

# FROM *EUMENIDES* TO *ANTIGONE*

DEVELOPING HEGEL'S NOTION OF RECOGNITION, RESPONDING TO HONNETH

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Axel Honneth's first main work on the subject of recognition, *The Struggle for Recognition*, finds its methodology, ground, and inspiration in the development of the same concept offered by Hegel in his early Jena texts. Honneth's main idea is to revive Hegel's analysis of recognition. He does so in order to present it as a "grammar of social conflicts"; that is, a code by which to read contemporary political deficiencies in light of a primary moral impulse that demands visibility and recognition from others. According to Honneth, Hegel's main accomplishment was to show that we build our relationship to the world—that is, a shared world, a relationship to others—in terms of a primary moral impulse that becomes a struggle for recognition. Morality is, therefore, at the core of our relationship to the world. Furthermore, the intersubjective realm shows itself to be a condition for self-knowledge. Honneth then takes up Hegel's original intuition that a human life is not fully human until it recognizes itself through the recognition of and from others. He develops this point into a study of different, progressive modes of recognition that become constitutive not only of the intersubjective political realm, but also become necessarily linked to the construction of identity and relation-to-self.

Autonomy and recognition, hence, are two key concepts that make Honneth's reading of Hegel more interesting—and in the end, probably more accurate—than other contemporary attempts to revive Hegel's thinking.<sup>1</sup> However, even insofar as this is the case, there are several problems with Honneth's interpretation of Hegel, problems that he himself has recently come to acknowledge. It is evident—and Honneth would not deny it—that his approach to Hegel in *The Struggle for Recognition* was more systematic than exegetic. That is, for the most part it is guided by the questions Honneth was interested in answering at the time. Thus, he admits that at the time, he may have offered a "somewhat forced reinterpretation of the

young Hegel."<sup>2</sup> One of his most critical claims concerning the development of Hegel's philosophy was that already during his later years in Jena, Hegel would have given up "the notion of an original intersubjectivity of human life,"<sup>3</sup> thereby sacrificing it to "a system based on a philosophy of consciousness, thus leaving the original project unfinished."<sup>4</sup> According to this criticism, a metaphysical and systematic notion of the Spirit would have replaced "the Aristotelianism of his early Jena writings,"<sup>5</sup> and would have become an obstacle for the completion of the original intersubjective program. However, in some of Honneth's more recent approaches to the subject, one can see that he has begun to reconsider this criticism. In his latest book on Hegel, for instance, *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit* (2001) (*Suffering from Indeterminacy*)—a study of Hegel's mature *Philosophy of Right*—Honneth accepts that Hegel's ontological concept of the Spirit, and its consequent notion of the State, seem today to be "rehabilitierbar" in many ways, worthy of being "reactualized."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the speculative conception of the Spirit—and even its metaphysical premises—no longer seems to be an obstacle either to study the complex structure of recognition in Hegel's mature thought, or to rescue it for the contemporary debate.<sup>7</sup>

The objective of this essay is not only to take issue with Honneth's original criticism of Hegel, but also to propose an alternative reading of the problem, one enlightened by a different and perhaps more hermeneutical approach to Hegel's philosophy. Even if in later revisions of his original critical approach Honneth has admitted that a Hegelian shift toward a philosophy of consciousness is no longer an obstacle to Hegel's mature analysis of recognition, and that Hegel's mature philosophy may have thus continued with its original emphasis on an intersubjective construction of autonomy, this still does not seem to be enough. On the one hand, no attention seems to be paid to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as if reconsider-

ing Hegel's mature notion of recognition would mean to refer mainly to the *Philosophy of Right*.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Honneth continues to insist that Hegel's early Jena writings are still the main source for contemporary approaches to the subject of recognition and a project of the construction of autonomy in an intersubjective realm.

This essay, however, will try to demonstrate that it is precisely thanks to a change in Hegel's conception of the political realm during his later Jena years that the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, even more than any other text by Hegel, can bring to light an interesting and relevant analysis of the concept of recognition. This will be illustrated by examining an enigmatic, suggestive shift that becomes visible when one compares Hegel's use of tragedy as a model for *Sittlichkeit* in some of his early Jena writings, with his treatment of the same themes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. While in the former, Hegel uses the *Eumenides* as an image to explain the kind of spiritual movement that takes place in the intersubjective realm, in the latter, he chooses the tragedy of *Antigone* to show the same process. We will see how in the former, the notion of recognition is linked to a notion of reconciliation, while in the latter, it is linked to a much more complex conception both of the intersubjective realm and of human agency. While the *Eumenides* serves to introduce a concept of the political realm as an autonomous system able to resolve its own contradictions, *Antigone* opens up the question of the impossibility of such a definite resolution. And with this, we find that Hegel is insisting, even more than in his early texts, precisely in the intersubjective construction and achievement of autonomy. In the *Phenomenology's* analysis of *Sittlichkeit*—in light of an unresolved conflict between the contradictions and contingencies generated within the process of recognition—one can see a more mature, less idealistic Hegel who recognizes the difficulties, and hence the richness, of our intersubjective construction of freedom and autonomy.

### Setting the Ground for a Response: The Notion of the Spirit in the *Phenomenology*

Honneth's reason for excluding the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from his first inquiry into the notion of recognition in Hegel's Jena period is stated clearly at the beginning of his book: "Already in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the completion of which brought to a close Hegel's period in Jena, the conceptual model of a 'struggle for recognition' had lost its central position within Hegel's theory."<sup>9</sup> Perhaps still following a Habermasian reading of Hegel, Honneth distinguishes sharply between the young Hegel and his mature writings (starting already with the *Phenomenology*). As Habermas had pointed out a few years before, in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, what could have been an important counter-discourse to Modernity and its "philosophy of the subject" in the young Hegel, became overridden by a self-reflective monological model,<sup>10</sup> or, in terms of Honneth, by a notion of Spirit understood as a project of self-reflection: a self-realization through the attaining of "absolute knowledge of itself."<sup>11</sup> Instead of understanding "the history of human spirit," as the young Hegel did, in terms of a "conflictual process in which the 'moral' potential inherent in natural ethical life (as something 'enclosed and not yet unfolded') is gradually generalized,"<sup>12</sup> Hegel's "political theory of ethical life . . . gradually takes the form of an analysis of the education [*Bildung*] of the individual for society."<sup>13</sup> Thus, as Ludwig Siep has also pointed out, Hegel's philosophy of the Spirit in the *Phenomenology* ends up being, the same as it was for Fichte and Schelling, a "theory of the education [*Bildung*] of the Spirit,"<sup>14</sup> "in which all the forms of recognition are reduced to stages of the Spirit's losing and recovering of itself."<sup>15</sup> The consequence, says Siep confirming Honneth's criticism, is an "asymmetry" inherent to Hegel's theory of recognition: "an asymmetry of a community over the individual."<sup>16</sup>

As much as I think that this criticism may fail to see how fully Hegel developed the affirmative and symmetrical dimensions of recognition in his mature thought, beginning with the *Phenomenology*, one should not ignore or

#### RESPONDING TO HONNETH

leave aside these criticisms. They echo, in certain respects—and keeping the differences in mind—those very critical readings of Hegel inaugurated in the twentieth century by thinkers as Rozensweig, Buber, Lévinas, and Derrida, who all pointed to the terrible consequences of this tendency of the Hegelian philosophy to reduce the other to the same. In a different line of thought, but attending also to the absence in Hegel’s mature thought of a real account of otherness as constitutive of identity, Habermas, Honneth, and Siep’s criticisms remind us that we must be very careful in re-reading Hegel if we want to revive aspects of his proposal for our contemporary concerns. It is precisely trying to be as careful as possible, that one can propose an alternative reading of the notion of Spirit in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*: one that would not constitute itself as opposed or as an obstacle to providing an account of the centrality of intersubjectivity. On the contrary, it could show how Hegel’s notion of Spirit, at least in the *Phenomenology*—and precisely in the chapter devoted to the development of the notion, the chapter titled “Spirit”—incorporates and fully develops the project, started a few years before, that was devoted to showing the centrality of the recognitional character of human life.

It is probable that Honneth’s dismissal of the *Phenomenology* as a valuable source for an inquiry interested in actualizing Hegel’s concept of recognition—even after acknowledging, as he does in *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit*, the potentialities of Hegel’s mature philosophy—is due to the fact that he reads the analysis of recognition in the *Phenomenology* in light of a very traditional line of interpretation. As Honneth himself describes, the struggle for recognition in the *Phenomenology* is exclusively devoted to “the formation of self-consciousness,” where this is “reduced to the single meaning represented in the dialectic of lordship and bondage.”<sup>17</sup> Honneth seems to depart from a commonplace—a common misunderstanding, I would say, even among Hegel scholars—namely, that the development of the concept of mutual recognition, as it is stated at the beginning of the “Self-consciousness” chapter of the *Phenomenology*, finds its unique and final resolution in the dialectic between Master and Slave.<sup>18</sup>

There is, however, an alternative reading. Against the traditional interpretations, one could argue that what Hegel introduces as the “pure concept of recognition” (*dieser reiner Begriff des Anerkennens*)<sup>19</sup> at the beginning of the chapter on “Self-Consciousness”—the idea of two consciousnesses that “recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another”<sup>20</sup>—should be understood precisely as that. Namely, it should be understood as an empty concept that still has to fulfill and actualize itself. The place where this progressive actualization takes place is not only the Master/Slave dialectic, but precisely the “Spirit” chapter, as it is suggested by Hegel when he says,

A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it. . . . With this we have already before us the concept of Spirit. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence. . . . The detailed exposition of the concept of this spiritual unity in its duplication will present us with the process of Recognition.<sup>21</sup>

It is only when consciousness discovers that the certainty it attains of its individuality is only possible because of its belonging to a shared intersubjective world—that is, it is only until the step into Spirit<sup>22</sup>—that what was until then a pure, abstract concept of recognition, will start fulfilling itself through the motion of a progressive, intersubjective construction of autonomy. This is the only possibility for self-consciousness at the end of the chapter on “Reason.”<sup>23</sup>

Spirit in the *Phenomenology* is therefore the movement or process by which individuality is achieved and construed on the basis of an intersubjective, social realm. It is the progressive fulfillment of the pure concept of recognition, which had its first, failed, figure in the Master/Slave dialectic. This reading, however, is already quite close to the notion that Honneth rescues in Hegel’s early concept of Spirit in the *System der Sittlichkeit*: the devel-

opment of “the struggle for recognition as a social process that leads to increasing integration of community . . . being at the same time, a medium of individualization.”<sup>24</sup> Perhaps then, recognition has not disappeared from Hegel’s central concerns. Much less has it been sublated and overridden by a monological conception of a self-appropriating notion of Spirit. There is another alternative: to understand that the notion of recognition is now being used and has been incorporated into a very complex concept of Spirit that completes, without denying, the originary intersubjective idea. Thus, Hegel’s shift to a more systematic framework does not bring as a necessary consequence the annulment of the relevance of his earlier recognitional project.<sup>25</sup> The first shape of this notion of Spirit, the Ethical Order and its tragedy, presented on the light of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, will show precisely the contrary.

### **The *Eumenides* and the Absolute Reconciliation of the Ethical World**

Having already stated the relationship between recognition and Spirit in the *Phenomenology*—a relationship that apparently goes unnoticed by Honneth—one could already see in its proper context and scope *Antigone*’s first appearance in Hegel’s text.<sup>26</sup> But at the beginning of this essay, I suggested that my interest is not only to show that one can still see in the *Phenomenology* how deeply concerned Hegel is with the goals of his early Jena program. Moreover, I intend to show that there is a shift in the *Phenomenology* toward a much more complex notion of “ethicity,” and that, therefore, one could even argue that it is the *Phenomenology*, much more than Hegel’s early texts, that should become a point of reference for the contemporary debate on recognition.

In order to illustrate this shift and, with it, the importance of the fact that Hegel has decided in the *Phenomenology* to use *Antigone* and not any other tragedy to discuss the first shape of ethicity, let’s go back to one of Hegel’s earlier Jena texts: the essay on Natural Law. According to Honneth, it is precisely in this essay, and in the *System der Sittlichkeit*, that one can find Hegel’s original project on recognition.<sup>27</sup> It is not arbitrary, then, to look back into the Natural Law essay and to compare Hegel’s notion of the intersubjective

realm as it is presented there with a later notion as it is introduced by *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology*.

Since there is not sufficient space here to introduce this essay properly, it is at least important to have in mind that it represents, with the *System der Sittlichkeit*, Hegel’s turn in Jena toward more political philosophical concerns than in his earlier years in Bern and Frankfurt. The essay prepares the ground for Hegel’s more systematic proposal in the *System der Sittlichkeit*. It does so bringing forth the contradictions that Hegel finds as inherent in the political theories of his time—mainly, the liberal atomistic perspectives, in both Hobbesian and Kantian proposals—and by advancing a possible alternative in the understanding of the political realm. He calls this *Sittlichkeit*, since *Sitten*, costumes and mores, are for Hegel precisely the intersubjective ground on which every theory of right should be thought and built up.

Hegel introduces his idea of the “tragedy of ethicity” in order to illustrate the way in which this notion of ethicity—the “absolute ethical life of a people”—is achieved. This occurs through a recognitional process among classes—the economic and the political ones.<sup>28</sup> In his development of a notion of ethicity, Hegel is trying to put into question an atomistic notion of the individual, characteristic of the modern circumstances and theories that Hegel thought were proper of his time. The atomistic notion had to be shown to be a one-sided perspective. The absolute ethicity is therefore, in the essay, that movement that reconciles both, the individual and the community, the liberal and the communitarian perspectives—the inorganic and the organic, in Hegel’s essay—allowing a permanent dialogue between through both recognition of their equally valid claims and their mutual necessity:<sup>29</sup>

This reconciliation lies precisely in the knowledge of necessity, and in the right which ethical life concedes to its inorganic nature, and to the subterranean powers by making over and sacrificing to them one part of itself. For the force of the sacrifice lies in facing and objectifying the involvement with the inorganic. This involvement is dissolved by being faced; the inorganic is separated and, recognized for what it is, is it-

self taken up into indifference while the living, by placing into the inorganic what it knows to be a part of itself and surrendering it to death, has all at once recognized the right of the inorganic and cleansed itself of it. . . . Tragedy consists in this, that the ethical nature segregates its inorganic nature as a fate, and places it outside itself; and by acknowledging this fate in the struggle against it, ethical nature is reconciled with the Divine being as the unity of both.<sup>30</sup>

Absolute ethicity is, therefore, the result of a profound sacrifice. Recognizing the right of the other as “a part of oneself” is always some kind of “surrendering to death.” Hegel is here already aware of the profound difference—and thus the profound conflict—that lies in the ground of any possibility of recognition. Here is the place where tragedy, in the light of the *Eumenides*, comes on the scene. Hegel writes:

The picture of this tragedy, defined more particularly for the ethical realm, is the issue of the litigation between the Eumenides and Apollo over Orestes, conducted before the organized ethical order, the people of Athens. In the human mode, Athens, as the Aeropagus, puts equal votes in the urn for each litigant and recognizes their co-existence; though it does not thereby compose the conflict or settle the relation between the powers or their bearing on one another. But in the Divine mode, as Athene, Athens wholly restores to the people the man [Orestes] who had been involved in difference by the god [Apollo] himself; and through the separation of the powers both of which had their interest in the criminal, it brings about a *reconciliation* in such a way that the Eumenides would be revered by this people as Divine powers, and would now have their place in the city, so that their savage nature would enjoy the sight of Athene enthroned on high on the Acropolis, and thereby be pacified. . . . This is nothing else but the performance, on the ethical plane, of the tragedy that the Absolute eternally enacts with itself, by eternally giving birth to itself into objectivity, submitting in this objective form to suffering and death, and rising from its ashes into glory.<sup>31</sup>

One learns, then, that tragedy here is not just the sacrifice, the wound, or the conflict lying

below the possibility of recognition. Rather, tragedy also brings with it, in light of the *Eumenides*, its own reconciliation: the recognition of the other as ethical is here the definite *reconciliation* of the conflict. The other, as destiny, has to be taken seriously enough as something that has to be faced, and this facing leads necessarily to a struggle, a conflict. These are the consequences of the wounds inflicted by the tragic crime. But the Absolute, says Hegel, can always rise, like the Phoenix, out of its ashes into glory. Recognition, Hegel is saying, leads to an absolute reconciliation; it even seems to be a reconciliation of the Absolute with itself. All the elements that Honneth accuses Hegel of having developed once he stepped into a philosophy of consciousness appearing here already under this very particular notion of the tragic that Hegel has used, in this early Jena text, to depict the ethical realm.

### ***Antigone* and the Tragedy of Ethicity: The Beginning of a Journey toward Recognition**

So tragedy, according to this image depicted by Hegel’s reading of the *Eumenides*, does not end in conflict, but in the mutual recognition of the other’s legitimacy and right: “The true and absolute relation is that the one really does illumine the other; each has a living bearing on the other, and each is the other’s serious fate. The absolute relation, then, is set forth in tragedy.”<sup>32</sup> But is this also the image that Hegel depicts of *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology*? Why, if he had used already the *Eumenides* to talk about the ethical realm, is he now interested in showing another side of the story? <sup>33</sup> One may argue, of course, that in the *Phenomenology* we are faced with an entirely different problem: Hegel is not interested in showing the final absolute ethical reconciliation—not yet, at least<sup>34</sup>—but rather the necessary collapse of an immediate abstract notion of ethicity that will have to fall down to become aware of its own constitutive conflicts. This is true, but it is also true that in the chapter on Spirit, Hegel is not only narrating an historical development of ethicity. He is also building a conceptual account of what ethicity is and how we are to perceive it in our phenomenological experience of the intersubjective

realm.<sup>35</sup> *Antigone*, therefore, is not just Greece; it is also us. It is not just a shape that will be simply superseded and set aside in a progressive movement to a more developed and complete form of ethical life. It is the unavoidable ground where that fulfilled ethical life will have to raise itself. The wounds it may leave, therefore, are not going to be simply erased.<sup>36</sup>

And this is precisely the case. This is precisely the difference between the *Eumenides* and *Antigone*, more specifically, Hegel's *Antigone* in this chapter of the *Phenomenology*. The movement that Antigone's crime will put in motion is not going to be one of reconciliation, but, on the contrary, as Theodore George very well puts it, of an "insuperable paradox."<sup>37</sup>

Antigone's crime will be that which is put into question by putting into motion the ethical totality that was just shown to be the final result of the tragedy of the *Eumenides* in the Natural Law essay. The world where the deed is going to irrupt is that "stable equilibrium of all the parts" where "each part is a Spirit at home in the whole."<sup>38</sup> Reviving *Eumenides*' final result, Hegel describes this world as

an immaculate world, a world unsullied by any internal dissension . . . its process is a tranquil transition of one of its powers into the other. We do indeed see it divide itself into two essences and their reality; but their antithesis is rather the authentication of one through the other.<sup>39</sup>

But this world, Hegel says, is only a quiet and motionless and therefore a "dead," "abstract" concept. The absolute *Sittlichkeit* that had been shown in the Natural Law essay to be the final constitution and internal reconciliatory movement of the intersubjective world shows itself now to be just a naïve notion that will have to actualize itself, confronting its own internal contradictions. And this, says Hegel, will conduct it to its own necessary collapse. He writes: "In this development the ethical order will be destroyed."<sup>40</sup>

The deed disturbs the peaceful organization and movement of the ethical world. What there appears there as order and harmony of its two essences, each of which preserves and completes the other, becomes through the deed a transition of opposites in which each proves itself to be the

non-reality, rather than the preservation of the other. It [the ethical world] becomes the negative movement, or the eternal necessity, of a dreadful fate which engulfs in the abyss of its single nature divine and human law alike.<sup>41</sup>

While in the *Eumenides*, divine and human law were shown to find, through their mutual recognition of their necessities, their reconciliation as constitutive of ethicity, in *Antigone* there are no survivors: both will have to collapse.<sup>42</sup>

That is the force of Antigone's deed; that is her destiny. The destiny, as Hegel will show, of every ethical action—that is, every action that is meant to be significant, every deed that is meant to be introduced into the light of the common, public, shared world:

The doer cannot deny the crime or his guilt: the significance of the deed is that what was unmoved had been set in motion, and that what was locked up in mere possibility has been brought out into the open, hence to link together the unknown with what is now known.<sup>43</sup>

There is no such thing as an innocent action, Hegel insists: "Innocence, therefore, is merely non-action, like the mere being of a stone, not even of a child."<sup>44</sup> Every action is intrinsically transgression, it has to be if it is meant to be ethical, if it is meant to introduce—make manifest—in the common world the individuality of the agent: "the action is itself this splitting into two, this explicit self-affirmation and the establishing over against itself of an alien external reality."<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, it is precisely through the introduction of this individuality that the action's ethical character becomes meaningful and evident, not only to others, but to the agent herself. It is through the action which is always transgressive—always violent, perhaps, to that common external reality, i.e., to others—that the individuality itself is built up and made manifest even to the agent. "Because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred,"<sup>46</sup> writes Hegel quoting his own version of Antigone's monologue. The agent

learns through its own act the contradiction of those powers into which the substance divided itself and their mutual downfall, as well as the contradiction between its knowledge of the eth-

## RESPONDING TO HONNETH

ical character of its action, and what is in its own proper nature ethical.<sup>47</sup>

Here we have the significance of Hegel's introduction of *Antigone* in its proper scope. What *Antigone* has introduced in Hegel's thought<sup>48</sup> is not expressed properly just by saying that now Hegel knows that what lies beneath every possibility of ethical life isn't reconciliation but conflict. Furthermore, the tragic character of Antigone's action and her guilt—a tragic guilt, the Aristotelian *hamartia*<sup>49</sup>—has made available to him the proper elements in order to understand the impossibility of reconciliation. Hence, Hegel is already able to give an explanation to this abyss that will remain until the end of the chapter on Spirit as that which Hegel calls the "absolute difference."<sup>50</sup>

This explanation becomes an insightful theory of ethical action. It will still have to gain its content and development throughout the totality of the Spirit chapter, but its fundamental ground is already announced by Antigone's deed. Antigone discovers, through her action, what only the final stage of Spirit (*Gewissen* or the moral conscience of the modern world)<sup>51</sup> will know in all its proper dimension and complexity: that we can never predict the result and extension of our action; that is, that our moral knowledge previous to our actions is always incomplete. This is the case because those actions are introduced in a shared world and acquire their meaning—even their meaning for us—also through the judgment of others.<sup>52</sup> That is why Antigone has gone through the first step into this knowledge. She already *knew* that she was committing a crime,<sup>53</sup> but it is only after her action is introduced in the ethical world that she can now, as Hegel writes, "learn from her deed the developed nature of what she *actually* did."<sup>54</sup> As Robert Pippin says: "only as manifested or expressed in a social space shared by others . . . can one (even the subject himself) retrospectively determine what must have been intended."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, only in an intersubjective realm can one know who one is and become not only an individual—in a progressive, perhaps even endless process—but also a free individual. This is because only through this intersubjective process can one recognize oneself in one's actions. Recognition of others becomes essential for

this progressive achievement of individuality. This is precisely the same point of departure of the criticism of liberalism formulated by recognitional theories such as Honneth's: I cannot be said to be free unless others are free, since only in a mutually recognitive space I become also aware of who I am.

Thus, Hegel is not interested in reducing one process to the other. On the one hand, recognition is not just a moment in the self-consciousness awareness of itself (a moment that is left behind as a failed recognitive instance). On the other hand, community is not what ends up overriding the intersubjective construction of individuality, making the individual disappear in a process that only serves the interests and the coming back to itself of some kind of metaphysical absolute entity. Both individual and community are processes that have to be parallel and equally build up together. And the chapter on Spirit—inaugurated by *Antigone*—will be this progressive path through which Hegel looks forward to bring to completion—or at least to comprehend from a different, phenomenological perspective—his initial intersubjective program. Departing from the commonality of ethical life, Spirit will unconceal all the layers and conflicts proper to intersubjectivity. It will unconceal all the stages of recognition that belong to a very complex—and therefore not at all despicable—reflection on the character and process toward a political realm.

It may be true that the perspective that Hegel develops in the *Phenomenology* does not and cannot give an account of the normative dimension that Honneth is interested in looking for. Hegel himself will develop this kind of perspective later, in his *Philosophy of Right*, as Honneth himself has pointed out in *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit*. But the phenomenological perspective may show nuances and complexities that are sometimes ignored by the more normative systematic point of view. The complexity of any possibility of thinking human life as a shared world is something that the contemporary debate should not ignore or the importance or which should not be reduced. The paradoxical character of ethicity—the abyss at the ground of common life and the absolute difference that lies before us every time we try to reach for the others—is something that Hegel, and especially the Hegel of

the *Phenomenology*, does not let us forget. It is Hegel's vision of Spirit beginning in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* that should remain for us a reminder of what we are:

Death . . . is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. . . . The life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself un-

touched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. Spirit wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. . . . Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it.<sup>56, 57</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. See, for instance, Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Taylor presents Hegel's notion of recognition just as another development of Rousseau's original plea for equality over difference. Taylor's case is particularly interesting since his essay on the politics of recognition was published exactly the same year as Honneth's first book on the subject (1992). These two texts revived with more force than ever the contemporary debate on the notion of recognition as a key concept for a philosophical treatment of political and social conflicts.
2. Axel Honneth, "Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions," *Inquiry* 45 (2002): 501.
3. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 29.
4. *Ibid.*, 67. Although Honneth gives special force to this criticism of Hegel, this thesis was already suggested by Jürgen Habermas. Cf. for instance his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), chapter 2. Habermas argues that during his later years in Jena, Hegel would have shifted from a "communicative" model of rationality to a paradigm of a philosophy of consciousness, thus abandoning an intersubjective perspective.
5. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 29.
6. Axel Honneth, *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), 14.
7. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth had insisted that Hegel's abandonment of his original program was "his least of the obstacles to reappropriating the systematic content of the theory. Of far greater significance are the difficulties stemming from the fact that the approach's central lines of thought is tainted by metaphysical premises that can no longer be easily reconciled with contemporary thought" (67). Even this idea seems to have changed over the years for Honneth: in *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit*, the metaphysical framework does not seem to be an impediment to reactualize Hegel's political philosophy.
8. This is, however, a common agreement among Hegelian interpreters of the concept of recognition. Even those that consider that the notion continues to be a key concept in Hegel's mature thought prefer to concentrate mainly in his later works. See, for instance, Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
9. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 5.
10. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 41. Cf. also Robert Williams's account of Habermas's position in *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 13–15.
11. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 31.
12. *Ibid.*, 15.
13. *Ibid.*, 29.
14. Ludwig Siep, "Die Bewegung des Anerkennens in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*," in Dietmar Kühle and Otto Pöggeler, eds., *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 120. The translation of all the quotes from this article is mine.
15. *Ibid.*, 125.
16. *Ibid.*, 121.
17. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 63.
18. This "agonistic" interpretation is indeed a very common reading of the *Phenomenology's* development of the notion of recognition. Cf. the discussion of this phenomenon in Richard Lynch, "Mutual Recognition and the Dialectic of Master and Slave: Reading Hegel against Kojève," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (2001): 33–48. Even Robert Williams, whose project is centered precisely in showing—against Haber-

- mas—that the mature Hegel has much more to say about recognition and intersubjectivity, focuses his analyses of the *Phenomenology* exclusively on the Master/Slave dialectic, and points out that, to see a complete development of the concept, where the other is “more than a negation or a limit” one has to go further into the *Encyclopedia* and the *Philosophy of Right* (Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 47).
19. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), §185, 112. I quote Miller’s translation since it is the most commonly used in English speaking bibliography on Hegel, but, since the translation is not always as accurate as it could be, I will change the text wherever I consider it necessary.
  20. *Ibid.*, §184, 112.
  21. *Ibid.*, §177–78, 110–11.
  22. “These shapes, however, are distinguished from the previous ones by the fact that they are real Spirits, actualities in the strict meaning of the word, and instead of being shapes merely of consciousness, are shapes of a world” (*ibid.*, §441, 265).
  23. The understanding of this step from Reason into Spirit depends on a proper understanding of the unfolding of the concept through its phenomenological shapes throughout the *Phenomenology*. Ramón Valls Plana explains this unfolding in a very insightful way when he says that the movement in the *Phenomenology* must be understood both in an ascendant and a descendant direction. The progressive movement of consciousness toward the development of her truth during her different shapes is at the same time nothing else but the gradual acknowledgment of the conditions of possibility of her previous figures. Spirit, therefore, shows itself to be the prior and necessary condition—the only reality—behind consciousness’s experience of its existence as an independent being. Ramón Valls Plana, *Del Yo al Nosotros. Lectura de la Fenomenología del Espíritu de Hegel* (Barcelona: Editorial Estela, 1971), 99. Cf. also Robert Pippin, “Recognition and Reconciliation. Actualized Agency in Hegel’s Jena Phenomenology,” in B. Van den Brink, ed., *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 57–78, esp. 72–74. Pippin’s article is especially relevant in this context since he is precisely responding to Honneth’s interpretation of Hegel, as Honneth himself acknowledges afterwards in the *Rejoinder* that comes at the end of the book (351–52).
  24. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 28.
  25. Cf. for a detailed discussion of this matter Miguel Giusti, “Autonomía y reconocimiento,” *Ideas y Valores* 133 (2007): 39–56.
  26. *Antigone* enters in scene a second time in the *Phenomenology*, in the chapter on Religion, “Religion and the Form of Art.” In his comment on these passages devoted to *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology*, Dennis Schmidt says that “although they are found at quite different moments in the text, and although they are centered upon apparently different themes, these two sections of the text answer to one another and need to be read as a piece.” Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 95. As much as this is true, I will refer here exclusively to the first passage without mentioning the chapter on Religion, since my interest is to show how this first shape of the Spirit on the light of *Antigone*’s tragedy announces already the very complex notion of ethnicity and intersubjectivity that Hegel has already developed by the time he is writing the *Phenomenology*.
  27. About the Natural Law essay, Honneth says that even though “Hegel has not yet developed a solution for this problem [the problem of “how to explain philosophically the development of an organization of society whose ethical cohesion would lie in a form of solidarity based on the recognition of the individual freedom”] . . . he has already marked out the rough contours of the route by which he will reach it” (Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 14). This route consists mainly in setting the ground for an “ethical totality” as the result of “a process of recurring negations, by which the ethical relations of society are to be successfully freed from their remaining one-sidedness and particularities” (*ibid.*, 15).
  28. It is never clear if Hegel is describing in this essay the movement that would take place in every form of *ethnicity*—every attempt of constitution and understanding of the common life of a people—or if he is already talking about an alternative for the modern political realm. There are reasons to think that it is the latter since Hegel is already introducing a historical perspective that points out to the need to cope with the atomistic notion of the individual, characteristic of the modern circumstances and theories that Hegel attacked at the beginning of his essay.

29. The movement, of course, is much more complex. This is just a schematic presentation of a much more complicated proposal. Honneth himself gives a very interesting interpretation of the text in *The Struggle for Recognition* (cf. chapter 2, 11–16). For a truly detailed commentary of the essay, cf. Bernard Bourgeois, *Le Droit Naturel de Hegel. Commentaire* (Paris: Vrin, 1986).
30. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, its Place in Moral Philosophy, and its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 104–05.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 108.
33. Renato Caputo develops a very interesting reading of both the Natural Law essay and the passages on *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology* in trying to give an answer to these questions. Cf. Caputo, “De la Tragédie Grecque à la Tragédie Moderne. Généalogie du Tragique dans la Philosophie de Hegel à Iena,” *Hegel Jahrbuch*, 2004. He proposes there a very similar reading of what I am trying to show here in opposition to Honneth, arguing that the young Hegel, even during his years in Jena before the *Phenomenology*, is still absorbed in a “melancholic nostalgia” (*ibid.*, 283), while in the *Phenomenology* he is already aware of the nuances proper to the modern world, which will need a resolution outside the tragic (*ibid.*, 284). Caputo, however, is concerned with another reconciliation, one brought to Modernity by Christianity, while I would prefer to insist on the unavoidable and irreparable wound that *Antigone* leaves even for the Modern world.
34. It could be said that this final reconciliation comes with forgiveness. Theodore George, for instance, seems to think something of this sort. Cf. Theodore George, *Tragedies of Spirit: Tracing Finitude in Hegel’s Phenomenology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 75. I do not think that forgiveness at the end of the Spirit brings into absolute reconciliation what has been wounded since the beginning and throughout the different moments of the Spirit. Forgiveness, on the contrary, seems precisely to confirm that, at least from a phenomenological perspective, Hegel does not conceive an absolute ethicity as the final result of Modernity. But that is something I’ll have to leave aside for the time being.
35. Alan Speight’s extraordinary analysis of these passages in the *Phenomenology* is very useful to understanding how one does not have to stand either on the historical or on the conceptual side of the interpretation of the chapter on Spirit. Hegel’s *Antigone*, says Speight, is both the Greek ethos and a very insightful reflection on Modern agency. Cf. M. Speight, *Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 52. Theodore George also insists on this interpretation when he states—against Menke’s more historical reading of this moment in the *Phenomenology*—that it can be read “as an inquiry in what it means for consciousness actually to embrace a number of broader political, social, and ethical commitments while allowing for an individual to remain true to itself” (*Tragedies of Spirit*, 75).
36. See Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 96: “this crisis [opened up by Antigone’s crime] will never be fully and finally resolved; the locus of its appearance will remain vital in the life of the community.” That is also why Schmidt insists: “The analysis of ethical life here not only exhibits the form of a tragedy, it also has the result of a tragedy” (*ibid.*, 101).
37. George, *Tragedies of Spirit*, 87.
38. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §462, 277.
39. *Ibid.*, §463, 278.
40. *Ibid.*, §444, 266.
41. *Ibid.*, §462, 279.
42. “Only in the downfall of both sides alike is absolute right accomplished, and the ethical substance as the negative power which engulfs both sides, that is, omnipotent and righteous Destiny, steps on the scene” (*ibid.*, §472, 285).
43. *Ibid.*, §469, 283.
44. *Ibid.*, §468, 282.
45. *Ibid.* Here one can see that Hegel has developed already a much more complex notion of ethical actions, not only in comparing the *Phenomenology* to the early Jena texts, but even with some of his Frankfurter texts such as the *Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, where Hegel introduces the figure of Antigone as representing the “more sublime of all guilts,” the guilt that is brought up as the result of innocence. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel does not think of Antigone’s action as innocent anymore. This is also why—in a different debate (cf. note 34), the notion of forgiveness that comes at the end of the *Phenomenology* will have to be much more complex than that notion of forgiveness introduced in the *Spirit of Christianity* precisely to respond to a tragic destiny like that of the innocence.
46. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §470: 284.
47. *Ibid.*, §445, 266.

## RESPONDING TO HONNETH

48. I deliberately say this because I do not think it was the other way around: it is not that Hegel had already a theory on action and then used *Antigone*, for instance, to illustrate it. I definitely agree with Alan Speight when he insists that “it was Hegel’s reading of the ancient tragedies that seems to have influenced his theory of action” (Speight, *Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency*, 48).
49. Cf. the analysis that George presents of the relevance of this concept for Hegel’s interpretation of agency in George, *Tragedies of Spirit*, 91ff. See also Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 100–01.
50. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §658, 400.
51. Miller does not make a distinction between *Bewusstsein* and *Gewissen*, a difference that Hegel has been very careful in using to introduce the shape of the moral Modern conscience. For instance, §658 talks about the *Bewusstsein*, while §659 already introduces the idea of the *Gewissen*, but in both cases he translates “conscience” without further explanation.
52. Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §642 and §640, §644 respectively. This is what Bernstein calls “the fallibilism of all moral knowledge and the ineliminable interpretive pluralism with respect to the meaning of all moral actions.” J. M. Bernstein, “Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action,” in R. Elridge, ed., *Beyond Representation: Philosophy and Poetic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35. This is not very different from Hannah Arendt’s analysis of human action in her chapter on the subject in *The Human Condition*. The similarities between Arendt and Hegel— especially the Hegel of the *Phenomenology*—in reference to action should be studied more thoroughly.
53. Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §670. That is why perhaps, as Speight suggests, Hegel has chosen Antigone and not Oedipus. Cf. Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*, 54.
54. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §469, 283.
55. Pippin, “Recognition and Reconciliation,” 72. This is also what Speight calls the “retrospectivity” of actions in Hegel’s theory and what has been analyzed by Charles Taylor in “Hegel’s Philosophy of Actions,” in Lawrence S. Stepelevich and David Lamb, eds., *Hegel and the Philosophy of Action* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanity Press, 2003). But I consider Pippin’s analysis more insightful, at least for my present interests, since it is Pippin more than anyone who insists on the importance of the others, and the others’ judgment, for the retrospective meaningfulness of the action.
56. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §32, 19.
57. I want to thank Theodore George and Lauren Freeman who were on the same panel at SPEP where I first presented this paper. It is thanks to our conversation and continuing dialogue on these subjects that I have been developing my ideas toward this critical view of recognition in the light of Hegel and Honneth. I have especially to thank to Lauren Freeman also for being patient enough to correct my English for final draft of this essay.

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