernstein prefers Marx's term "praxis" because Hegel's references to spirit seem tainted by the metaphysics of idealism, which Bernstein rejects.

Hegel thinks that it is not enough to instruct reason to think of its standards as socially and diachronically negotiated. The story of that negotiation must itself be told—and told in such a way that we can reasonably take ourselves to be entitled to the standards we now choose, on the basis of that story, to endorse. To say simply that the standards have in fact emerged from a contingent social-historical process would not suffice to secure such entitlement. If that were all that could be said on behalf of our standards, we would be condemned to a conformist positivism, for we would then, in effect, be attributing absolute authority to whatever our group happened as a matter of fact to require of its members. Our commitment to modern moral and political norms would then have no rational justification whatsoever. Actual acceptance of some set of standards does not entail their acceptability.

This is why Bernstein rejects some of Rorty's most controversial claims as either false or severely misleading. When Rorty says that truth is "what our peers will, *ceteris paribus*, let us get away with saying,"⁵⁶ or that the good pragmatist wishes "to reduce objectivity to soli-

darity,⁵⁷ or that his own preference for democratic values boils down to a kind of “ethnocentrism,”⁵⁸ he appears to be committing himself to a disturbing sort of conformism that leaves no room for his claims that democracy is the best sort of political practice developed so far and that pragmatism’s greatest gift to philosophy is its reinterpretation of self-reliance. The task for Hegelian pragmatism, as Bernstein sees it, is to get society and history into our understanding of normativity without reducing normativity, the bindingness of truly acceptable standards of judgment and action, to nonnormative social facts. Rorty, in his more judicious moments, retreated from his apparently reductive dicta, but he never satisfied Bernstein that he had given a coherent account of how his position was to be distinguished from a conformist acceptance of how history happens to have turned out or of how one’s most admired associates happen to think and talk.

Rorty’s apparent endorsement of conformism is a self-consciously provocative philosophical position. Hegel’s chapter on “Spirit” begins with a critique of the *unreflective* conformism of ancient Greek ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). Unreflective *Sittlichkeit* is the social equivalent of the subjectivist and voluntarist ways of treating something *given*—the desire within, the individual’s mere capacity for willing—as an absolute standard. Here the subject takes the way things are done within his or her ethnos [greek] or polis [greek] as binding. The basic social roles are what they are. No one gives any thought to altering them. No one considers taking responsibility for their adoption, criticism, or revision. Each role comes with its own requirements, which are assumed to be determinate in content. The assignment of individuals to roles is also given. The conformist ethnocentric subject has no apparent choice but to submit to the given duties of his or her given station.⁵⁹

The givenness of role-specific duties in a social setting of this kind does not eliminate the possibility of conflict between the duties of people who occupy different roles, or between the duties of an individual who occupies multiple roles, or between multiple interpretations of what a right-minded role-occupant does under novel circumstances. Role-specific duties are determined by functions that belong to this or that aspect of social life. Even a moderate degree of complexity in social organization can, however, bring duties pertaining to family and civic life into conflict in a particular case. Ancient tragedy reflects on such conflicts, but without transcending their initially given, apparently irrevocable character.

Even the most stable society is a breeding ground for conflicting directives and for conflicting applications of standards to cases. If all individuals experience such conflicts in their own hearts, minds, and

wills, as previous chapters of the *Phenomenology* have shown, then a society encompassing many individuals of differing statuses can be expected to face myriad conflicts. Sooner or later, the need to resolve such conflicts leads to the question of why a given socially generated requirement or an inherited way of applying standards to cases ought to be viewed as binding. To raise this question is to acknowledge that standards treated long ago as given must be counted as arbitrary unless they can be vindicated reflectively.

In the explicitly social context of spirit, this question becomes: Who *gets to decide* what relationships and requirements count as binding and on what grounds? Bernstein's democratic answer to this question is that requirements qualify as binding only insofar as the relationships that give rise to them can bear critical scrutiny from the vantage point of the people involved in them. Hegel affirms that we are all caught up in such relationships and responsible in some way for negotiating the requirements they embody, but he is too much a creature of a monarchical and patriarchal society to draw out the full implications of his affirmation. He proclaims the advent of reflective *Sittlichkeit*, while viewing bureaucratic and professorial elites, rather than the demos [greek], as its primary embodiment. Bernstein, Habermas, and Rorty all regard Hegel's defense of mixed monarchy and the patriarchal family as incompatible with his ideal of mutual recognition. They differ over how this ideal might best be embodied in a *concrete universal*.

The ideal, if it is to be given plausibility in the face of domination and terror, might be thought to abide in a heaven above, a utopia to come, a quixotic knight of virtue, a purified sect at the margins of society, an unsullied conscience within one's breast, or the beautiful souls portrayed in Romantic novels. Yet when imagined in any of these ways, Hegel argues, ideality evaporates into subjectivity. It becomes a mere *ought*, the spirit of spiritless conditions. Somehow, the ideal must find a footing in actuality if those conditions are themselves to be transformed. Mutual recognition is embodied in society insofar as its members treat one another as having the authority and the responsibility to apply, interpret, criticize, and revise inherited standards, and to participate in the maintenance and reform of shared arrangements.

It is because they accept Hegel's critique of the alienated moralist's mere *ought* that Bernstein, Habermas, and Rorty seek a concrete universal with which to identify. All three recognize Dewey as the classical pragmatist who understood the need to update self-conscious *Sittlichkeit* democratically and to view democracy as a concretely actualized form of sociality, but Bernstein adheres more stringently than Habermas and Rorty do to Dewey's conception of radical democracy, as well as to the Hegelian arguments I have been reconstructing. In chapter 3 of *The*

Pragmatic Turn, Bernstein gives an overview of Dewey's vision of radical democracy.

Democracy, for Dewey, is to be understood as a way of life embodied first of all in the ways in which individuals treat one another, secondly in the habits and attitudes they acquire in this distinctive mode of cooperation and contestation, and finally in a regime of political institutions and laws. Democracy is an ideal, as Dewey put it, "in the only intelligible sense of an ideal: namely, the tendency and movement of *some thing which exists* carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected" (quoted in PT 72; my emphasis). Shortly after quoting this line, Bernstein points out that Dewey is "drawing upon the rich Hegelian understanding of *Sittlichkeit*" (PT 73). It is a way of life—the ideal-infused, yet imperfect mode of democratic interaction—that builds up the habits and attitudes characteristic of democratic individuality and constitutes the spirit of the institutions and laws. Without that spirit, the institutions and laws are means disconnected from democratic ends, and can easily be hijacked by democracy's enemies.

Deweyan democracy, construed as a way of life, is not to be reduced to proceduralism. Neither is it to be "limited to deliberation or what has been called public reason; it encompasses and presupposes the full range of human experience" (PT 86). Bernstein implies that neither Habermas nor Rawls is Deweyan enough. What makes Deweyan democracy radical, by Bernstein's lights, is its endless struggle, its *requirement* of endless struggle, to overcome domination and related social ills. This struggle is the political inheritance with which Bernstein identifies, his concrete universal, the admittedly imperfect embodiment of the ideals he upholds. Conflict is to be expected in any polity, he says. "New conflicts will always break out. The key point is how one *responds* to conflict" (PT 84; emphasis in original).

Bernstein insists that mutual recognition, when interpreted in accordance with radical democracy, is incompatible with the elitism that Dewey opposed in Walter Lippmann's liberalism. Dewey was right to view Lippmann's faith in "a special class of intelligentsia" (PT 75) as of a piece with Hegel's excessive faith in professional governmental bureaucrats and university professors as vehicles of self-conscious *Sittlichkeit*, simply by virtue of their professional formation and their institutional insulation from the incentives of the marketplace. Teachers, bureaucrats, and intellectuals exercise power over others. When that power goes unchecked, they can readily find themselves in a position to exercise it arbitrarily over others.

To be in such a position is to dominate those others, however benign one's intentions might be.⁶⁰ The radical democratic remedy for domination is accountability to those others. There are bound to be teachers,

bureaucratic officials, and intellectual leaders in any democratic society. Radical democracy is not anarchy. It has no truck with the existence of elites as such. The radical democratic claim is rather that elites unchecked by the counter-power of ordinary people are a danger to any society that wishes to be free from domination.

Bernstein applauds Putnam for eliciting from Dewey “an epistemological justification of democracy” (PT 163). Inquiry into any subject matter benefits, according to Dewey, from observation, experimentation, and a corrigibilist habit of changing one’s mind in light of what one finds. The social prerequisite of inquiry properly conducted is “free and full discussion.” The same ideal, when applied to the solution of social problems, entails “the maximum use of the capacities of citizens for proposing courses of action, for testing them, and for evaluating the results” (Putnam, quoted in PT 164).

In *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty sides with Lippmann against Dewey on elites and presents national pride, rather than dedication to a transnational struggle for inclusive freedom, as his preferred conception of democratic identification. Rorty also defends a politics of campaigns, in contrast with movements. In his eyes, the latter have the disadvantage of viewing “particular campaigns for particular goals as part of something much bigger.”⁶¹ Bernstein differentiates himself from Rorty on all of these matters.⁶²

National pride runs aground on the facts of domination. It is hard to take pride in a nation *per se* without dishonoring its countless victims. Thankful as we may be for this or that constitutional provision or legal advance, it is not a nation-state, but those who have struggled against empire, slavery, segregation, patriarchy, and oligarchy whom we ought to thank. It is with the trajectory of their accomplishments that we can identify without risking either idolatry or self-deception.

Liberal elitism prides itself on its realism, but it has always been based on wishful thinking. In the economic crisis of 2008, the unrealism was exposed. The supposedly disinterested political elites, far from responding to the crisis democratically, have made nice with the oligarchs. If something larger than a campaign is not forthcoming from below, if ordinary people fail to organize effectively against the oligarchs and hold them accountable, we might as well admit that oligarchy, not democracy, is our lot.

7. Absolute Knowledge, Corrigibility, and Objectivity

The only thing about the *Phenomenology* that causes more perplexity than its double beginning is its disputed ending. The epistemological upshot of the book, on the interpretation I have been defending, is that

only a holistic, corrigibilist, diachronic conception of standards, which takes the cognitive and practical significance that subjects and objects possess to be fully intelligible only within a historical account of social practices, can withstand criticism on its own terms. Only such a multifarious and encompassing conception of normativity, in Hegel's view, can escape the twin problems of one-sidedness—arbitrariness and indeterminacy. How, then, does this conception differ from what I am calling Peircean corrigibilism and what Bernstein (misleadingly) calls fallibilism? And how does Bernstein make room for objective inquiry?

In Hegel's idiolect, as I have reconstructed it here, the absolute is whatever turns out to be warranted as the self-sufficient standard of belief and action, and that is just the radically expanded epistemic and social context within which subjects perceive and distinguish objects, make inferences, act in the world, attribute authority and responsibility to one another, and revise their conceptual and normative traditions. The most important epistemological lesson one learns when one attains absolute knowledge is, according to Hegel as I read him, that the true standard manifests itself in a corrective *process* in which all knowers and agents, all human beings, indeed all *objects* known to humankind, are either witting or unwitting participants. For present purposes, I must leave aside the question of what Hegel might mean by declaring this process itself a *subject*.⁶³ Bernstein has no interest in that question at all.

Bernstein has thus far said little about the details of Brandom's published scholarship on Hegel. Brandom argues that, for Hegel:

each appearance, each actual constellation of commitments and conceptual contents, will eventually turn out to be inadequate. The inexhaustibility of concrete, sensuous immediacy guarantees that we will never achieve a set of conceptual contents articulated by relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility that will not, when correctly applied, according to their own standards, at some point lead to commitments that are incompatible, according to those same standards. No integration or recollection is final at the ground level.⁶⁴

The position Brandom here attributes to Hegel has it that inquiry is fallible in the sense that the totality of an individual's commitments or of a society's shared commitments is always bound to include *some* error. Hegel's reason for affirming this sort of fallibility is that what he calls "experience"—the process in which individuals interact with the world and one another through time—tends by its nature to generate conflict among commitments and thus the need for correction. Each stage of the corrective process, for both individuals and societies, requires a new synthesis of commitments on pain of falling into contra-

diction and incoherence. While the need for perpetual acknowledgement of error is a central feature of the process, no concrete epistemic advice follows from recognition of this need. What does follow, however, is that inquiring individuals and groups should abandon the hope of achieving perpetual peace in all matters cognitive and practical, and instead reconcile themselves to a continuous process of conflict resolution, correction, confession of error, and the abandonment of one commitment for another. And this means that the resting point of spirit at the end of the *Phenomenology* is quite unlike what it has often been thought to be. At the ground level—that is, at the level of one’s first-order commitments—Hegel is presenting a picture of perpetual motion, an essentially contestatory epistemology.

Let us call this picture *strong corrigibilism* with respect to inquiry (or with respect to experience in Hegel’s sense), as distinguished from the much weaker claim, which hardly anybody denies, that one cannot rule out *a priori* the *possibility* that an individual or group will eventually have reason to revise some of its substantive commitments. For the strong corrigibilist, the system of first-order commitments will go on requiring rectification as long as human beings experience the world and one another. Notice that Hegel’s reasoning, as reconstructed here, does not proceed from the premise that *any* of our beliefs about the world and one another could turn out to be false (or that *any* of our material inferential commitments, theoretical or practical, could turn out to be incorrect). The fallibilism that goes hand in hand with Hegelian strong corrigibilism does not operate at that level. It is simply a consequence of the strong corrigibility of all actualizable, integrated, global sets of commitments. This is important for two reasons: first, because the sort of fallibilism Brandom attributes to Hegel is not liable to the problems of the quite distinct forms of fallibilism raised in Descartes’ first *Meditation* or advocated by Mill in *On Liberty*⁶⁵; and second, because it permits Hegel to draw a distinction of levels, so that his own epistemology is self-referentially coherent.

It is this distinction of levels that Brandom has in mind when he adds: “Hegel does think a finally adequate set of philosophical and logical meta-concepts can be achieved.”⁶⁶ These meta-concepts are whatever terms we have sufficient reason to use when reflectively articulating the multifarious dimensions and contexts of self-sufficient normativity—the terms we arrive at by offering immanent critiques of other views on the same topic and ordering those views into a dialectical progression that not only displays, but also accounts for, their strengths and weaknesses. The preferred meta-concepts are the ones employed by self-conscious spirit when articulating the essential and perpetual corrigibility of first-order inquiry and when giving its reason for over-

coming the subject-object dualism. It is in this second-order self-consciousness that spirit attains a sort of rest—in the realization that it does not need to go beyond itself, for example, by endlessly revisiting one-sided forms of objectivism, subjectivism, conventionalism, and synchronic reason on the assumption that they might, after all, be true. For Hegel, on this reading, to think that those positions might be true, even after surveying what they actually involve, would be fallibilism of the wrong kind. It would represent a failure to take seriously the difference between the skeptic's sort of negativity, from which nothing can finally be learned, and the progressively determinate negation Hegel takes to be present in all forms of genuine *Wissenschaft*. Inquiry is a process in which the need for correction at the ground level is perpetual but also a process in which some things come to be known, so that an inquirer is rationally entitled to assert them with confidence as findings—in Peirce's terms, as "beliefs" that can henceforth be treated as default starting points for further inquiry, rather than merely as *hypotheses* (as they were before careful investigation of the evidence). Epistemology, for Hegel, is an area in which all one-sided options have definitively been taken off the table in favor of a social and diachronic conception of reason. To deny this, a defender of Hegel might say, would either be to underestimate the arguments he has given against the one-sided options or to confuse the wrong kind of fallibilism with an appropriate sort of intellectual modesty.

If Hegel is committed to strong corrigibilism as I have defined it, to the restricted kind of fallibilism it entails, and to a distinction of levels between perpetual first-order conflict resolution and self-conscious second-order acknowledgement of corrigibility, it would seem that Bernstein's meta-concepts are intertranslatable, for the most part, with Hegel's. One advantage of the Hegelian position I have been sketching, regardless whether Hegel actually would have endorsed it, is its greater precision. By comparison, Bernstein's Peircean fallibilism seems too imprecise in its positive content to appraise. He is right to reject both skepticism and classical foundationalism, and right to think that the way beyond those options involves denying assumptions shared by both. But what sort of fallibility is being affirmed and how it relates to the concepts of belief, knowledge, inquiry, certainty, absolute certainty, corrigibility, and so forth requires further explanation. If the point is that all philosophical claims—including this one?—retain the status of mere hypotheses in Peirce's sense, and should therefore not be accepted with confidence, the implication would be that suspension of belief is the appropriate stance to adopt concerning philosophical topics. But that would be to embrace a kind of skepticism that neither Peirce nor Hegel would find congenial.

At any rate, the issue of self-referential consistency—the issue addressed by Brandom’s Hegel in the distinction between levels—needs to be addressed in some way. One also wants to know how Bernstein proposes to distinguish whatever degree of confidence he has in Peircean fallibilism from the immodesty (or is it dogmatism?) he attributes to Hegel. If Bernstein does not think that the meta-concepts he endorses under the heading of “Peircean fallibilism” have been shown to be—or *could* be shown to be—adequate, what exactly is he asserting?

The Hegelian pragmatist, according to Bernstein, surveys history for forms of praxis that have appeared. An immanent critic can do his or her best to come to terms with the strengths and weaknesses of actual modes of life, insofar as those modes embody standards of cognitive and practical success. The dialectical process warrants absolute certainty neither that all of the important possibilities have already been considered, nor that the ones thus far considered could not be reformulated in ways that strengthen their claims to acceptability.⁶⁷ So the conversation goes on.

Habermas would be troubled by this conclusion, because in his eyes it gives insufficient grounding to the moral principles essential to democracy. For this reason, “Habermas speaks about moving from Kant to Hegel and back again to Kant,” Bernstein writes (PT 199). The movement from Kant to Hegel is motivated by an awareness of the power of Hegel’s criticisms of the alienated Kantian moralist’s mere *ought* in the *Phenomenology’s* chapter on “Spirit.” The moralist and social critic do need to identify with a concrete universal, which for Habermas is constitutional patriotism. But Habermas worries that a truly defensible concrete universal cannot be achieved without help from a suitably de-transcendentalized reformulation of Kant’s account of rational agency (abstractly conceived). This is why Habermas moves from Hegel back again to Kant.

For Habermas, Hegelian immanent critique is inherently incapable of supporting a concrete universal of the right sort in the right way. He suspects that Hegelianism gives us either too much (a sort of absolute knowledge that cannot in fact be had) or too little (a historicism that is indistinguishable from ethnocentrism in Rorty’s sense). That is why Habermas initially returned to the topic of rational agency, conceived in abstraction from history, in the hope of demonstrating that all agents who engage in *discursive acts* have already implicitly committed themselves to principles that prohibit violations of morality. Bernstein surveys Habermas’ various attempts to supply the wanted demonstration, and finds no evidence that he has.⁶⁸ Equally important, Bernstein

claims that there is no need to back up one's favored concrete universal in this way. On this point, he obviously sides with Rorty.

Bernstein's charge against Rorty is that he sometimes "wrote as if anyone who even thought there was a proper philosophical way to speak about truth, objectivity, and 'getting things right' was 'guilty' of idolatry—bowing down before external authority" (PT 215). We have seen that Bernstein considers some of Rorty's formulations of pragmatism either mistaken or misleading, because they seem to imply that a normative concept can be reduced to nonnormative social facts. But even if these formulations were all expunged from Rorty's writings, thus removing grounds for the charge of conformism or conventionalism, Bernstein would remain concerned that Rorty wishes to dispense with the ideal of objectivity altogether.

When pragmatists show interest in accounting for objectivity, Rorty accuses them of objectivist backsliding. He recommends that the whole topic be dropped. This recommendation chimes with his claim that truth is not a goal of inquiry, that the only goal inquirers (ought to) have is that of bringing their commitments into line with the standards of justification in the best available practices of inquiry. The commitments with the strongest justifications in their favor are the ones, at any given moment, that an inquirer ought to accept. There is no independent value of truth to be considered.⁶⁹

Hegelian pragmatism, for Bernstein, affirms the priority of the social-practical over the objective and the subjective in an acceptable account of standards of belief and action. This affirmation of the priority of the social-practical is not, however, a plea for the elimination of talk about objectivity (PT 119–23). The social practical sphere, the realm of spirit, is that in which human subjects are shaped into beings constrained by standards and thus into beings who are free in the sense of being fit to be held responsible for their judgments and actions. It is also the sphere in which practices of inquiry place constraints of objectivity on the subjects involved in them.

An acceptable pragmatic account of inquiry, Bernstein says, would situate objectivity in our justificatory practices, avoid identifying justification with truth, and sidestep "the self-defeating aporias of bad relativism and conventionalism" (PT 110). Brandom is Bernstein's main example of a pragmatist committed to doing all three of these things. As Brandom puts the first point, "One of the central challenges of an account of conceptual norms as implicit in social practice is . . . to make sense of the emergence of . . . an *objective* notion of correctness or appropriateness."⁷⁰ I shall conclude by suggesting what such a notion might look like by Bernstein's lights.

Natural science is a form of inquiry. The standards implicit in the practice require certain forms of close observation of objects and use of a vocabulary that lends itself to “objectifying” descriptions. They also require practitioners to attribute normative significance to the objects being investigated, in the sense that the actual properties of those objects determine whether the hypotheses that scientists put forward are true. This does not mean that objects have such significance apart from the practice. Neither does it mean that getting the objects right can be explained by saying that true beliefs and hypotheses correspond to the facts.

Speaking of correspondence to the facts is, Bernstein says, just a “highfalutin” way of speaking of truth (PT 108). It is not a way of *explaining* what truth is. The correspondence theory of truth is true but uninformative and therefore not genuinely explanatory. The coherence theory of truth is just plain false. But we do not need an explanation of what truth is. On that point, Rorty is right. He is also right to say that subjects alone attribute authority and significance, that they alone are capable of holding one another responsible in terms of the practice’s standards. What Rorty fails to account for, according to Bernstein, is the fact that scientists, when holding one another responsible in this way, take their beliefs and hypotheses to be *responsible to* the objects. To count as successful, as true, the beliefs and hypotheses must get the objects, their properties, and the relations among them right. As Brandom puts the matter, our concepts “answer for the ultimate correctness of their application not to what you or I or all of us *take* to be the case but to what actually is the case.”⁷¹

Ethical education also recruits us into a form of inquiry. It shapes us into subjects of a certain kind and equips us to hold one another, and ourselves, responsible for achieving evaluative objectivity. The standards our elders applied while drawing us into the practice mandate resistance to the selfishness and self-delusion of the ego and require attention to the actual needs, excellences, and suffering of others. The standards demand attentive inquiry on the part of subjects to matters that lie to some large extent beyond their own selves. Here is your parent, sibling, child, colleague, friend, rival, employee, customer, or student. Can you see what you are doing to her? Are your assumptions about the quality of your relationship with her and about the requirements of that relationship true? There is something to be gotten right or wrong in the moral world around us.

Democratic social criticism, too, is a form of inquiry. Its standards require critical attention to the question of who dominates whom in families, economies, and politics; to exploitation in the workplace and the marketplace; to the condition of the least well off; to torture, terror-

ism, and tyranny; to war and empire in humanitarian guise; and to the self-justifying stories that societies tell about themselves. The egotism of individuals has an analogue in the egotism of groups, and both are awash in self-deception and rationalization. To tell the truth about such matters, a critic is not well advised to conform to what her peers will let her get away with saying.

The standards of inquiry in science, ethics, and politics are all embedded in social practices. The standards orient our attention to things—to persons, physical objects, relationships, institutions, events, and processes—that are distinct from us, as inquiring subjects, yet fall within our conceptual reach. The practices incorporate the things. They shape us into subjects with perceptual, inferential, and practical capacities. The actions to which the perceiving-infering-acting game gives rise themselves give rise to perceptual, inferential, and practical habits, which it is our task to perfect.

To be a subject in the sense that Bernstein and Brandom have in mind is not to be trapped within an inner Cartesian theater, but to be free in the sense of being appropriately held responsible for what one believes, thinks, and does.⁷² It is to be a creature, creator, and reviser of standards for cognitive and practical success, a demander and giver of reasons. All such beings, to the extent that they qualify as rational agents, are largely right about such matters as whether corn needs rain, whether three strikes make an out, whether loyalty is to be valued in a friend, and whether destitution is foul. But we subjects are prone to error about distant galaxies, the constitution of middle-sized objects, the beginning and end of time, the demands of excellence, the harm we inflict on others, and our complicity in evils. Because we are likely to benefit, on the whole, from believing truths about such things, we inquire into them.

It was not some metaphysician's mistake that made common folk speak of aspiring to truth and objectivity. Such talk serves an interest within our practices that does not derive from objectivist philosophy and can survive that philosophy's demise. Rorty says that we human beings "have no duties to anything nonhuman" (quoted in PT 212). Leave aside the controversial cases of gods and dolphins. We do not *wrong* the amoeba or the fossil by describing it wrongly.⁷³ But we do hold one another responsible, in all practices of inquiry, for getting things right.⁷⁴ That is what distinguishes practices in which *inquiry* plays a role from practices of other kinds. And Bernstein is right to say so.

NOTES

I am grateful to Akeel Bilgrami, John Bowlin, Molly Farneth, Eric Gregory, Peter Alexander Meyers, Wayne Proudfoot, and Ian Ward for taking time to comment on a draft of this essay and to the editors of the *Journal* for permitting me to go on at such length in their pages.

1. W.V.O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review* 60:1 (1951), pp. 20–43. In the concluding paragraph, Quine acknowledges that C.I. Lewis and Rudolph Carnap had taken "a pragmatic stand on the question of choosing between language forms, scientific frameworks," but complains that their "pragmatism leaves off at the imagined boundary between the analytic and the synthetic."
2. Wilfrid Sellars, "Some Reflections on Language Games," in *Science, Perception, and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1963), pp. 321–58, esp. 340.
3. Sellars first presented his critique of the Myth of the Given in a series of lectures at the University of London in March, 1956. The substance of those lectures appeared later that year as "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in *The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*, vol. 1 of *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 253–329. A reprint with additional notes appeared in Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality*, pp. 127–96. Another reprint, with an introduction by Richard Rorty and a "Study Guide" by Robert B. Brandom, is Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). The reference to "incipient *Meditations Hegeliennes*," which Sellars places in the mouth of an imaginary objector, comes in §20.
4. During the 1967–68 academic year, Rorty co-taught a graduate seminar at Princeton University on Carnap, Quine, and Sellars, in which he developed a preliminary version of the arguments that became chapter 4 of Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). That chapter is the intellectual pivot of Rorty's turn from analysis to pragmatism. The seminar's other instructor was Gilbert Harman. I have discussed the seminar with both instructors as well as with Alexander Nehamas, who was one of the students enrolled in it.
5. Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), pp. 96–9; henceforth PT, followed by page number. Bernstein had already connected the dots between Sellars and his pragmatist and idealist predecessors in Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), pts. 3 and 4; henceforth PA, followed by page number.
6. West studied with Rorty while earning a doctorate in philosophy at Princeton University. In Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of

Wisconsin Press, 1989), West highlights the importance of Ralph Waldo Emerson's influence on James and Dewey and argues that Sidney Hook, W.E.B. Du Bois, Reinhold Niebuhr, C. Wright Mills, and Lionel Trilling should all be viewed as pragmatists. There is no hint in PT that there is anything to be gained by construing the tradition of pragmatism in this more inclusive way.

7. Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), pp. xix-xx. The quoted phrase is from the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, ¶76.
8. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970); *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). The quotation is from PT 214.
9. Chapter 4 of *The Pragmatic Turn* is entitled "Hegel and Pragmatism." Bernstein has been pondering the significance of Hegel's influence on pragmatism in particular and on modern philosophy in general for a long time. Each of the four parts of *Praxis and Action*—which are devoted to Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, and analytic philosophy, respectively—begins with a discussion of the Hegelian background. Only in the last case is the treatment of Hegel brief. Chapter 5 of Richard J. Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986) reflects on the "explosion of interest in Hegel" that had occurred over the previous decade (p. 141). Bernstein is too modest to say how many times he has reignited the fuse and patiently shielded the flame.
10. My interpretation of Hegel is reconstructive in roughly the same sense that Peter F. Strawson's interpretation of Kant is reconstructive in Peter F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Accordingly, I do not hesitate to employ the somewhat anachronistic idioms of *normativity* and *language games* in explicating Hegel's claims. But there will be a number of points at which what Hegel would have taken himself to be asserting becomes an issue, in particular where Bernstein criticizes Hegel's *idealism* or conception of *absolute knowledge* while making assumptions about what these amount to. At those points, I will shift temporarily from reconstructive to historical interpretation—in Brandom's terms, from questions about the proper *de re* specification of conceptual content to questions about the proper *de dicto* specification of conceptual content. When I speak of *Hegelian pragmatism*, I am characterizing a philosophical tradition in which Dewey, Bernstein, Brandom, and others appropriate Hegel's arguments in a particular way. Brandom would classify this *de traditione* specification of conceptual content as a type of *de re* specification. See Robert B. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 94–107. See also Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres," in *Philosophy in History*, ed. Richard Rorty, Jerome B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 49–75.

11. See Merold Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 36.
12. On the terms “pragmatist” and “pragmatism,” see Robert B. Brandom, *Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, and Contemporary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), esp. chap. 2.
13. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, p. 168.
14. The overcoming of this particular form of alienation is not, however, a matter of ceasing to be an individual subject, according to Hegel, but rather a matter of coming to recognize and affirm (identify with) modern *social* norms that require subjects to develop and express their individuality by taking responsibility for the further rectification and application of those very norms. The overcoming of the sort of alienation epitomized by a Kantian conception of autonomy is not, then, the result of being reabsorbed without residue (metaphysically or otherwise) into an undifferentiated social mass. Instead, it is the result of coming to identify oneself as one who shares with others the responsibilities of self-cultivation, of rational agency, and of rational discourse. (I am responding here to a helpful question raised in conversation by Akeel Bilgrami.)
15. In interpreting “essence” (*das Wesen*) in this way, I am following the lead of Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 25, *et passim*. For evidence that Hegel takes the essence of a formation of consciousness to be the standard of cognitive or practical success it acknowledges, see ¶¶81 and 84 of the *Phenomenology*.
16. The idea of norms implicit in practice and the related idea of making norms explicit are central themes in Robert B. Brandom's “Hegelian pragmatism,” as well as in his interpretation of Hegel. For Brandom's systematic statement of his own version of pragmatism, see Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). For Brandom's work on Hegel, to which the present pastiche of the *Phenomenology* is deeply indebted, see *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, chaps. 1, 2, 6, and 7; and *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), pt. 1. I have also benefited from reading a draft of Brandom's long-awaited book on Hegel, *A Spirit of Trust*, which opens up the semantic dimension of Hegel's philosophizing in a way that sheds light on everything else Hegel does. At all points in the present essay where I make reference to Hegel's views on concepts, determinacy, entailment, compatibility, incompatibility, negation, and material inference, a reader should assume that I am relying in some way on Brandom's exegetical work.
17. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, p. 236.
18. *Ibid.*
19. PT 134. See Robert B. Brandom, “Vocabularies of Pragmatism: Synthesizing Naturalism and Historicism,” in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 156–83. Richard Rorty's problematic response can be found in the same volume, pp. 183–90. See also

Jeffrey Stout, "On Our Interest in Getting Things Right: Pragmatism without Narcissism," in *New Pragmatists*, ed. Cheryl Misak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 7–31.

20. See §5 of the present essay.
21. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, p. 235; emphasis in original.
22. See Robert B. Brandom, "Reason, Expression, and the Philosophic Enterprise," in *What Is Philosophy?* ed. C.P. Ragland and Sarah Heidt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 74–95; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vol. 1, pp. 3–23; and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). That MacIntyre needs to be understood in relation to Hegel is argued in Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles*, chap. 4. I am suggesting that MacIntyre, no less than Brandom, is taking over from Hegel a narrative conception of what it is to *earn* rational entitlement to one's commitments on disputed issues, and that Bernstein's philosophical practice makes sense when it is taken to embody that conception. I would add, as important qualifications of that conception, that there are many contexts in which entitlement to one's commitments, according to Hegel, does not need to be earned and that the giving of reasons for one's commitments need take the form of a dialectical narrative only when it proves important to make one's grounds especially explicit. Hegel takes Kant's defense of his philosophy relative to its empiricist and rationalist predecessors as a model for the construction of such a narrative. Indeed, Hegel is using that model in constructing a defense of his own system relative to its Kantian and Romantic predecessors. A slightly different example is Hegel's defense of reflective, modern *Sittlichkeit* as a way of life that inherits the advantages, but not the disadvantages, of an unreflective traditionalism, on the one hand, and abstract and alienated moralism (of a sort that leaves capitalists, tyrants, and revolutionaries *practically* unconstrained), on the other. In all of these cases, the philosopher begins by taking note of a dispute in which the champions of incompatible positions are able to explain the weaknesses of one another's positions but not the strengths. Hegel also holds, however, that we are rationally entitled to most of our commonsensical beliefs by default, which is to say that we are not obliged to earn entitlement to those beliefs by giving reasons for them. Often it is doubts, not beliefs, that require defense.
23. This does not mean that a critical phenomenology must confer a single lexical order on all formations of consciousness there have been. Hegel's *Phenomenology* does not in fact do so. Narratives of dialectical progression are designed retrospectively to make sense of, and justify, particular dialectical outcomes. Hegel integrates a series of such narratives, several of which begin anew in distinct forms of naive submission to a given. It might be that Bernstein overestimates the degree of integration Hegel intends. See PA 86.

24. I am grateful to Akeel Bilgrami for pressing me to raise questions about Bernstein's references to fallibilism. The remainder of this section responds to Bilgrami's worries about an earlier draft of this essay.
25. See especially C.S. Peirce, "Of Reasoning in General" and "The First Rule of Logic," in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, 1893–1913*, ed. Nathan Hauser, Christian J.W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 11–26, 42–56.
26. Likewise, Elizabeth F. Cooke, *Peirce's Pragmatic Theory of Inquiry: Fallibilism and Indeterminacy* (New York: Continuum, 2006) does not, in my view, adequately address the issues I am about to raise.
27. See Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), chap. 1; and William P. Alston, "Self-Warrant: A Neglected Form of Privileged Access," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13:4 (1976), pp. 257–72.
28. Michael Williams provides an introduction to the debates over this notion in *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chaps. 3 and 4, but does not, in my view, adequately distinguish between the topics of inquiry and knowledge.
29. C.S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, 1867–1893*, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian J.W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 109–23.
30. Peirce, "The First Rule of Logic," p. 44.
31. For an account of how dogmatism differs from some of the other concerns I have been touching on, see Akeel Bilgrami, "Truth, Balance, and Freedom," in *Chomsky Notebook*, ed. Jean Bricmont and Julie Franck (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 334–48.
32. This is not to say that a particular object (say, a tree) is not *in fact* different from another particular object (say, a horse). For reasons we will come to in a moment, Hegel holds that some of the properties of any tree are incompatible with some of the properties of any horse, regardless whether any subject comes to recognize this. But his critique of naive objectivism bears on its treatment of the given object as a standard, and a standard is always a standard *for a subject*. So the distinctions that matter in this context are the distinctions the subject draws.
33. The points made in this and the next several paragraphs are explicated in detail by Brandom in *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, chap. 6.
34. For some illuminating remarks on Hegel's conception of noninferential awareness, see Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, pp. 204–8.
35. Sellars, "Some Reflections on Language Games," p. 329. If, as a result of noninferential awareness, I take the object before me to be a desk, I might infer from this and various other commitments I have acquired that there are now seven pieces of furniture in my office, that sitting at the desk would be a good way to get some writing done this afternoon, or that I

shall indeed sit there, in the sense of *shall* that involves forming an intention. Actually going and sitting there, as a result of adopting that intention, would be what Sellars calls a language-exit transition.

36. In §7 of “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” Sellars distinguishes between inner episodes one could have “without any prior process of learning or concept formation” and inner episodes consisting of “non-inferential knowings.” In §32, he is careful, when describing the primary form of the Myth of the Given, to stipulate that what the Myth takes to be the foundational level of knowledge is *not merely* (1) something known noninferentially to be the case *but also* (2) something known to be the case without presupposing “other knowledge either of particular matter of fact, or of general truths.” He anticipates that some readers might consider this double requirement a “redundancy,” on the assumption “that knowledge . . . which logically presupposes knowledge of other facts *must* be inferential.” But this assumption, he says, “is itself an episode in the Myth.” It is (2), not (1) that he opposes. Part of his objective is to disentangle noninferential knowledge, which is a harmless idea in itself, from the idea that episodes of noninferential knowledge can function as a free-standing foundation for the entire edifice of human knowledge. To perform that function, the putatively foundational knowledge must be such that a person can have it without *already having* the knowledge that is supposed to rest upon it. This is not a problem with noninferential knowledge *per se*, but rather with a foundationalist picture of how such knowledge can be had and what it can support. See Robert B. Brandom, “Study Guide,” in Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 119–81, esp. 130–1, 138–44, 152–5, 162.
37. C.S. Peirce, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, 1867–1893*, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian J.W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 28–55, esp. 30.
38. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, p. 92.
39. Richard Rorty gives a clear exposition of this point in “Intuition,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 4, pp. 204–12.
40. Bernstein’s most fully developed treatment of ideology critique appears in *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, pt. 4.
41. Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles*, p. 196.
42. See Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 196.
43. This implication is what requires the qualifications of the narrative conception of earned rational entitlement discussed in note 22 above.
44. See Brandom, “Vocabularies of Pragmatism,” pp. 161–3.
45. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶232.

46. See Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, pp. 194–9.
47. This is a central theme in the work of Harry Frankfurt. See, for example, Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
48. In part two of *Praxis and Action*, Bernstein discusses existentialism in relation to Hegel's critique of the unhappy consciousness. This is understandable, in that Kierkegaard's existential theology posits a heavenly master. It seems to me that nontheological versions of existentialism are better discussed in relation to Hegel's critique of "the actualization of rational self-consciousness through its own activity" in the chapter entitled "Reason."
49. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶¶419–37.
50. Bernstein sometimes says that he rejects "rigid absolutes" (PT 30), which might be taken to imply rejection of principles that *absolutely prohibit* such acts as murder, rape, and torture, that is, principles ruling out such acts regardless of the agent's practical circumstances and employing a normative concept that names a species of inherent injustice. But what Bernstein opposes, and gives reasons for opposing, is *adhering* to principles *with absolute rigidity*, that is, regardless of whatever evidence or arguments might be raised against them. While he can be faulted for not clearly distinguishing these two senses of *absolute*, he does highlight the importance, in Dewey's thinking, of the claim that "*the ends of freedom and individuality for all can be attained only by the means that accord with those ends*" (quoted in PT 77; emphasis in original). This claim entails acceptance of absolutes in the first sense, but is compatible with Dewey and Bernstein's suspicion of excessively rigid adherence. More clarity on this point would have significantly improved Richard J. Bernstein's *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion since 9/11* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005) and Louis Menand's account of pragmatism's diagnosis of the mayhem of the Civil War in Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2001).
51. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, chap. 7; *Reason in Philosophy*, chap. 3.
52. At many points in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel discusses formations of consciousness that he associates, and expects his readers to associate, with Kant's philosophy. It is important to realize, however, that these passages intentionally abstract from those features of Kant's actual philosophy that Hegel takes as his own principal inspiration. For this reason, many scholarly attempts to prove that Kant's views do not conform strictly to the "Kantian" positions that Hegel criticizes are beside the point. This warning is especially pertinent in relation to Hegel's discussion of reason as a giver of laws. It is also important to keep in mind that in the "Reason" chapter Hegel is abstracting, in particular, from those aspects of Kantianism that can be construed as acknowledging the social and historical determinants to be treated later in the *Phenomenology* under the heading of "spirit." Hegel is not criticizing Kant *per se*. He is creating ide-

- alized positions in order to clarify what needs to be made explicit in an acceptable account of self-sufficient normativity.
53. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, pp. 226–34.
 54. Hegel rejects utilitarianism in part because he believes it to involve an attribution of undue authority to given desires, preferences, or states of satisfaction in subjects.
 55. See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶430.
 56. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 176.
 57. Richard Rorty, “Solidarity or Objectivity?” in *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, ed. John Rajchman and Cornel West (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 3–19, esp. 5.
 58. Richard Rorty, “Post-Modernist Bourgeois Liberalism,” in *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, ed. Robert Hollinger (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), pp. 214–21.
 59. Completely unreflective *Sittlichkeit* can be defined in Hegelian semantic terms as a language game in which players take judgments about what a subject’s role happens to be as reasons for that subject to do something, but in which players do not yet codify the propriety of the material practical inferences involved by introducing *conditionals* or *ought-to-do principles* as explicit licenses for those inferences—licenses for which reasons can in turn be requested. I discuss the relation between material practical inferences and explicit ethical standards in *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 188–98; and in “Comments on Six Responses to *Democracy and Tradition*,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33:4 (2005), pp. 709–44, esp. 721–4.
 60. For an account of the relevant sense of *domination*, see Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pt. 1.
 61. Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 1–38, 104, 111–24.
 62. It will come as no surprise to readers familiar with *Democracy and Tradition* that I consider Bernstein the more insightful interpreter of democracy. In *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), I attempt to be much more concrete than Bernstein has yet been about what radical democracy is and what problems it currently faces. Bernstein commends Dewey for bridging the gap, all the more pronounced in our own day, between debates among academics over democratic theory and the discourse of ordinary citizens (PT 88). Bernstein also criticizes Putnam for failing to bring his accounts of democracy and moral objectivity “down to the nitty-gritty” of concrete determinations of actual political issues (PT 166). But it would be fair to say that *The Pragmatic Turn* is no more concrete than Putnam tends to be.

63. For an account of this, see Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, pp. 222–34.
64. Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, p. 104.
65. Again, see Bilgrami, “Truth, Balance, and Freedom.”
66. Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, p. 104.
67. Notice that when Bernstein makes this sort of point, he is treating absolute certainty as an excessively high degree of confidence one *might* have in what one believes—and thus as something worth warning everyone against. This differs from the strategy I have been commending of treating absolute certainty as the *unachievable* goal set by Cartesian epistemology when it wrongly buys into radical skepticism’s method of hyperbolic doubt. The goal of absolute certainty, understood as what the Cartesian method *would* establish *if it were* successful on its own terms, is irrelevant to real epistemic practice, not a temptation to which the ordinary inquirer is prone.
68. In addition to PT chap. 8, Bernstein discusses Habermas at length in *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, pp. 185–225 and *Philosophical Profiles*, chap. 2.
69. Richard Rorty, “Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Donald Davidson versus Crispin Wright,” in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), vol. 3, pp. 19–42.
70. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, p. 594; emphasis in original.
71. *Ibid.*; emphasis in original.
72. See Robert B. Brandom, “Freedom and Constraint by Norms,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16:3 (1979), pp. 187–96; and Philip Pettit, *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 4 *et passim*.
73. I would add, at Akeel Bilgrami’s urging, that there is, in my view, a fairly strong sense in which we wrong a forest or a river by ruining it, regardless how this bears on its usefulness in our projects. But that is a topic for another day.
74. See Stout, “On Our Interest in Getting Things Right.”