

Recognition and Ethics

Introduction

This study focuses on recognition as an operative concept in Hegel's ethics.¹ It builds on and completes the study of the concept of recognition begun in my earlier book, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*, which focuses primarily on Hegel's early thought.² The earlier study demonstrates the existence of a concept of intersubjectivity in German idealism and explores convergences between Hegel and Husserlian phenomenology on the topic of intersubjectivity. However, it is restricted to Hegel's Jena writings, including the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), and to defending Hegel against charges that his thought violates intersubjectivity and difference by reducing the other to the same.

In this present work I examine the concept of recognition in Hegel's mature system of practical philosophy, as this system evolves in debate with Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Law* (1796). There are important differences between the account of recognition in the *Phenomenology* and the account in the ma-

1. I follow Eugen Fink in distinguishing between thematic concepts and operative concepts. A thematic concept is one that is explicitly coined and thematized by an author. An operative concept is a concept used by an author to explain and elaborate his thematic concept. See Eugen Fink, "Operative Concepts in Husserl's Phenomenology," trans. William McKenna, in *A Priori and World: European Contributions to Husserlian Phenomenology*, ed. W. McKenna, R. M. Harlan, and L. E. Winters (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 56–70. Some of Hegel's thematic concepts are spirit (*Geist*), freedom, master/slave, and ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). Recognition (*Anerkennung*) is an operative concept used by Hegel to show and develop his thematic concepts. Thus in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, spirit originates in reciprocal recognition. Master/slave represent only the particular shape of unequal recognition and fail to exhaust the possibilities inherent in the concept.

2. Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

ture system; Hegel does not fundamentally change his position concerning recognition, but he does change its context and develops the concept differently. The *Phenomenology* is a self-accomplishing skepticism that shows that all shapes of consciousness are self-subverting; this self-subversion is clearly demonstrated in the case of master and slave. However, the mature *Philosophy of Spirit* builds on the *Phenomenology* and offers an account of affirmative mutual recognition in other that is central to ethical life. Clearly these differences are relevant to the question of the meaning and possibility of ethics. I propose to track the concept of recognition in Hegel's mature *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Spirit* and its subsequent elaboration in the *Philosophy of Right*. In contrast to my earlier study, the focus here is on the significance of recognition in and for Hegel's ethics, that is, his constructive philosophy of spirit.

There have been other treatments of Hegel's ethics and other treatments of Hegel's concept of recognition, but until now no study has brought these two topics together, much less focused on the importance of recognition as a deep structure in Hegel's account of ethical life. This omission is surprising, for the problematics of freedom and the problematics of recognition are inseparable. This nexus of freedom and recognition—that freedom requires recognition of the other for its self-realization—is part of the legacy Hegel inherits from Fichte. Fichte introduced the concept of recognition as a presupposition of both Rousseau's social contract and Kant's ethics; Fichte developed it as the existential and transcendental foundation of the concept of right and ethics. From Fichte on, the concept of practical subjectivity within German idealism is intersubjective. Recognition and Fichte's related concept of the summons are presuppositions of the consciousness of freedom and its ethical development. For Hegel as for Fichte, right is constituted through recognition, namely, recognition of freedom's presence in the world. Owing to their freedom, human beings may be capable of rights, but these rights remain mere possibilities unless they become actual in the medium of recognition, and in this sense recognition is the foundation of right. For Hegel, recognition mediates the affirmative consciousness of freedom and plays a crucial role in the formation of the ethical sphere, including ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). Recognition decenters the modern concept of the subject found in Descartes and Kant, not by displacing it as in structuralism, but by transforming and expanding it into intersubjectivity. In short, subjectivity is transformed (*aufgehoben*), expanded, and elevated into intersubjectivity.

The genesis of the consciousness of freedom in mutual recognition establishes the importance of recognition for ethics. For Hegel, the threshold of the ethical is attained when the other ceases to be regarded as a nullity or a mere 'thing,' and comes to count as a self-determining end in itself. Hegel's analysis of recognition constitutes the ethical as a stage in the development of freedom and thus circumscribes narrowly individual interpretations of freedom, that is,

nominalism. In contrast to Kant's reflective methodological individualism and *Moralität*, intersubjective recognition is for Hegel the universal shape and pattern of freedom, including all the virtues, and of social institutions from the family through civil society and state. Recognition makes possible Hegel's retrieval of the antirealist classical social political theories of Plato and Aristotle and their transformation into shapes of intersubjective freedom. Recognition transforms the modern concept of the subject into an ethical intersubjectivity and transforms classical political structures into a historical and social ontology of the conditions of freedom's actualization in the world. Recognition is the medium in which Hegel reconciles Kant with Aristotle and Plato.

Recognition for Hegel is a topic with several levels, aspects, and dimensions in his account of ethical life. First, love and marriage are determinate intersubjectivities constituted through mutual recognition. The unity of the family is a unity of recognition. Hegel's treatment of love and marriage constitutes the interpersonal dimension and level of recognition, wherein he anticipates and influences twentieth-century dialogical philosophy from Buber through Levinas. The second level of recognition is between individuals and institutions, for example, family, property. As we will discover, in abstract right, including property ownership and contract, there is an impersonal formal recognition; similar impersonal forms of recognition are present in civil society. For Hegel, civil society generates inequalities of wealth and poverty and requires the development of ethical institutions to deal with the problems created by such inequalities. These institutions Hegel calls corporations, which are mediating institutions related more to medieval guilds than to modern businesses. As we will see, the corporation is the ethical moment within civil society; it plays a role similar to the family, namely, of recognizing and honoring the human being as a totality and not merely as a worker or consumer. The third level of recognition is the state, which must strive to extend throughout the nation ethical concerns for persons similar to those exhibited by family members for each other. However, despite Hegel's affirmation of reciprocal recognition, recognition retains negative aspects. These underlie his account of conflict, including his famous account of master and slave and his account of transgression and theory of punishment. Moreover, at the level of international relations, Hegel believes that any mutual recognition remains deficient: there is no international 'We,' and international law remains an 'ought to be' (*Sollen*).

Now that I have given a preliminary overview and explanation of Hegel's ethics of recognition, I want to mention some external reasons for this project, which I shall develop in the remainder of this chapter. The first external justification is that recognition either has been entirely overlooked in most previous English-language studies of Hegel's ethics or has been concealed or marginalized in those discussions. However, if English-speaking scholarship has neglected recognition, the opposite is true for the French. Second, the French

reception of Hegel, heavily influenced by Alexandre Kojève's lectures, has focused on the struggle for recognition, but in a way that truncates and distorts the meaning of the *concept* of recognition and obscures its ethical significance. Unfortunately Kojève's reading has become almost the standard picture of Hegel that must be overcome if his ethics of recognition is to be understood and appreciated. This will be the topic of the third section. Fourth, recent German philosophy, notably critical theory (Habermas), has appreciated the importance of the concept of recognition for ethics. Habermas identifies Hegel's concept of recognition as an important counterdiscourse of modernity because it provides an inclusive, rather than an exclusive, concept of social rationality. However, Habermas and his followers believe that this social-ethical rationality is a direction that the mature Hegel did not take; instead they believe that Hegel remains a philosopher of the subject. It is ironic that in his interpretation of the "mature Hegel" as a philosopher of the subject, Habermas tends to confirm the interpretation offered by Hegel's French followers—most of whom Habermas disagrees with! In my view, Habermas is correct to identify recognition as a counterdiscourse to modernity but wrong to believe that the mature Hegel closes off or undermines this approach. Fifth, Michael Theunissen supports Habermas's interpretation of Hegel when he seeks to demonstrate what he calls the repression of intersubjectivity in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. In contrast, I argue that recognition and intersubjectivity are irrepressible because they constitute the general structure of ethical life. Sixth, my reading of Hegel has been influenced by the recent studies of Ludwig Siep, so I shall summarize some of Siep's contributions to the understanding of the concept of recognition.

The Concealment of Recognition in Hegelian Ethical Studies

A review of the literature on Hegel's ethics reveals a relative paucity of book-length studies: F. H. Bradley's *Ethical Studies* (1876), Bernard Bosanquet's *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (1899), Hugh Reyburn's *Ethical Theory of Hegel* (1921), W. H. Walsh's *Hegelian Ethics* (1969), and most recently, Allen W. Wood's *Hegelian Ethical Theory* (1991).³ Bradley's work represents a powerful appropriation of portions of Hegel's thought while at the

3. See also David Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity: Hegel, Heidegger, and After* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Kolb's book is not a study of Hegel's ethics but of Hegel and Heidegger as critics of modernity. Although Kolb notes the importance of recognition in Hegel's social philosophy (chap. 2), his approach to Hegel and the *Philosophy of Right* is through the logic. Kolb portrays recognition as primarily concerned with right and civil society; however, he also recognizes a deeper sense of recognition implicit in ethical life and the state (p. 32). But since his focus is on the logic and the logical relation between civil society and state, he does not pursue this deeper sense of recognition, which, in my view, is central to Hegel's ethical theory.

same time remaining an independent statement. Reyburn expounds the *Philosophy of Right* in the context of Hegel's mature system and is helpful in interpreting it as an expression of Hegel's logical-categorical analysis. However, with the exception of Wood, none of these mentions Hegel's concept of recognition. Bosanquet uses the term 'recognition', not as a special topic, but as a conceptual vehicle for expounding Hegel's view of rights.⁴ Right is a dimension of intersubjective relations. Bosanquet seems to be unaware of both Fichte's and Hegel's independent treatment of recognition, and he passes over Hegel's important discussion of recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Nevertheless, he is the only English interpreter who takes recognition seriously as clarifying what Hegel's idealism means in the practical sphere, and the only interpreter who sees recognition as systematically and foundationally related to Hegel's social conception of rights and duties.

In his recent valuable study, Wood acknowledges recent interest in the concept of recognition in both Fichte and Hegel and devotes a helpful chapter to recognition. However, Wood is not sympathetic to or interested in the systematic unity of Hegel's thought. What Hegel considered to be his foundational discipline, speculative logic, Wood pronounces to be a total failure. However, if for Wood Hegel's speculative logic is dead, Hegel's thought is not. He seeks to salvage and expound Hegel's ethical and social thought while jettisoning Hegel's logic and metaphysics and ignoring the influence of the latter on the former.⁵ In Wood's approach the unity of Hegel's systematic thought is broken up into a series of discrete themes and arguments, considered in isolation and on their own merit, insofar as these may prove interesting to contemporary philosophers. In such an approach, recognition, instead of providing a unifying concept for Hegel's ethical thought, becomes one discrete theme among others and is considered more or less in isolation from the others, including the themes of self-actualization and freedom. Further, in his piecemeal approach to Hegelian themes and topics, Wood restricts his focus on recognition to Hegel's discussion of abstract right. This restriction of recognition to property

4. Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 192–201. Bosanquet's employment of 'recognition' as an expository term seems purely coincidental, because Bosanquet does not know Hegel's early Jena materials or even mention the German term *Anerkennung* which figures prominently in both Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Law* (1796) and Hegel's Jena writings. However, even if Bosanquet's use of recognition is a coincidence, this fact would constitute an independent confirmation of the importance of recognition for thinking through and understanding Hegel's ethical life and concept of right.

5. For an alternative reading and approach to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, see Kolb, *Critique of Pure Modernity*, 59–61. Kolb convincingly demonstrates the importance of Hegel's logic for his political argument and refutes Wood's claim that the logic is dispensable for understanding Hegel's social and political thought. However, in view of Kolb's own criticisms of the logic, it is an open question how far he disagrees with Wood's judgment concerning the failure of Hegel's logic. I suspect that in spite of his criticisms Kolb would deny that the logic is a "total failure." Besides, a "failure" on the part of a Hegel is probably more instructive and interesting than the "successes" (if any) of most other philosophers.

rights resembles Fichte more than Hegel. It threatens to reintroduce Fichte's separation of ethics and politics, duties and rights, which is a target of Hegel's critique. Wood either misses or simply passes over the significance of recognition for morality and conscience and for ethical life and its institutions.

As a consequence Wood analyzes freedom as "being at home with self in an other" in individualistic terms such that otherness must be *subdued* to achieve independence.⁶ Such language about coercion and subjugation is more reminiscent of Fichte's account than Hegel's. Wood apparently believes recognition requires no fundamental revisions of the framework of transcendental idealism. Recognition is more nearly like a piece of empirical social psychology, useful for analyzing abstract right, but without any ontological implications for the putative underlying "idealist" concept of subjectivity. Wood fails to take seriously Hegel's phenomenological account of the origin of *Geist* in mutual recognition. *Geist* is not just another term for a transcendental ego, but a universal social We. Whatever Wood says subsequently about recognition, liberation, and the attainment of universal consciousness tends to be filtered through and subordinate to his analysis of freedom as individual self-actualization. This does not mean that what Wood says is false, but he does present a reading of recognition more oriented toward Kant and Fichte than Hegel.⁷ This reading overlooks the crucial point that recognition constitutes and results in spirit, the I that is a We. This inclusive teleology of the We constitutes the transition from subjective spirit to objective spirit and is constitutive not only of abstract right but also of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) itself. Wood also passes over the fact that for Hegel freedom requires intersubjective mediation and is actual as the state.

As we shall show, the themes of 'freedom,' 'recognition,' and 'ethics' are for Hegel not separable but inextricably intertwined; freedom presupposes and requires recognition. Recognition is the process wherein and whereby freedom becomes both actual and ethical. That is why recognition is central to Hegel's philosophy of spirit (*Geist*). Hegel's account of freedom's becoming actual includes a critique of egoism and individualism, a decentering of the individual 'subject' by the other, that is at the same time a transformation (*Aufhebung*) of subjectivity into ethical intersubjectivity, an expanded or universal self constitutive of ethical life. Although Hegel has a good deal to say about freedom, it is crucial to understand that for Hegel autonomous freedom is intersubjectively mediated. Hegel believes that genuine autonomy is achieved only in relation and community with others. Relation to others does not contradict au-

6. Allen W. Wood, *Hegelian Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 44–45. Hereafter cited as *HET*.

7. For a similar view of the Fichtean bias of Wood's account of recognition, see Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 234–237. Redding's work reached me only after this manuscript was completed and was in production.

tonomy; it is a requirement of autonomy. Genuine autonomy for Hegel is a mediated autonomy.⁸ That is why freedom takes the shape of self-recognition in other.

Hegel's story of the social mediation of freedom includes the parochial universality of the family, its dissolution into the self-seeking competitive formal individualism of civil society, and the ethical critique and correction of both by the state. Hegel's important claim that the state must be understood as an ethical institution rests on the critical universalism inherent in reciprocal recognition. This critical universalism means that for Hegel freedom is actual only as ethical community, that is, the state. As far as Hegel is concerned, the state as the realization of freedom constitutes the real refutation of slavery and practices of domination.

In contrast, Wood ignores the existential-ontological implications of recognition and tends to treat it as a theme of empirical social psychology; in this way recognition becomes subordinate to an individualistic concept of selfhood and self-realization. Further, in his piecemeal approach to Hegelian themes and topics, he restricts the focus on recognition to Hegel's discussion of abstract right and misses its significance for the other dimensions and institutions of ethical life, as well as its significance for Hegel's ethics as a whole. It is not surprising, therefore, that Wood believes that Hegel's universal consciousness, Spirit or the 'We', is tainted with individualism and particularity and in itself no critical safeguard against a parochial society constituted by a privileged race or a class whose members mutually recognize each other but treat outsiders as nonpersons.⁹ As will become evident in the course of this study, these claims are symptomatic of a failure to appreciate the universalizing and transformative ethical significance that recognition has for Hegel, and why he believes the concept of mutual recognition is the root of ethical life. The significance of recognition for Hegel's ethics as a whole may be stated thus: The threshold of the ethical is reached when the other comes to count. Part of what it means to say that the other counts is to be found in Hegel's concept of love, but also in his account of the reciprocal correspondence of rights and duties, a correspondence that is foreshadowed by the family, presupposed by abstract right and contract, but becomes explicit only at the level of the state.

In view of Wood's dismissive interpretation of Hegel's logic, I hasten to add that Hegel's ethics, particularly as set forth in the *Philosophy of Right*, is categorically organized. For Hegel, such categorical organization is crucial to understanding the *Philosophy of Right* as a philosophical science (*Wissenschaft*). He tells us that this "work, as a whole, like the construction of its parts, is

8. For the term 'mediated autonomy', see Andreas Wildt, *Autonomie und Anerkennung: Hegels Moralitätskritik im Lichte seiner Fichte-Rezeption*, Deutscher Idealismus Band 7 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982).

9. Wood, *HET*, 93.

based on the logical spirit. It is also chiefly from this point of view that I would wish this treatise to be understood and judged.”¹⁰ Hegel does not spell out exactly what he means by logical construction of the *Philosophy of Right*, and that is a topic that would require another study beyond the scope of this one. It is clear that the *Philosophy of Right* presupposes the prior derivation and deduction of the concept of right and freedom,¹¹ but it is not clear that or how those concepts are delivered by the logic. Nor is it clear how the general logical divisions and categories organize Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. This does not mean that Hegel does not occasionally illumine ethical and social issues with incisive analyses that make use of the categories.¹² For those interested in the architectonics of Hegel’s system and exploring correlations between the logic and *Philosophy of Right*, Reyburn’s and Kolb’s studies remain the best.¹³

I shall not attempt here to solve the problems inherent in Hegel’s assertion of a correlation between the logical categories and the *Gestalten* of consciousness.¹⁴ However, I do not agree with the recent study by Vittorio Hösle that argues that the categories of the logic are all mundane and consequently cannot support Hegel’s account of intersubjectivity in the *Realphilosophie*.¹⁵ Although the *Philosophy of Right* follows a categorical rather than an empirical order, this does not mean that experience and intersubjectivity are unimportant or superfluous. Hegel himself comments often on both the distinction between and the relation of categorical thought to experience; the following is typical.

We merely wish to observe how the concept [*Begriff*] determines itself, and we force ourselves not to add anything of our own thoughts and opinions. What we obtain in this way is a series of thoughts and another series of existent shapes in which it may happen that the temporal sequence of their actual appearance is to some extent different from the conceptual sequence. Thus we cannot say, for example, that property existed before the family, although property is nevertheless dealt with first. One might accordingly ask at this point why we do not begin with the highest instance, that is, with the concretely true. The answer will be that we wish to see truth precisely in the form of a result. . . . What is actual . . .

10. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, Werke*, Theorie Werkausgabe (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970); *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [hereafter cited as *PR*]), preface, 10.

11. *Ibid.*, §§3–4.

12. *Ibid.*, §§61, 67, argue that the relation of use to property is the same as that of substance to accident, or force to its manifestation.

13. Hugh Reyburn, *The Ethical Theory of Hegel: A Study of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921); Kolb, *Critique of Pure Modernity*.

14. For an inconclusive study, see Johannes Heinrichs, *Die Logik der Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1974).

15. Vittorio Hösle, *Hegels System*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1987). For a critique of Hösle, see my “Discernment in the Realm of Shadows,” *Owl of Minerva* 26, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 133–148.

is therefore from our point of view only the subsequent and further stage. . . . The course we follow is that whereby the abstract forms reveal themselves not as existing for themselves, but as untrue.¹⁶

This passage shows that the categorical order moves from primitive and simple categories to more complex and mediated categories, that is, from the categories of the logic of being to those of the logic of essence to those of the logic of the concept. However, this categorical ordering does not imply any specific existence claims; in the empirical sociohistorical order, the family exists prior to and as a condition of property. Further, if we consider the *Philosophy of Right* as a phenomenology of freedom, then the above passage makes it clear why Hegel's theory of property (*Eigentum*), set forth first in categorical order in abstract right, must be understood as a subordinate aspect of and abstraction from the family and from his philosophical anthropology, in which freedom and recognition are central.

While recognition is less prominent as a discrete theme in Hegel's later thought, it has not disappeared or become superfluous. Recognition is the existential genesis of the concept of spirit, and remains *aufgehoben* in spirit. Moreover, in Hegel's mature *Encyclopedia*, recognition is the phenomenal appearance of the concept (*Begriff*) of freedom.¹⁷ This fact undermines any nominalist reading of Hegel that identifies spirit (*Geist*) with an empirical individual ego, or *ego cogito*. The phenomenological-empirical aspect of the *Begriff* of freedom is for Hegel an intersubjectivity and/or community. Recognition mediates the important transition from subjective to objective spirit, from subjectivity to intersubjectivity. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is a further elaboration of his concept of objective spirit, set forth in outline in his *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Spirit*.

I think there is at least an important analogy, if not positive correlation, between the threefold mediation constitutive of reciprocal recognition and the threefold mediation constitutive of the system as a whole.¹⁸ Further, I will show that Hegel conceives the state by means of the logical category of organism, which is prior to the systematic distinction between nature and spirit. Hegel and Fichte believe that the concept of organism is not restricted to the natural sphere, that is, that there are spiritual organisms, and that communities are in some important respects best understood as spiritual organisms. Both Fichte and Hegel believe that organism is a concept that illumines civic and social relations and the concept of community. I shall argue that recognition is the ideal unity of the social organism that is expressed in and as the spirit of its laws. Recognition is an account of how communal spirit is for itself as a 'We'.

16. *PR*, §32 Zusatz.

17. *E*, §484.

18. *Ibid.*, §187; see also the syllogism of recognition below in chap. 3, fn. 25.

Distortions of Recognition in the French Reception of Hegel

If the concept of recognition has not received sufficient attention in English-speaking scholarship on Hegel, the opposite is true in French philosophy. In the French reception of Hegel between 1937 and 1960, given powerful impetus by Alexandre Kojève's lectures, the struggle for recognition and master/slave are a central topic and focus, and have continued to be central in French discussion.¹⁹ Yet, important as Kojève's work was in mediating Hegel to the generation of 1937–1960, and although Kojève made the struggle for recognition central to his interpretation of Hegel, the irony is that Kojève's work obscures and distorts Hegel's concept of recognition. The distortion lies in Kojève's identification of recognition with master and slave. However, for Hegel, recognition is a general concept of intersubjectivity, wider than master and slave. For Hegel, master and slave are a determinate shape of recognition, in which the possibilities inherent in the concept are deficiently actualized. The deficiency resides in the attempt to compel and coerce recognition, which, if successful, ends in domination. Master and slave is an unequal recognition that fixes and institutionalizes violence, hierarchy, and domination. For this reason, Hegel considers mastery to be self-subverting. In contrast to Kojève, Hegel's master and slave is but an important first phase of unequal recognition that *must* and *can* be transcended. It is not the final, but merely a transitional, inherently unstable, configuration of intersubjectivity. Genuine recognition is fundamentally reciprocal and involves the mutual mediation of freedom. For this to occur, both parties must renounce coercion. Reciprocal recognition involves freedom and liberation. Hence it is a gross interpretive error to equate, as Kojève does, recognition with the struggle between master and slave. These distortions and obscurings continue in present-day discussions of Hegel, and represent the "standard interpretation," the contemporary "dogma" about Hegel. This standard interpretation must be overcome if Hegel's ethics of recognition is to be properly understood and appreciated.

Kojève arrives at his interpretation through a rejection of Hegel's speculative dialectic and reconciliation. As Judith Butler observes, "Kojève's refusal of Hegel's postulation of an ontological unity that conditions and resolves all experiences of difference between individuals and between individuals and the external world is the condition of his own theorizing."²⁰ Kojève reads the *Phenomenology*, no longer as an introduction to the system of philosophy, but as a philosophical anthropology. The perspective of human agency and therefore

19. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 158. Hereafter cited as *MFP*.

20. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 63. Hereafter cited as *SD*.

the struggle for recognition become central themes in his interpretation of Hegel. For Kojève, recognition is synonymous with the unequal recognition of master and slave. Kojève thinks the concept of recognition primarily on the basis of an ontology of negation and finitude. This point is crucial for appreciating the limitations of Kojève's understanding of recognition.

Kojève, like Sartre, affirms an absolute heterogeneity of principles that precludes the possibility of mediation.²¹ Kojève appropriates and conceives Hegel's concept of recognition on the basis of this heterogeneity, this radical ontological opposition between being and nothingness. Any mediation and reciprocal recognition become impossible. This has practical implications. For Kojève and Sartre, the opposition of master and slave is final, whereas for Hegel, master/slave is the first mediation of the sheer opposition of the life and death conflict. Master/slave is a *Gestalt* of consciousness that ends sheer violence, on the one hand, while institutionalizing it in the form of coercion and unequal recognition, on the other. However, for Hegel, master and slave do not exhaust the possibilities inherent in the concept of either recognition or freedom. There are other modes of recognition in which opposition either does not arise or in which it can be transformed and transcended.

On his anti-Hegelian ontological assumptions, Kojève understands recognition simply in terms of opposition and struggle. Kojève believes the desire for recognition leads necessarily to struggle.

Man's humanity "comes to light" only in risking his life to satisfy his human Desire—that is, his Desire directed towards another Desire. . . . In other words, all human, anthropogenetic Desire—the Desire that generates Self-consciousness, the human reality—is finally, a function of the desire for recognition. And the risk of life by which the human reality "comes to light" is a risk for the sake of such a Desire. Therefore to speak of the "origin" of Self-consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for recognition.²²

Kojève thus collapses Hegel's analyses of the life and death struggle (*Begierde*) and master and slave into the concept of recognition, without seeing that this is but one possible and contingent configuration and mode of recognition. He determines recognition as ontological conflict—absence of mediation and absence of reciprocity. To be sure, Kojève knows that Hegel discusses love as a possibility, but he brushes this off with the question-begging assurance that "in the *Phenomenology*, love and the desire for love have become Desire for

21. The heterogeneity is manifest in the title of Sartre's great work of this period (1943), *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956). For a critical discussion of Sartre and Hegel on this heterology, see Klaus Hartmann, *Sartre's Ontology: A Study of Sartre's Being and Nothingness in the Light of Hegel's Logic* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966).

22. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. J. H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 7. Hereafter cited as *IRH*.

recognition and fighting to the death for its satisfaction.”²³ Later he asserts that love as a sentiment lacks formal universality and seriousness because love does not involve any risk of life. For Kojève—but not for Hegel—love is not a genuine form of recognition because it lacks risk and struggle.

Kojève’s interpretation is misleading, because he grasps the concept of recognition, and Hegel’s philosophy as a whole, at a subordinate level where opposition and conflict appear absolute and incapable of mediation. From Hegel’s point of view, Kojève’s position would be deficient and self-subverting. Vincent Descombes agrees; he charges that it is not Hegel’s but rather Kojève’s version of the dialectic that cannot tolerate difference and suppresses it.²⁴

Kojève’s interpretation not only distorts Hegel’s position but also makes it appear vulnerable to rather obvious criticisms, particularly criticisms oriented on the other, otherness, and difference. Kojève’s “Hegel” reduces the other to the same (Levinas). According to Butler, Kojève’s suppression of difference finds expression in his conception of recognition: “Recognition conditions the ‘recovery’ of the self from alterity, and thus facilitates the project of autonomy. The more fully recovered this self, the more encompassing of all reality it proves to be, for ‘recovery’ is not retreat, but expansion, an enhancement of empathy, the positing and discovery of relations in which it has all along, if only tacitly, been enmeshed.”²⁵ This language appears to reduce external relations to internal relations, mediation by other to self-mediation, as if the other were merely an implicit dimension of the self. No wonder recovery from alterity “facilitates” the project of autonomy. The other appears here to be merely a vehicle for the recovery of the self, an occasion for self-reflection and self-consciousness.²⁶ Kojève understands recognition quite differently from Hegel. For Hegel, the I becomes a We through affirmative self-knowledge in other conferred by reciprocal recognition. However, as Butler notes, for Kojève “recognition does not have the effect of assimilating the individual into a more inclusive community; following the tradition of classical liberalism, Kojève views recognition as a process in which individuals form communities, but these communities facilitate the development of individuality and not its transcendence.”²⁷ In Kojève’s reading, recognition does not overcome but reinforces the individualism that is the target of Hegel’s critique.

The Kojèvean “Hegel” tames the other, the negative, and the difference by making them instrumental to the development of individual identity and unity.

23. *Ibid.*, 243.

24. For a fuller treatment of this issue and Hegel’s response to this misreading, see chapter 15 below.

25. Butler, *SD*, 87.

26. Later we shall see that for Hegel the other is indeed crucial for the mediation of freedom and for self-recognition. But this does not mean that the other is merely an instrument or means of self-reflexive self-recovery. Mutual recognition not only means a renunciation of coercion, it includes mutual release, or allowing the other to be.

27. Butler, *SD*, 77.

No wonder that, as Butler observes, students of Kojève came to repudiate “Hegel” for being all the things that Kojève argued that he never was, namely, the philosopher of the subject, metaphysics of closure, or presence that excludes difference and, according to Nietzschean critics, is anti-life.²⁸ If Kojève were the twentieth-century Hegel, the students who advanced the aforementioned criticisms of Kojève’s “Hegel” were quite possibly reacting against the abstract identity inherent in Kojève’s position. The irony is that such reactions against Kojève’s “Hegel” in favor of difference and alterity draw closer to Hegel himself.²⁹

Recognition as Counterdiscourse of Modernity: Habermas

Kojève identifies recognition with master and slave and with coercion. In contrast, Habermas and Axel Honneth see in Hegel’s concept of recognition at least the possibility of reciprocity and reconciliation, which are important for the concept of a community of communicative freedom. As Honneth observes, Hegel interpreted love as a form of recognition, and he was right to discern in love the structural core of ethical life.³⁰ Where Kojève sees in recognition only the possibility of struggle or of master/slave relationships based on coercion, Habermas affirms the possibility of community based on communicative freedom and reciprocal interaction.

Habermas’s critical theory is an eclectic, wide-ranging synthesis that makes use of Hegel’s concept of recognition to articulate the intersubjective-communication aspect of the life-world (Husserl). Habermas’s relation to Hegel is ambiguous, because he believes that Hegel is both a critic and a representative of the “philosophy of the subject.” His essay “Labor and Interaction” contains a useful discussion of the concept of recognition in Hegel’s early Jena manuscripts.³¹ Habermas claims that the early Hegel has a communitarian conception of spirit that includes language and labor as subordinate dimensions. Habermas also lays the foundations for his criticism of Hegel, to wit, that Hegel presents two models of spirit (*Geist*), the intersubjective model and the idealist-monological, self-reflexive model, and that the latter tends to take priority over the former. In his more recent *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas interprets the two models of spirit in terms of a distinction be-

28. *Ibid.*, 176.

29. Perhaps Foucault sensed this when he wrote, “We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.” Michel Foucault, “The Discourse on Language,” in *Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 235.

30. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 1995), 107.

31. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. J. Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 142–169.

tween the so-called early Hegel and the mature Hegel of the system. According to Habermas, the early Hegel's concept of recognition and intersubjective concept of spirit is overridden by and subordinate to the self-reflective monological subjectivity of absolute idealism.

Habermas believes that the concept of recognition of the early Hegel presents a *counterdiscourse against the philosophy of the subject* constitutive of modernity. But this divergent path is not the one that the mature Hegel chose, either in his philosophy of spirit or in his *Philosophy of Right*. Instead says Habermas, Hegel "could carry out his critique of subjectivity only within the framework of the philosophy of the subject."³²

While distancing himself from the Hegel that he believes to be the culmination of metaphysics and the philosophy of the subject, Habermas remains heavily indebted to Hegel's concept of recognition. Habermas's exact position vis-à-vis Hegel is difficult to determine. On the one hand, given the historical collapse of the Hegelian school and the associated critique of metaphysics, Habermas appears to stand closer to left-Hegelian critics of Hegel. Perhaps this means he would agree with Hegel's recent critics, such as Emmanuel Levinas, who believe that the monological self-reflective subject subsumes intersubjectivity and that Hegel ultimately reduces the other to the same.³³ On the other hand, Habermas claims that Hegel's concept of recognition is one of the most important, yet suppressed, counterdiscourses of modernity. By identifying recognition as a counterdiscourse, Habermas means that the concept of recognition carries out a deconstructive move of delivering reason over to its other, yet without ending in sheer negation or annihilation.³⁴ This reading of recognition as a counterdiscourse to modernity depends on seeing it not simply as reciprocal exclusion of the other but rather as having positive ethical significance. I believe that Habermas is correct but fails to appreciate how fully Hegel developed the affirmative dimensions of recognition in his mature ethical theory.³⁵ Here I seek to develop the positive significance of recognition for Hegel's ethics.

A central theme running throughout Habermas's *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* is the dispute between two divergent paradigms of reason, namely, inclusive reason and exclusive reason. In the latter, reason's self-coincidence is purchased at the price of necessary exclusion. Exclusive reason is subject-centered, Cartesian. Once reason is identified with the subject—be it a *cogito* or transcendental subject—it becomes subject-centered and excludes what is

32. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 41; cf. p. 295. Hereafter cited as *PDM*.

33. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). Following Husserl, Levinas argues that philosophy is ultimately an egology and that this implies that the other is reduced to the same.

34. Habermas, *PDM*, 310–311.

35. For a discussion of this issue, see John McCumber, *Poetic Interaction: Language, Freedom, Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

other, be this 'other' the 'object,' the body, world, or another subject. For Habermas, the most recent representatives of exclusive reason are Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. For them, the inclusive paradigm of reason that Habermas finds in the early Hegel and champions is a metaphysical fiction. For Foucault, inclusion is really disguised exclusion. Note that Foucault's thesis reflects the abstract concept of identity that is found in Kojève and that is a target of Hegel's critique.

Habermas favors the inclusive paradigm, which he believes Hegel's concept of recognition provides and supports. Inclusive reason interprets the boundaries drawn by exclusive reason not as exclusions but as dichotomies within reason. Inclusive reason exhibits a logic of reciprocal inclusion, holism and totality. Such a holism, Habermas believes, need not fall back into foundationalist metaphysics but rather provides resources for overcoming it. Habermas believes that such holism decenters and desublimates the subject-centered reason of idealism, the "philosophy of the subject." The concept of recognition provides an alternative to subject-centered reason. Habermas believes that participation in a free community escapes the subject-object paradigm, objectification, Foucauldian dividing practices, and the like. In a free community, participants in interaction and institutions are no longer originators who master others and situations but are members and products of traditions in which they stand and solidarity groups to which they belong.³⁶

Honneth develops Habermas's interpretation in the direction of social psychology by distinguishing what he calls three positive forms of recognition: (1) primary relations such as love and friendship, (2) legal relations, and (3) a community of value and solidarity. The three forms of recognition in turn make possible affirmative self-relations. Love makes possible self-confidence, right makes possible self-respect, and social esteem develops self-esteem. There are three corresponding negations of recognition, or disrespect: (1) abuse and rape, (2) denial of rights and exclusion, and (3) denigration and insult.³⁷

Unfortunately, in Honneth's and Habermas's interpretation, the early Hegel is sharply distinguished from the mature Hegel. Recognition is allegedly a topic of interest only for the "young Hegel" of the Jena period and ceases to be important in Hegel's subsequent intellectual development. Honneth repeats Habermas's line that in Hegel's mature thought the concept of recognition is displaced by a monological conception of self-reflective subjectivity. Hegel displaces intersubjective relationships by the relationship between a subject and its self-externalizations. This is an updated Spinozan version of the relation between substance and its accidents. For Honneth, "ethical life has become . . . a form of monologically self-developing Spirit and no longer constitutes a . . . form of intersubjectivity."³⁸ It is ironic that despite their apparent

36. Habermas, *PDM*, 299.

37. See Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 129 ff.

38. *Ibid.*, 61.