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The Organization of Philosophy and a Philosophy of Organizations

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Introduction

The discipline of academic philosophy has shown little interest so far in organizations. Given that modern life can arguably be described as “life in organizations”, or “organized life,” this state of affair is problematic. However, this lapse in the current organization of professional philosophy doesn’t mean that philosophy itself, as a mode of inquiry, is not able to contribute to the study of organizations. This paper seeks to clarify how philosophy as a practice can contribute to the study of organizations and to encourage the professional philosophers to turn themselves more decisively toward this study.

The paper has two parts, each with two sections. In the first part, I critically highlight the near absence of organizations in the organization of contemporary academic philosophy. The first section establishes this absence, by applying a selfreflexive lens to the discipline like the one used by a current theorist of organizations within his own discipline (Parker 2000). In section “Is the Lack of Interest in Organisations a Problem for Academic Philosophy,” I consider some reasons why this absence might be problematic, namely, not just because organizations are an intrinsic part of modern society so that they ought to be taken seriously as a worthy topic but more fundamentally because many of the objects that philosophers elect as their privileged objects of study are significantly shaped by the fact that they are embedded in organizations.

In the second part, I shift the focus to try and show how a philosophical perspective can contribute usefully to the study of organizations. Using Hegel as a primary reference, I argue that a philosophical outlook can be characterized by several theoretical features that can be particularly useful for the study of organizations. These are analytical depth, synthetic breadth, and the focus on the link between normative and ontological dimensions. After defining these three specific features of a philosophical outlook, in section “A Philosophy of Organisations in Modern Society,” I focus on the big picture, using Hegel’s social and political theory as a model of philosophical account of modern organizations. In section “Philosophy of Life in Organisations,” drawing on a recent book I wrote recently with two other colleagues also influenced by Hegel, and a leading theorist of work, I focus on life within work organizations to show again, this time in relation to more specific issues of management, how philosophy can contribute to the study of organizations.

The Absence of Organizations in the Organization of Academic Philosophy

If we observe the current makeup of the specialized academic discipline of philosophy, it is fair to say that in it organizations feature as a topic of interest only at the margins. Some philosophers make direct contributions to organization studies (for instance, Herzog 2019),

and as we will see, some subfields of academic philosophy overlap with organization studies, but organizations are not considered topics of choice in the profession. One might consider that there is nothing problematic with this. After all, a reasonable approach to the different disciplines would be that they are defined by the specific objects they study. Organization studies are the inquiry that takes organizations as their central object. Other disciplines, such as psychology or sociology, can also study organizations from their own point of view, but this doesn't mean that all other human sciences ought to. One might well argue that division of labor is a condition of efficiency, in academic research as elsewhere.

Such cordoning off, however, is problematic for philosophy, for several reasons.

First, philosophy as a practice is not defined by its objects, but rather by its mode of inquiry. There is a philosophical way of studying any kind of issue or reality. As the great philosopher of biology and medicine, Georges Canguilhem wrote at the outset of his most famous book (1991, 3): "Philosophy is a reflection for which all alien material is good, and (...) for which all good material must be alien." As a result, there is nothing in the philosophical mode of inquiry that should prevent philosophers from studying organizations; and as a matter of fact, many organization theorists employ philosophical references and philosophical modes of thinking.

Indeed, the different problems attached to organizations do not just constitute a specialized topic, an object of interest among others. Organizations are at the heart of modern society; modern society is an organizational society (Presthus 1962). This means that organizations ought to be an object of primary concern. Further than that, it also means that many of the objects studied by philosophers in their respective areas of specialization are directly impacted by these objects being embedded in organizational structures.

Before reflecting on how philosophy, as a mode of inquiry, can contribute to the study of organizations, it is important to establish more precisely the near absence of organizations in the current organization of the discipline.

Roughly speaking, mainstream academic philosophy is organized along a major axis separating theoretical and practical philosophy. Theoretical philosophy includes philosophy of mind (philosophical psychology, cognitive science), epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of science. Practical philosophy includes ethics and political philosophy.

In relation to theoretical philosophy, we can observe that the minds that develop beliefs about the world belong to persons who have been trained in educational systems, work in economic organizations, participate in formal and informal public spheres, and are influenced by their use of the outputs produced by, and indeed by their participation in, media organizations. As for practical philosophy, the desires, beliefs, and actions of individuals are framed by their taking place in organizationally structured social spaces. Such framings are bound to impact on the normative content of those actions, beliefs, and desires. Similarly, in political philosophy, the rights and responsibilities of citizens and the state in relation to each other surely are determined to a significant extent by the internal organization of the different social spheres to which individuals belong.

However, mainstream academic philosophy is not well placed to take into account organizations and the organizational framings of the objects it studies. In both theoretical and

practical philosophy, mainstream assumptions and the most prevalent methods prevent them from doing so.

In theoretical philosophy, the core assumptions of the most popular approaches in the discipline are either formal or naturalistic. In neither kind of approach does the organizational aspect of the objects studied come into view. In the case of formal approaches, the analyses aim to establish definitions of key concepts by specifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for their correct employment, through arguments that can withstand logical objections, notably those that arise from exceptions, counter-factual arguments, and thought experiments. The default assumption in those epistemological inquiries is individualistic: questions of cognition are questions about the ontological elements and conceptual features involved in an agent knowing something and what it means for those beliefs to be true or false. The questions are asked in highly formal, general terms. The agents under discussion seem to float in an undetermined, a-social space. The content of their beliefs appears equally unaffected by the social contexts in which the latter were produced. The background image in these inquiries that form the core of the discipline today is of subjects viewed as independent cognitive machines facing natural objects whose embeddedness in social environments has no impact on the latter's ontological features and meaning.

In the case of naturalistic approaches, the unit of analysis is the single brain or the individual mind, viewed from the perspective of its emergence from natural evolution. The brain uses the structural capacities that phylogenetic development has bequeathed it and that enable it to develop beliefs about the world, some of which, as justified and true, can count as knowledge. The individual mind or brain can combine such elements of knowledge through its symbolic capacities, the "language of thought" (Fodor 1988), or, on another view, through mechanisms that activate different units and parts of the neuronal network (Churchland 1989). Timeless philosophical questions asking how humans can know anything about the world, what human language refers to, and in what sense propositions can be true or false are answered here through a combination of empirical claims about the makeup of the human brain, with a particular focus on its complex networks and connectivity, with logical arguments about the ways to formalize empirical information and the conceptual conclusions to draw from it.

In these two kinds of approaches, no attention is given to the fact that human cognition occurs within specific social spaces that are governed by domain-specific rules and are structured by interpersonal relations involving power and authority, in which the aims and interests of the agents are shaped by the overall logic of those spaces, in other words, everything that makes modern life an organized form of life, a form of life structured in its very depth by a number of different organizations.

There is a social branch of epistemology that does focus on the fact that knowledge is for a large part produced and shared by others, within and indeed by institutions (notably by scientific and media organizations), and is acquired by individuals in their relations to other individuals and within social groups (Goldman 1999). But the models used in mainstream social epistemology are again highly formal. They differ from classical models of epistemology by introducing "social" sources of knowledge (other individuals and groups), but they ask the same questions and seek to answer them in similar ways as traditional formal epistemology. The introduction of the "social" element does not translate into a focus on the

“thick,” organized aspects of the collective and how the latter might impact on the production and transmission of knowledge.

In practical philosophy, the mainstream approaches are also centered on the individual. In moral philosophy, the central concern are the rights and responsibilities of individuals, what is owed to individuals, and what individuals owe to others. These questions are tackled either at a general level, in general theories of duties and rights, or in terms of specific social relations, for instance, the family, or the relations between an individual and the state. In the case of general moral philosophy, the normative valence of individual actions is considered in relation to general principles, such as autonomy, justice, or welfare. These principles are defined and justified in general, independently of any particular social space.

Applied moral inquiry asks about the morality of choices and actions in specific social relations: a doctor to a patient, a parent to a child, a human person in relation to an animal, and so on. In these cases, some consideration is given to some of the features of the social context that make the relations specific. But in most of these cases, taking into account the specific nature of the situation and the identity of the agents does not impact on the theory itself. For example, deontological theories are developed and then applied to, say, responsibilities toward animals (Korsgaard 2012). Or a general virtue ethic is developed and then applied to, say, the medical context (Pellegrino and Thomasma 1993). The moral conclusions are drawn by applying one of the main ethical theories to the case at hand, but the case itself does not impact on the theory.

There is one area of ethics within the organized discipline of philosophy that deals directly with organizations, namely, business and professional ethics. This is the area of mainstream philosophy that is closest to organization studies; indeed there are substantial overlaps in terms of audience and interest in the journals catering for the two disciplines. The term “business ethics,” however, is ambivalent, depending on where the emphasis falls methodologically between business and ethics. Speaking in general terms, we might say that journals of business ethics publish two different types of studies. One type is made up of studies that draw theoretical (conceptual and/or normative) conclusions about aspects of business activity on the basis of empirical analyses, using qualitative and quantitative methods. In this kind of publications, ethical theory is usually mobilized to interpret the data; sometimes the data is used to criticize or vindicate a particular ethical theory, but the central problem remains the first-order moral problem at hand. In these types of articles, concrete elements of private and public and formal and informal organizations are directly considered. Another type of articles focuses more on the “ethics” side, in a manner that is characteristic of disciplinary academic philosophy. Here “ethics” is central not just as a first-order moral problem but also just as significantly and sometimes predominantly at the second-order level of the correct philosophical approach to moral questions. In articles of this kind, the philosophical theory is just as much the focus of the inquiry as the actual moral problem. In articles of this kind, which correspond to the standards internal to the discipline of philosophy, the organizational elements are much more sparse. Often these kinds of analyses are wholly disconnected from the actual aspects of business activity considered, and the ethical reflection relies instead on ideal constructs, such as the perfect market or an ideal theory of the firm. In professional ethics, a similar divide can be noticed. Professional ethics studies the culture and ethos of a profession and how they intersect with abstract moral principles (Bayles 1989). Here as well, the studies that abide more closely by the methods

and standards of academic disciplinary philosophy tend to overlook the thick reality of what constitutes a profession as a particular kind of organization and focus instead on more abstract, theoretical, and second-order issues. In mainstream political philosophy, the same detachment from the organized aspects of social life can be observed. The most prevalent and valued of work in political philosophy seeks to establish general conceptions of justice that can be applied to particular issues, in relation to particular social contexts. The paradigmatic relationship is that between state and individual, the central question being what a just state owes to each individual. This question is preceded by a more fundamental one, regarding the appropriate definition of justice itself, a question that is answered in reference to other core norms, such as freedom or equality or welfare. Another type of question relates to how justice might be implemented. This intersects with a third type of question, of a methodological, reflexive kind: how philosophers should construct definitions and theories of justice in the first place, through social contract thought experiments, or by drawing on historical traditions, or through rational choice calculations, and so on. None of these three kinds of questions lead philosophers to take into consideration the specific features of particular social spaces. Like moral philosophy, applied political philosophy in its mainstream incarnations tends to operate by applying general normative arguments to the social spaces under consideration, from the outside so to speak. Crucially, these general arguments have been developed independently of an analysis of how these spaces to which they are applied are specifically organized.

One area of mainstream political philosophy in which some organizations are discussed is the branch of political philosophy that focuses on firms, as in the recent work of Elizabeth Anderson (2017). In this case as well, however, the descriptive and conceptual aspects related to the organizational dimensions of corporations and the relations between managers and employees are minimal. The focus is squarely on the normative issues, in Anderson's case, the domination and the encroachments to the principle of equality that are entailed in the wage relation. Only those aspects of the capitalist organizations that impact on the capacity for democratic equality are relevant for her. And only private, capitalist organizations feature in the analysis.

There is one specific subfield of mainstream academic philosophy that focuses on issues that would be expected to overlap with what organization studies are interested in, namely, social ontology. On the analytical side of that area of specialization, which is where the modern classics are placed, there is actually little focus on organizations themselves (see Gilbert 1999). As a kind of philosophical inquiry explicitly acknowledged in the discipline, social ontology is concerned with the most fundamental aspects of social realities, their ontological components (individual or collective intentions, for instance), conceptual structures, and the normative implications that flow from having identified those basic constituents of social reality. Most social ontology writings do not focus on particular kinds of institutions or organizations. When they do, they don't make the distinction between institutions and organizations (typically Searle 1995). In other words, they don't study the organizing and organized features of institutions. In any case they spend little time on these social realities. Tuomela (2002), for example, a seminal text in the field, only has six pages on organizations.

Finally, there is a kind of contemporary social ontology that borrows some of its key vocabulary from analytical references but draws inspiration from the social and political philosophy of Hegel. It is in this highly specialized subfield that philosophical work is

explicitly concerned with the kinds of issues that organization studies also devote themselves to (Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2011). Recently, a book has specifically sought to address issues of organization theory from a Hegelian perspective (Krijnen 2015, also 2017). As section “A Philosophy of Organisations in Modern Society” will show, there are good reasons for that: in Hegel’s ontology of modern society, one can find precise conceptual tools to do justice to the phenomenon of organizations. Before we look at this, however, a more specific account ought to be given for why the lack of interest demonstrated by professional philosophers toward organizations is detrimental to their own inquiries.

Is the Lack of Interest in Organizations a Problem for Academic Philosophy?

One major reason explaining why philosophers ought to take the phenomenon of organization more seriously has already been stated in succinct form above: given that modern life is organized life, many of the objects that philosophers study are impacted by the fact that they are embedded in organizational structures. This would seem to make the consideration of the organizational moment an intrinsic part of giving an account of those objects.

As a matter of fact, if we look at two examples of key debates in mainstream disciplinary philosophy, they seem to show that philosophers have recognized that their objects are not floating freely outside social spaces but are impacted in their very structures by their being located in those spaces.

In theoretical philosophy, the challenge mounted by extended mind and distributed cognition paradigms to classical strands of epistemology and cognitive science demonstrates a sensitivity to the fact that cognizing brains and minds function not just on the basis of their individual neuronal constitution and symbolic capabilities but also as a result of their being inserted in highly organized cultural niches (Menary 2006). The point for the authors advancing these paradigms is precisely to underline the social and embodied features of cognition specifically for the purpose of better explaining how cognitive processes function and evolve. In other words, the emphasis on the “distributed,” “embodied,” and “integrated” conditions of cognition shows awareness that embeddedness in social organizations impacts constitutively on the object studied, in this case cognition.

In political philosophy, one significant challenge to mainstream approaches, by authors who are institutionally situated at the core of the discipline, is the “realist” one (Geuss 2008). One of its main features consists precisely in arguing against normative arguments that are detached from the complex reality of the social spaces to which these arguments are supposed to apply. Instead, realist philosophers argue, and political philosophy should understand politics as involving power struggles that are specific each time to the historical and social contexts in which they unfold.

Even in these cases, however, taking into account the supra-individual, social, and material contexts has not done full justice to the organizational dimensions.

In paradigms of distributed, integrated cognition, the focus is on the interaction between agents and the cognitive resources stored in the external environments, typically symbolic languages that developed through cultural evolution and are maintained through cultural learning. These cognitive resources help individual agents perform cognitive tasks they would perform much less effectively if they relied solely on their individual capacities. Of course, language is central to organizations (Westwood and Linstead 2001), and so one might

say that proponents of distributed cognition demonstrate a concrete focus on a key organizational dimension when they emphasize the importance of the discursive context for individual cognition. But what is at stake in whether the organizational element is taken seriously, in its full ontological and normative thickness, is not just whether some of its dimensions are used to account for a particular problem. In the case of cognition, a full focus on organizations would need to specify the different kinds of social organizations in which an integration of internal and external processes occurs. Concretely, to take a provocative example, a substantive organizational outlook would assume that the use of a symbolic language, say mathematics, differs according to the social spaces in which it is deployed, precisely because the organization impacts on that use. Taking the organizational element seriously means that one does not just focus on the symbolic language being afforded by the external social environment in general, but that one assumes that different social environments afford the symbolic language in different guises, depending on their place in the overall social organization and their own specific organization, and that these modalities in turn affect the meaning and use of the symbolic language itself. In other words, even though a high school student understands as much about the golden ratio as any adult who also knows about it, the cognitive processes might have to be described in different ways between a student learning about the ratio in a traditional school setting, a studio photographer using it intuitively to crop a wedding photo for her clients, and a museum guide pointing it out to visitors when describing a painting.

In political philosophy, in a field at the margins of mainstream philosophy, the discussion has revolved precisely around these kinds of issues. One important criticism of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition has been that the general paradigm it offers needs to be complemented, to take into account the specific rules and normative grammars at play in particular institutional realms (Renault 2011). This objection in fact took the organizational element seriously, since it argued precisely that including the social dimension of expectations and experiences of justice was not sufficiently concrete if it referred only to the social in a generic, macro sense and that one had to also consider the level of specific organizational contexts.

This example provides an apt transition to the third section. As mentioned already, philosophy is characterized not so much by the objects it studies as by its methods. These methods can be aptly applied to organizations. It is ample time that professional philosophers turned their attention, from within the discipline toward a more systematic study of organizations, as an object that is intrinsically valuable and indeed as a constitutive dimension of individual and social existence.

In order to take a first step toward such systematic study, in the following section, I reflect on what makes up the specificity of a philosophical outlook, the kind of intellectual endeavor that the rare philosophers who write about organizations and the philosophically trained organization theorists already practice. I then foreground one area within the discipline of philosophy that seems to me to constitute an exemplar of a philosophical perspective on organizations. I try to show that Hegel's social and political writings display the kind of descriptive detail and normative depth that a good philosophical account of organizations should provide.

A Philosophy of Organizations in Modern Society

What defines a theoretical outlook as specifically a philosophical one? The question might seem impossible to answer unequivocally since the term “philosophy” refers to many historical traditions, across a wide range of cultural contexts. There might seem to be little in common between, say, Buddhist, African, Anglo-American, and “continental” philosophy, not just in terms of the methods each uses but even regarding the very idea of philosophical inquiry. Against this impression of great disparity, however, a set of basic intellectual orientations can be identified that are common to the many different ways of doing philosophy (see on comparable lines Williamson 2018).

The first of those intellectual attitudes is analytical acuity. This is the attempt to identify clearly the basic constituents of complex meanings, and indeed of complex realities, in order then to see better how these meanings and realities are constituted and how they “work.” This attitude leads to the well-established practices of seeking to craft valid definitions that cover all cases, drawing distinctions between close meanings, analyzing concepts to see what they entail, but also of distinguishing between different levels of reality, and distinguishing between different kinds of questionings, for instance, between the empirical, the conceptual, and the normative, to ensure the right kinds of answers are given to each type of question.

The second attitude defining of a philosophical outlook attempts to do the opposite. We might call it synthetic scope. Philosophers are not just concerned to “cut up each kind according to its species along its natural joints, and to try not to splinter any part, as a bad butcher might do” (Plato 1996, 265c–266a) but also “in seeing together things that are scattered about everywhere and collecting them into one kind, so that by defining each thing we can make clear the subject of any instruction we wish to give” (ibid.). This second philosophical impulse again tries to account for meanings and realities, but this time by showing the links between different elements of meaning or of reality, to highlight how these elements organize themselves in larger wholes that function or make sense, on the basis of which kinds of relations.

Plato’s famous metaphors of the philosopher as a skillful butcher and weaver of concepts point to a third dimension, one that equates conceptual and ontological clarification, in both their analytical and synthetic dimensions, with a normative task. Philosophy aims to be a form of wisdom in both the theoretical, “scientific” sense, as a kind of knowledge, and in the practical sense, as enlightenment about the individual self and the collective, and how they ought to conduct themselves in the world. Classical philosophical models always contained a second-order, reflexive moment in which they showed how knowledge in the theoretical sense was connected to knowledge in the normative, practical sense. In some areas of contemporary philosophy, where the self-imposed model is the natural sciences, this normative dimension has almost disappeared. But even there, the search for knowledge is implicitly pursued for a higher good, encapsulated in the idea of truth. We might call this third dimension of philosophical inquiry the greater good dimension.

A philosophical approach to organizations should prove its worth by bringing to the fore elements of understanding about organizations in those three dimensions, in terms of conceptual and ontological clarification and synthetic insight, and by identifying the normative stakes of conceptual and ontological analysis.

A great number of philosophical models, many of which are encapsulated in the name of a famous thinker, can be used to study organizations philosophically. Indeed, organization

theorists have made use of the entire philosophical corpus, from Socrates to Agamben. In this section, I will bring to the fore the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel, as a primary example of what a philosophical outlook can contribute to the organizational studies, notably in relation to the three core features just highlighted.

Hegel is famous for his dialectical method. It is a method that combines the first two features of a philosophical approach identified above in a highly sophisticated way. A dialectical analysis consists in showing how conceptual meanings, and with them the kinds of realities that display those conceptual structures, are logically related to each other, so that one cannot exist without the other. For example, as the beginning of the *Science of Logic* demonstrates, in order to think the very simple category of “being,” one needs also to posit its opposite, the category of “nothing” (Hegel 2015). Such direct opposition is the most basic type of necessary logical implication. Throughout the course of his “logic,” Hegel unpacks many other types of logical relations, which, taken together, underpin the rational structure of reality in all its complexity. In highlighting such logical relations between concepts, the dialectical inquiry performs the task of analytical clarification, since it shows how concepts, meanings, and orders of reality differ from each other, but equally of synthetic scope, as it also shows the links through which meanings and realities are connected. As the survey of Hegel’s conception of organizations will hopefully demonstrate below, such dialectical approach can perform the two tasks to with a great degree of detail. This makes it a particularly useful heuristic tool.

Hegel is also a useful reference in light of the third feature of philosophical approaches. This is because he is most eminently a philosopher who equated the task of theoretical clarification with the normative task of philosophy. For him, the ultimate goal of rational clarification, through the clear thinking of distinctions and connections, is tantamount to the realization of freedom itself. When we understand the rationality underpinning the structures of entities, their interconnections, and the different orders they constitute within the world, and when we accord our desires, beliefs, and actions to the world’s rationality, through the use of our own rational powers, we achieve not just understanding but also freedom. Knowledge and freedom go hand in hand, and philosophy is the meta-level inquiry that helps to realize both.

This sounds like a classical, rationalist view of philosophy, one that was already at play in Greek philosophy and was still prevalent during the European Enlightenment. Where Hegel departs from his predecessors in the Western tradition is in insisting on developing what he calls a “concrete” conception of freedom, as opposed to an “abstract” one (Hegel 1991, 282). This “concrete” conception of freedom is another aspect of Hegel’s philosophical method that allows him to achieve a high level of detail in his analyses and thereby makes the latter particularly fruitful.

Abstract conceptions of freedom define it simply as the power to act in whatever way one chooses, in other words, through the absence of external obstacles. Hegel shows that this account of freedom, as “freedom from,” is mistaken, since on that definition, one would be free even if one’s actions were governed by forces internal to the agent that were unmastered by her, or if the agent was free in her own volition, could fully endorse the reasons for her actions, and there were no direct obstacles to these actions, but the external world in which the action occurred was inimical to the full realization of the agent’s plans. A better, “concrete” conception of freedom conceives of it as being “free in,” not “free from,” that is,

finding the support for the realization of one's desires and volitions inside and outside oneself. Freedom is "concrete" in this case, when it is actually realized in subjective and objective features of reality. On the subjective side, the subject is "concretely free" when she has made her desires and volitions "rational," which means, desires and volitions she can fully endorse for herself. On the objective side, freedom is realized when the external world is receptive to, and indeed helps toward, the realization of the subject's desires and volitions. In both dimensions, rationality is the medium enabling the realization of freedom. Hegel's theory of subjective spirit (2007) focuses on the internal processes by which a human subject can gradually gain control over her own internal life to make it something that she can self-reflexively determine, thereby becoming in tune with herself. The theory of objective spirit describes the different conditions that have to be in place in the external world so that a rational subject can find herself "at home" in it, that is, in the physical world and in the world shared with other humans.

As said, this "concrete" approach to freedom explains why Hegel's analyses achieve a high degree of detail and complexity. This approach requires that one associates closely the subjective and the objective dimensions: how material, institutional realities frame and determine the desires, beliefs, and actions of individuals and, reciprocally, how the individuals can embody and actively materialize meta-individual norms, values, and indeed functional imperatives. And the emphasis on concrete realization also means that all aspects of individual and collective existence need to be considered, from the somatic to the economic, the cultural, and the political.

It is in the theory of "objective spirit" that a Hegelian theory of organizations has its place. In that part of his system, as just said, Hegel analyzes the external, the material, and institutional conditions that need to be in place so that human beings can be "at home" in their geographical environment and their social world. In accordance with the third feature of philosophy identified previously, the analysis is equally functional and normative. Hegel speaks simultaneously in terms of the range of needs that have to be fulfilled for a (modern) human individual to function to the fullest and in terms of a maximal realization of freedom. He famously highlights three main circles of social life, with specific institutions at the heart of each circle, as key conditions of modern freedom. Each institutional realm in turn contains specific organizations. In the family, basic physical and primary emotional needs are fulfilled (Hegel 1991, para. 158–180). These allow the subject to be at home with herself in her body, mind, and soul, to be "self-sufficient" in a basic, psycho-physical sense. In the broader social sphere, subjects have their material needs fulfilled by finding their place within the division of labor and exchanging goods with others (para. 189–195). Learning a craft allows them to further develop their cognitive powers and practical skills (para. 197–198). Belonging to a trade or industry allows them to develop a social identity that is the translation in social terms of their acquired bodily and intellectual capacities and is shared by others engaged in the same craft (para. 250–255). The substantial overlap in abilities, worldviews, and identity features between all the members of that trade makes of the latter an institution akin to a "second family" (para. 255). Like the natural family, this is a social space in which the subject can feel at home, as it houses an institutional framework that offers concrete material support (material provisions in cases of injury, illness, or death of a partner) as well as psychological support through the strong cultural ties it harbors. Finally, as a member of the

state, the subject can participate in collective decisions through the representation of the trade in the parliament and as a citizen through the public sphere (para. 298–312).

These different social spheres, each involving particular institutions (marriage, education of children, technical division of labor, crafts, social-professional bodies, the spheres of the law applying to each of these areas), all contribute to the full realization of concrete freedom. Each social sphere and its institutions allow subjects to develop particular relationships to the external world and to others. By being included in those spheres, participating in their practices and sharing the beliefs, norms, and values prevalent in them, in the best of cases at least, the subject can see her own self and her own desires and aims realized in the outside world. On the subjective side, there occurs a process of learning, about the world and about oneself, which allows the subject to increase her capacity to determine her own ends and goals. The subject also realizes that the fulfillment of her needs and life plans is tied to her existence in the collectives and institutional frameworks that make such realization possible. As a result, the particular subject undergoes a process of “universalization,” seeing things increasingly from the perspective of the different social wholes in which she is embedded (para. 187, 260, 264). On the objective side, the “universal” aspect of the institutions, their system-like functioning, and the fact that they develop forms of collective agency and intentionality find their ultimate justification in the realization of the particular ends of individuals, in the “concrete” freedom of each individual.

This layered, multidimensional picture provides a particularly useful framework for a comprehensive theory of modern organizations.

The way in which Hegel characterized the spheres of social freedom anticipated the features organization theorists highlight in their study of organizations (see Krijnen 2015, 150–153, for a useful survey of the main definitions of organizations in the organizational literature). Organizations are collectives that are set up for the realization of specific individual ends. They function according to their specific rules, which derive from their specific functional utility (the particular type of ends they help to fulfill), and entail specific definitions of statuses as well as relations of authority. They operate on the basis of particular kinds of “ethos” (Sitte), that is, particular ways of defining rights and responsibilities, linked to shared representations about the nature of the group and its role in society, what might be called the “culture” of that group. Hegel called these social bodies by the generic German term of *Einrichtung* (para. 144) or synonymously by the Latin-based term of Institution (para. 180, rem, para. 253, para. 263, para. 268). In both cases, the etymological emphasis is on the artificiality of these human constructs, the fact that they were “instituted,” “set up” (*einrichten*) for the realization of particular human ends.

One might debate whether it is appropriate to equate Hegel’s “institutions” with “organizations” in the contemporary sense. As Krijnen rightly emphasizes and as has been indicated in the chapter already, Hegel’s theory of institutions is part of his account of the realization of freedom, whereas organizations tend to be defined in relation to utilitarian goals. Yet, as Krijnen also shows and as has also been remarked at length here, it would be a mistake to oppose Hegelian institutions and organizations too strongly. Hegel’s *Einrichtungen* also entails “utilitarian” and functional element, namely, the individual needs and interests they help to fulfill and the role they play in the overall social system.

One might object that the different spheres of government fulfill functional needs within the machinery of collective organization and therefore do not fall under the definition of organization as a collective that is set up with the purpose of fulfilling individual goals. In this case, it is true that the link between the organized collective and individual goals is different from such links as they occur in the organizations within civil society. In the latter, individuals can see fairly directly how the organizations arise on the basis of their needs and interests: commodity markets organize the distribution of goods to be consumed; crafts develop, formalize, and train individuals into the technical skills required for efficient production; trades organize the lives of working subjects who share the same professional identity; tribunals apply the laws to particular cases; and so on. In the case of the organized branches of government, the immediate objects are needs of the collective as a whole: creating a regulatory framework for the different markets (what Hegel call “police”), elaborating the rules governing the life of the whole nation (legislative power), making final decisions regarding those general rules (executive power), and organizing the technical procedures to apply the general rules (civil service). And yet, as we saw, the logic behind Hegel’s social and political theory is that the “particularistic” dimensions of individual life and the “universal” dimensions of social life are interdependent: individuals rely on different collectives for the fulfillment of their individual needs, and collectives rely on the individuals for the embodiment and enactment of their rules and functions. In the end, therefore, the collective rules of government refer back to the individuals, inasmuch as the latter are destined to form an overall collective through their organization in smaller collectives (families, crafts, trades). In the case of government as well, therefore, we can say that Hegel’s “institutions” also include the features of “organizations” in the contemporary sense of the term.

Hegel’s theory of institutions doesn’t just intertwine the principles of utility and of freedom but combines them also with a consideration of the internal functional dimensions of these institutions. This means that a collective “instituted” with the aim of fulfilling particular goals has to function on the basis of specific rules, not just in order to be efficient in view of these goals, and not just so it is normatively justified (in a way that individuals can “be at home” in it), but also so that it functions well as a collective, in other words as an organization. The evidence that Hegel explicitly considered this third dimension, one that is most especially a concern for organization theorists, can be found in a passage in which he describes the institutional structure of society as its “organization” (para. 255, p. 273).

Beyond the detailed framework provided by Hegel’s analysis of modern society, the dialectical logic he employs in characterizing modern *Einrichtungen* and *Institutionen* delivers further useful insights for the study of organization. From a Hegelian point of view, an organization instantiates the connections between the universal and the particular at the heart of all complex realities. Taking a Hegelian perspective on the connections between the particular and the universal within the single entity that is an organization helps to see that the relations between particular and “universal” in fact apply in both directions.

Starting from the particular perspective of the individuals, as already mentioned, the ultimate justification of the collective (the “universal”) is the concrete realization of particular features of individual freedom. The archetypal case is the firm, whose ultimate point is the fulfillment of individual needs. A firm specializes in delivering a particular service; that service in turn is defined through the division of labor whose ultimate ground is itself the systematic

organization at the collective level of needs-fulfillment through production, distribution, and consumption. The needs in question, however, are to a large extent individual needs.

Each organizational sphere is defined by the function it serves within the overall societal system. Even when a particular organization seems to have its function defined in relation to the system as a whole, for instance, the function of “police,” which aims to regulate the commodities market, or the different arms of government, ultimately the final functional ground, remains individual interests (para. 236). Hegel states explicitly that mere societal equilibrium at the collective level, at the level of the whole, is insufficient in modern society, precisely because its guiding norm is freedom for each and every one. In this sense, therefore, organizations are collectives whose ultimate ground appears to be the individuals.

Crucially, however, what further defines each organizational sphere is the way in which the general, or “universal,” function it fulfills directly impacts on the subjective features of the individuals involved in it. Hegel describes this process in terms of “dispositions,” *Gesinnungen*. Each type of organization determines a different kind of “disposition,” that is, subjective ways of being, which include the specific ways in which individuals in a particular organization relate to each other, how the individuals relate to the collective, the kinds of subjective capacities, and modes of being that are privileged, including forms of belief and types of action. If we look at the modern bourgeois family from the point of view of its “organization,” as an institution that fulfills particular needs and functions within modern society, then the Hegelian perspective makes it clear that it calls upon its members to adopt a particular kind of “disposition”: one based on feeling as privileged cognitive and interpersonal modality that favors selflimitation, even self-sacrifice in some circumstances. In the economic sphere, each broad sector of activity determines particular kinds of organizations, the “estates,” whose specific industrial logic in turn determines the modes of cognition and action of their members. For example, the agricultural sector implies a relationship to the natural elements that the other “estates” don’t have. Within the industrial and commercial estates, the corporations are differentiated by the types of productive activities they engage in. Each type of productive activity determines the subjective nature of its members differently. Hegel’s examples of productive activity are obviously dated, but the fundamental point remains: life in professional organizations impacts on the very structure and content of a subject’s “dispositions,” including their worldview, the way in which they know things about the world and themselves, how they relate to the world, which features of the world stand out for them, and how they relate to others, inside and outside their own organizational world.

The Hegelian approach emphasizes two further interesting features of organized life. The first is that organizations form a system among themselves, at the horizontal level of civil society. By system, here, I mean a complex organization of organizations, which integrates different organizations in such a way that each performs functions necessary for the others and thereby in turn benefits from its own integration in the overall organization. This overall system might operate more or less smoothly of course; there might be frictions between organizations, which render the overall organization more or less stable. And the overall system of organizations might operate more or less to the benefit of the agents within it (which is ultimately their concrete freedom). Clearly, modern history is replete with examples of social systems that were internally dysfunctional and highly detrimental to the individuals engaged in them. But the point here is that Hegel’s analysis shows how the families, the

education system that takes subjects from the world of the family to the broader social world, the division of productive activities between the different sectors and branches of industry, the legal system, the economic regulation that brings together all the economic sectors, all these institutional spheres with their own organizations impact on each other and in turn are integrated to form a giant organized whole.

A second feature of organizational life is that outside the system of social organization stands the political system of government itself organized in different spheres. The individuals of the social system participate in that meta-sphere, whether as direct agents, if they belong to the “universal class” of the public servants, or through political representation. Whereas most other models operate with a generic form of citizenship premised on the mere fact of counting as responsible adult, for Hegel, even at the political level, modern individuals in fact continue to be defined by their respective organizational memberships. Hegel was at pains to avoid what he considered the fateful abstraction of modern models of political representations based on the principle of one person/one vote (para. 303). Instead, he argued that political representation should be anchored in the different “estates” and “corporations” (the trades and industries). This means that even as they learn to take the universal, collective viewpoint upon themselves, modern individuals remain influenced in their overall “disposition” by the organizations they belong to in their social existence.

This rapid survey of Hegel’s social and political theory should hopefully have made clear what benefits a philosophical approach inspired by it can bring to the study of modern organizations. The first benefit lies in the way in which this approach can highlight systematically the different features of modern organizations, and most importantly how these features are connected to each other, from utilitarian, functional, and normative perspectives, that is, both in order that they fulfill their specific functions within the social system and so that they help toward the realization of concrete individual freedom. On the methodological level, that approach also seems invaluable as one of its defining concerns is to integrate theoretical perspectives on social entities, which are opposed in other models. A Hegelian approach demonstrates that methodological perspectives that might be taken to be alternatives or even to be opposed to each other can in fact be reconciled to present a more comprehensive view of organizations: the individual and the collective, the functional and the cultural, the utilitarian and the normative, and the structural and the agentic. Furthermore, the Hegelian approach shows that a modern subject belongs to a multiplicity of social spaces, all of which are organized in specific ways, and that each of those spaces impacts upon subjective ways of being, knowing, feeling, interacting, and of course working. The conclusion to draw from this is particularly significant from the point of view of organization studies. If modern society is an organized society, then there is no form of knowledge or action that is socially un-situated, and there is no generic way of knowing, feeling, or acting. Even at the collective, “universal” level of political deliberation, individuals remain determined in their approach by the social organizations they live in. This conclusion, however, is most eminently demonstrated through the dialectical, that is, the properly philosophical approach adopted by Hegel. Hegel’s social and political theory is thus particularly well suited to deliver the message of organization theory to philosophers, and, in turn, it delivers a good example of what a consistent philosophical outlook on organizations can achieve.

Philosophy of Life in Organizations

Hegel's social and political theory provides a useful framework for a conceptual account of organizations from the point of view of modern society and how modern individuals become socialized and lead their lives within the organizations of modern society. In a recent book, my colleagues and I have given an account of organizations combining Hegelian methodology with the rich insights of Christophe Dejours' psychodynamics of work (Dejours et al. 2018). This account focuses on the inner life of organizations and more specifically on the individuals in economic organizations. From the point of view of Hegel's encyclopedic organization of philosophy, this is the level of "subjective spirit." As we saw above when we considered the subjective dimensions of "concrete freedom," such a perspective looks at the processes through which a human individual gradually develops and takes charge of her own affective, cognitive, and practical capacities, until she is able to develop a comprehensive form of self-consciousness, allowing her to apply those capacities in her dealings with the different worlds she has to engage with: the interpersonal world of close others, the broad social and cultural worlds, and of course the natural and material worlds. This perspective emphasizes how much the physiological and psychological processes necessary for achieving this kind of self-appropriation are complex and uncertain. A measure of Hegel's genius is that he foreshadowed many of the insights later developed by psychologists, notably psychoanalysts, who studied the many ways in which individuals struggle in their attempts at securing and developing sufficiently well-functioning psychosomatic identities (the literature on Hegel as a direct forerunner of Freud is extensive, but see in particular Mills 2002). This approach thus emphasizes the psychic vulnerability of individuals, the fact that the most fundamental condition for full freedom on the side of the individual is to have a sufficiently stable psychic identity. In turn this highlights the travails involved in establishing and maintaining that identity throughout the challenges of personal life, notably under the burdens of social existence. On that subjective side of organizations once more, the benefit of a philosophical approach, namely, the effort to achieve analytical acuity, synthetic scope, and sensitivity for the greater good, is evidenced by the results it brings about. Such a philosophical approach, informed by the rich psychodynamic approach Dejours has constructed after decades of clinical studies of deficient work organizations (see Dejours 2013 for a presentation of his main theses), helps to reach a level of detail in the analysis that should be invaluable for organizational studies.

The first level is that of the individual herself. In a work situation, the individual has to conform to the technical demands established by the organization, which specify most of the aspects of her activity. At the same time, however, each work situation is different, and, even in what might look like simple or well defined activities, there is a gap between organizational requirements and what the real situations demand. This gap opens up the possibility of failure, of misapplication of the rules, not meeting the targets. The subject has to deal with this gap, and since it is a subject that is intrinsically vulnerable, we can say that most work is potentially inducing of psychic suffering. Indeed, this threat of psychic suffering is true also of work that is too simple or too boring. The focus on the difficulty of leading a life within work organizations can thus point to a fundamental gap that managers need to be aware of, between the organized, prescribed dimensions of work activities and what it takes for subjects to get the job done. It is important to be aware of this gap for the reasons just discussed: technically, because no amount of prescription can predetermine what actually needs to be done to achieve the tasks successfully and, normatively, because this gap opens up the possibility of failure, alienation, loss of freedom, and control and thus can undermine

the psychic identity of subjects. On the contrary, when the gap is bridged successfully, work can produce a powerful sense of achievement and fulfillment.

The second level to consider is that of the work collective. Most work situations involve several workers who are brought together by the technical organization of the productive process. At that level, a key issue is the coordination of agents who each have to complete their tasks at their own individual level. This necessity to coordinate individual actions adds another layer of difficulty in achieving the tasks. Here, two ideal-typical cases can be distinguished. Cooperation between workers can work well. The condition for this is that some deliberation occurs between them, and a consensus is reached on how to make the cooperation successful. This is because each individual meets the task at hand in her own way, through her own perspective. As a result, it is not enough to have management prescribe cooperation. Just as there is a gap between prescription and actual realization at the individual level, there is a gap between prescribed and actual cooperation, and deliberation among those who are actually involved in the productive process is the only way to properly bridge that gap. In many cases, however, cooperation is dysfunctional or at least not optimally functional. There can be multiple reasons for this, starting with incompatibilities between individuals. Since cooperation is the condition for efficient productive action, it is crucial for managers to realize that underneath the ways in which they organize working groups, some room has to be given to a different kind of cooperation, one based on the actual experiences workers make of the difficulties of realizing their tasks, both individually and collectively.

The focus on the vulnerable psychic identity of workers seems to shift the focus from issues of productivity, efficacy, and efficiency to normative issues of well-being and even freedom. However, if we recall the Hegelian framework in which the subjective and the objective dimensions are united, it is in fact misguided to oppose technical issues of productivity, functional issues of organizational integration, and normative issues of well-being and freedom. In fact each aspect determines the others. Because of the challenge that all work represents for subjectivities, the functionality of work organizations impacts directly on well-being and concrete freedom. Conversely, the condition for productivity and efficiency is workers' capacity to deal with work challenges and the emergence of working forms of cooperation. In work organizations, technical and normative considerations cannot be held separately.

These two insights, the difficulty of achieving the task at the individual level and the importance of cooperation at the level of the work collective, transform the view of work organizations. These two perspectives demonstrate that the entire formal structure of the organization, the official policies, rules, regulations, formal work practices, the economic objectives, and productive targets framing work tasks, is not sufficient to properly organize the activities the organization is meant to achieve. Underneath this formal structure, another structure is required that makes it possible for individuals to work, and work with others, ideally in ways that work well for them and for the organization itself. Of course, in order to make people work in the required ways, and to organize their working with others, all kinds of strategies and material instruments wielding power over the workers can be mobilized by management. Many contemporary work organizations are highly efficient and profitable by focusing solely on the enforcement of the work requirements. Many such organizations display evident features of being unjust and harmful to their workers, and their operations come at the price of major disruptions in individuals' wellbeing. For many of those

organizations, only high staff turnover makes them sustainable over the long run. A much better model is one in which the reality of individual working activity and the importance of real cooperation are taken seriously by the organization. In such a case, efficiency, productivity, and profitability are achieved but not at the price of individuals' well-being and freedom or compromising on the values of fairness and justice that are held in broader society.

This alternative conception of organization matters especially for the conception of management. The management function is indispensable in work organizations. But what makes it appropriate to its function? On the cooperative conception presented here, there is an essential dimension to add to the traditional sources justifying management's power. Managerial authority is formally granted from outside (through the legal definition of the firm) and from above (through the delegation of power from public authorities in administrations and from the owners of the firm in the case of private businesses). In the reality of an organization's operations, however, management's authority is secured only if it enjoys the trust of the workers and collectives who face the reality of work challenges. It is not the place here to enumerate the different aspects of this reciprocal relationship and the alternative, cooperative conception of management that results from seriously taking it into consideration (see Dejours et al., Chapter 7). The key point is that a philosophical perspective on work organizations can emphasize aspects that come to light only if the different dimensions, the subjective, the collective, and the material, are held together. In other words, it is the combination of the phenomenological insight, focusing on the actual experience of work, with the social theory insight, which is sensitive to the dialectic between the apparently opposed poles of the individual and the collective, the functional, and the normative that can unveil the full complexity of life in work organizations. Beyond the use of philosophical concepts and tropes, it is the philosophical outlook itself that can bring useful insights to the study of organizations.

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