

7-1-2006

# Recognition Beyond Struggle: On a Liberatory Account of Hegelian Recognition

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**Abstract:** Monahan offers a critique of an agonistic interpretation of Hegelian recognition as exclusively manifested by and through struggle, drawing out Hegel's positive accounts of alternative manifestations of recognition. Furthermore, he argues that getting Hegel right on recognition actually opens up fertile theoretical ground for laying out positive accounts of human freedom and liberation.

Hegelian recognition is often criticized as an inadequate tool for theorizing human liberation. More and more, theorists of oppression and liberation (feminists, race theorists, queer theorists, and so on) are either rejecting recognition outright, or offering radical reinterpretations of a concept they understand to be too focused upon antagonistic struggle, and modeled upon the relations of dominance and subordination found in the familiar "Master/Slave dialectic." By way of a recent, and important, example, Kelly Oliver's book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* makes an excellent case for a liberatory feminist politics that transcends this agonistic (and patriarchal) model of human agency most often associated with Hegelian recognition.<sup>1</sup> While much of her critique of this interpretation of recognition (which I will here refer to as the "agonistic"

interpretation) is constructive and fruitful, it should be noted that it is predicated upon a very narrow, and in my view inaccurate, understanding of Hegel's own account of the phenomenon. In other words, Oliver's criticism of *this* account of recognition is compelling and persuasive, but it is by no means clear that the agonistic account she offers can be rightly understood as accurately capturing Hegel's own understanding.

While Hegel does devote a great deal of text to discussion of the ways in which recognition may be made manifest through struggle, where such interpretations (and those critiques based upon them) fail is in their presumption that struggle is the *exclusive* means of gaining recognition, and that recognition predicated upon domination is a *normative* paradigm. Hegel did indeed argue that struggle for recognition could be important, and that it was without doubt common, but he took great care to point towards ways and means whereby recognition, as a necessary condition for human freedom (and thus liberation), could be gained and maintained *without* the need for struggle. In other words, there is an understanding of recognition *beyond struggle* that Hegel explicitly describes and endorses. To reject recognition entirely on the grounds that it is overly agonistic is to throw out the baby with the proverbial bathwater. This is not merely because it is, in itself, an inaccurate reading of Hegelian recognition. My purpose in this paper is twofold. First, I will offer a critique of this agonistic interpretation of Hegelian recognition as exclusively manifested by and through struggle, drawing out Hegel's positive accounts of alternative manifestations of recognition. Second, my ultimate goal is not simply to "correct" a common misreading of Hegel, but to argue that getting Hegel *right* on recognition actually opens up fertile theoretical ground for laying out positive accounts of human freedom and liberation.

The agonistic interpretation of recognition is by no means unique to Oliver. It dominates feminist theory,<sup>2</sup> race theory,<sup>3</sup> and much of twentieth century continental philosophy.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the vast majority of literature concerned with oppression and liberation presumes that the agonistic view of recognition as struggle is both an accurate and-more importantly for my purposes—*complete* interpretation of Hegelian recognition. There is, in this literature, a myopic focus on the passages from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

dealing with the "Master/Slave dialectic" and the life-and-death struggle. The theory of recognition that results from this narrow focus is surely worthy of criticism, but it is also woefully incomplete. My reason for focusing on Oliver's work is not merely because her work is representative of this dominant interpretation of Hegel within the literature of oppression and liberation, but also because she offers such a compelling critique of this agonistic reading of recognition. Oliver argues convincingly that a commitment to genuinely liberatory theory demands a rejection of the agonistic interpretation of Hegelian recognition. That being said, her critique of recognition is impoverished to the extent that it omits any reference to what Hegel himself referred to as pure recognition ("*Dieser reine Begriff des Anerkennens*"),<sup>5</sup> while at the same time treating the agonistic interpretation as if it were complete. There are plenty of excellent reasons to be critical of Hegel from the perspective of gender and race theory, but his theory of recognition, as such, is not one of them.

## **The Agonistic Interpretation: "Corrupted" Recognition**

According to the view I have been referring to as "agonistic," recognition is achieved through a process of struggle, subordination, and domination. In this view, the world is full of agents seeking to *extract* recognition from other agents. Since, as Oliver describes it, recognition requires a recognizer and a recognizee,<sup>6</sup> many agents are bound to have their efforts thwarted, or at least resisted. Thus, in order to extract recognition from another, it becomes necessary to engage in a life and death struggle—one must *compel* recognition from the other, who, because the *bestowing* of such recognition is understood to constitute a kind of loss of status, will resist this compulsion. The ensuing struggle must result either in the death of one of the combatants, in which case there can be no recognition (because the dead are incapable of it), or one of the combatants must submit to and thereby recognize the other, who becomes master to the other's slave. This in turn establishes a relationship of dominance and subordination, an account of which is provided in Hegel's dialectic of Master and Slave.

There are four central tenets of the agonistic interpretation of Hegelian recognition. First, recognition, as a phenomenon, requires the participants to occupy one of two distinct roles—recognizer, or recognizee. There is always one (or more than one) who is recognizing another (or group of others), and one (or more than one) who is being recognized by another (or group of others). Recognition is thus always already a relation of asymmetry. Second, this asymmetry results in relations of superiority and inferiority. The one who is recognized (the recognizee) is thereby placed in a position of dominance vis-à-vis the recognizer, who in turn is subordinated through the act of recognition. This is simply because one of the participants is having his or her status as a fully human *subject* acknowledged, while the other is not. This can perhaps be most clearly seen in terms of the recognition of full political status. If group A is recognized by group B as having full political rights and privileges without being themselves so recognized, then group A will be in a position of political superiority. This in turn points toward the third central tenet, which holds that agents will tend to resist being placed in the subordinate position in relations of recognition (for what should be obvious reasons). Given that we are all seeking recognition, but are loathe to simply give it, it follows that others must be *compelled* to grant recognition, which results in a normative state of struggle. This is the fourth and last central claim of the agonistic view. If one's only two choices are domination or subordination, one will typically choose domination.<sup>7</sup> If domination is only achieved through the forcible extraction of recognition from some other, then one's efforts must be directed toward that forcible extraction. In this way, struggle becomes the foundation for recognition as such.

Recognition must therefore be understood, in Oliver's terms, as "pathological,"<sup>8</sup> inasmuch as it fosters relations of domination and oppression. According to Oliver, "[c]omparison and domination are thus *inherent* in the recognition model of identity, a model that helps to maintain oppression and colonialism on a psychological level."<sup>9</sup> This is because

[w]ithin the pathology of recognition, subjectivity is conferred by those in power and on those they deem powerless and disempowered ... It is the desire to become objectified in order

to be recognized by the sovereign subject to whom the oppressed is beholden for his or her own self-worth.<sup>10</sup>

It is easy to see how, within this agonistic view, one might hold that "Hegel portrays human consciousness as shaped primarily by domination, subordination, and death."<sup>11</sup> With all of this in mind, it is not in the least surprising that recognition should be subjected to constant critique from those theorists interested in issues of oppression and liberation. What I am arguing here, however, is that this critique of recognition as overtly agonistic misses the mark, since the object of the critique is not really recognition per se, but rather a particular form of it, and a *corrupted* one at that.<sup>12</sup>

The dominance of the agonistic interpretation of Hegelian recognition has its roots, I submit, in the myopic focus on the dialectic of Master/ Slave found in most twentieth-century interpretations of Hegel. Hegelian recognition, in other words, seems to be *reduced*, on most accounts, to the Master/Slave dialectic, without any effort to contextualize that dialectic or differentiate it from Hegel's treatment of recognition as a whole. Fortunately, recent Hegel scholarship has done much to undermine this view, and what follows owes a great debt to the work of Axel Honneth and Robert Williams in particular.<sup>13</sup> What these more recent works on Hegel's account of recognition have shown is that the agonistic view elides any reference to *pure* recognition.<sup>14</sup> It may be (and very likely is) the case that what I am here referring to as "corrupted" forms of recognition better describe actual human interaction as it is presently made manifest, but, especially for Hegel, that is only *contingently* true. That we find ourselves more frequently engaging in relations of corrupted, rather than pure, recognition, is a result of a failure to achieve those conditions, both individual and social, that are conducive to pure recognition, rather than some *necessary* moment in the development of human consciousness. This is not to say that pure and corrupted recognition are radically distinct concepts, either. Indeed, my choice to appeal to the terminology of corruption is intended not only to maintain consistency with Hegel's own use of "purity," but also to make clear the ways in which the pure and corrupted thing or phenomenon remains at root *the same* thing or phenomenon. What I am calling "corrupted" recognition is still a manifestation of recognition, it just has yet to reach its full potential. It is, in other words, only a suggestion of what it could become.<sup>15</sup>

Bearing these points in mind not only offers one a more accurate interpretation of Hegel, but also opens up a completely different approach to questions of oppression and liberation, which I shall discuss further below. Pure recognition offers an ideal for human interaction that both preserves the valuable insights the agonistic interpretation offers and at the same time answers the critique leveled against it, all the while pointing toward future directions of positive theoretical development as regards oppression and liberation.

Before any account of pure recognition can get under way, however, it is necessary to make an important interpretive point. Hegel's *Phenomenology* is often read as a rather linear narrative of the development of "Spirit" (Geist). Judith Butler, for example, refers to the *Phenomenology* as a kind of "*Bildungsroman*, an optimistic narrative of adventure and edification, a pilgrimage of the spirit."<sup>16</sup> I do not deny that this can be an instructive way to approach the text, but it is not without its weaknesses, either. Foremost, it misses the extent to which Hegel takes himself not to be *building* a conception of "absolute spirit" from disparate parts, but rather *revealing* a totality that was present, if only implicitly, in those parts all along. The structural order of the text, therefore, should not be understood as an instruction manual laying out the necessary steps that each consciousness must undergo in order to eventually cross a spiritual finish line. According to Philip Kain:

This is crucially important because many readers assume that the *Phenomenology* proceeds by necessary logical deduction, that each successive stage is logically derived from what precedes ... Readers notoriously are unable to see the necessity involved in moving from one form of consciousness to the next. This perplexity arises, in my view, from mistakenly assuming that each stage is supposed to be logically deduced from the preceding.<sup>17</sup>

And later:

What has to be done is to show that each stage fails. But nothing specific necessarily follows from that failure—certainly the next stage is not logically deduced ... It is we who make the leap to the next stage in order to overcome the inadequacies of the preceding stages. There is no problem with transitions from

stage to stage. Hegel strategically thinks up the next stage himself.<sup>18</sup>

In short, the "story" of the *Phenomenology* ought not be read exclusively as a sort of prescriptive narrative. This in turn means that the dialectic of master and slave should be read as an illustration of a larger point about the structure of intersubjective relations, and not as a paradigm for human interaction.

With this claim about the interpretive approach to the *Phenomenology* in mind, we are now equipped to grapple with the role of recognition (both *pure* and *corrupted*) in the Hegelian system.

## **Pure Recognition**

In the moment of Desire, from which Hegel's discussion of recognition in the *Phenomenology* emerges, the agent is motivated by an urge to demonstrate that she is a "simple universal,"<sup>19</sup> in that she takes herself to be complete, self-contained, and self-sufficient. She confronts a world of merely contingent, inessential objects, and understands herself to be the sole manifestation of necessity and independence. To maintain this belief, agents in the moment of Desire must engage in a constant process of *negation*. If I am to preserve my position as pure, unfettered subjectivity, then I must negate all external obstacles, usually by consuming or destroying them.<sup>20</sup> In so doing, I demonstrate their dependence upon my whim for their continued existence. Thus, if I am to maintain my "selfcertainty" in the moment of Desire, I must involve myself in a constant effort to vanquish or destroy anything that might present itself as an object *independent* of my own consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

All of this may appear rather abstract and esoteric, and certainly Hegel's prose style does nothing to mitigate this appearance, but in fact this approach to the world is all too common. Hegel's own use of the concept of simplicity in his term "simple universal" is in fact rather helpful here, for it points to the sense in which the moment of Desire seeks a lack of complications. If my consciousness exists at the end of the day in a manner that is related to, dependent upon, or otherwise "embedded" within social, material, and/or historical circumstances and contexts, then my subjectivity becomes convoluted rather quickly.

I can attempt to avoid this complexity by demonstrating that these "external" factors are in fact *completely distinct* from my agency,<sup>22</sup> and furthermore, subordinate to it. By negating difference, I maintain the illusion of my own complete self-sufficiency. The moment of Desire, in other words, is a manifestation of the belief that one is, effectively, the only subject on the scene. An agent manifesting this moment of consciousness will view the rest of the world, including the people in it, either as tools for his own use, or obstacles to be overcome. And in crushing those obstacles, or employing those tools, he demonstrates to himself that he alone is possessed of true subjectivity and agency. He becomes the lone active agent in a world of passive objects.

The moment of Desire serves as a perfect example of the interpretive point made at the end of the previous section. It is a moment not simply in the chronological sense, but more importantly in the sense that it is a mode of consciousness that one may be manifesting, may have once manifested, may manifest in the future, or may be able to incorporate into one's consciousness without having to necessarily experience it first hand at all. What is important about the moment of Desire in *the Phenomenology* is that the reader grasp the internal contradiction that, according to Hegel, inevitably flows from it. This contradiction emerges from the simple fact that each effort to demonstrate one's status as "simple universal" by negating some object is itself a proof that there are independent objects. If there really were no independent objects, if I really were the source of all that is, then I wouldn't need to swagger about consuming or destroying all that crossed my path. Furthermore, even if this weren't the case, the "independence" gained in the act of negation is itself dependent upon never-ending reiterations of that act. The moment I stop consuming or annihilating, I am admitting defeat—I am allowing independence to external objects. One could understand the very nomenclature as indicative of the self-defeating nature of this moment of consciousness. It is "Desire" precisely because it can never be satiated. Desire seeks what can never be, but what it dimly perceives *must* be. It seeks a status ("simple universal") that is ultimately only a caricature of what Hegel believes to be the *truth* of human consciousness. It is in the realization of the ultimate futility of Desire, for Hegel, that we come to realize the need for an encounter with another consciousness.

Before I spell this out, a more mundane example is in order. To be sure, very few individuals, if any, will fully manifest the moment of Desire as Hegel describes it in the *Phenomenology*. But elements of this mode of consciousness are not at all uncommon. At its root, the moment of Desire is a drive to inhabit a world in which nothing can rise up to challenge one's subjectivity. In the moment of Desire, I seek to demonstrate that nothing is capable of thwarting my will—that I am the only agent in the world worth the name. Consider, by way of example, someone who is deeply committed to the ideal of the "rugged individualist" in a manner that is as much John Galt as it is John Wayne. The individualist, let us call her Ann, will surely not destroy everything and everyone around her merely on whim, but she seeks to become as "self-sufficient" and "independent" as possible. She will psychologically, and perhaps even physically, distance herself as much as she can from the "outside" world, seeking to situate herself such that she need never rely on anyone else. To do otherwise she takes to be a sign of weakness. On one extreme, this might mean acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to survive on her own in the wilderness, "living off the land" and "fending for herself." On the other extreme, it might mean that Ann will seek to acquire enough wealth that she need never concern herself with her own physical needs (that's what good servants are for) or the social world (that's what good legal and administrative staff are for). Either way, Ann is setting herself up as a "simple universal." Other individuals, social bodies, material objects, and the natural world exist only as tools or obstacles to be *mastered*, *overcome*, or at the very least, *ignored*. She does whatever she can to prove to herself that she is in complete control of her life, that nothing is left to chance (or worse, to the will of others), and that nothing intrudes upon her world except by her consent. Ann's life becomes organized around this constant effort to assert her complete independence.

While this is an admittedly extreme example of individual behavior, it in fact appeals to ideals that dominate much of the North American cultural and ideological landscape. The "self-made-man," the captain of industry, and the romantic loner carving out a solo existence in the American wilderness all appeal to this notion of perfect self-sufficiency. This example is instructive not simply because there may or may not be individuals that manifest this extreme version of the moment of Desire, but because these elements of the

moment of Desire, as they exist in these iconic cultural tropes, are so common and influential. Desire, therefore, is not only some discrete moment of our own consciousness that we must confront and then leave behind, it is something that deeply informs our understanding of ourselves and our world on a cultural level.<sup>23</sup> We are thus confronting it constantly, and, according to Hegel, a firm grasp of its internal contradictions can only aid us in avoiding its more pernicious consequences.

Remember that what the agent seeks in the moment of Desire is a kind of affirmation of her own subjectivity. She wants proof that she exists as a subject able to exert her will over the world around her. But, as we have seen, the *modus operandi* of Desire cannot satisfy this need for proof and certainty. For Hegel, only pure recognition is able to provide this affirmation of agency that each subject needs in order to fully develop. The problem with the moment of Desire lies not merely in its method, but in the conception of agency that informs it. For Hegel, we can never be the "simple universal" posited in the moment of Desire, for human being means existing *both* as universal and particular.<sup>24</sup> The moment of Desire seeks to eliminate all particularity. The agent in the moment of Desire is seeking to *overcome* his history, his culture, his social standing, the physical and human obstacles in his way, and so on. That is, he seeks to annihilate all particularity from his existence. What recognition provides is a way to bridge this gap between universality and particularity *within* the consciousness of the agent, by allowing the agent to experience herself both as a situated, particular object enmeshed in a sophisticated system of other objects and forces, as well as being an independent consciousness capable of *acting* on this larger system of objects and forces in a way that generates new and different possibilities of further action and self-expression.

In *pure* recognition, the agent is able to exist as a self-conscious agent for another self-conscious agent, which means that the agent exists for himself as both a subject and an object simultaneously. In the *Phenomenology*, and many subsequent discussions of Hegelian recognition, recognition is elaborated in the scope of an I/thou encounter between two agents. This is clearly an instructive way to think through recognition, but as I shall show later, a narrow focus on this I/thou level can be very limiting, and even misleading. For the

moment, however, using a two-agent example will prove most helpful in fleshing out the differences between pure and corrupted recognition.

In order to keep this first example as straightforward as possible, imagine two agents, Matt and Mary, who are about to engage in *pure* recognition. Matt, in recognizing Mary, affirms openly that she is another self-conscious agent like himself. This in turn means that Matt recognizes that he is himself an object for Mary's consciousness—he is an *other* for her, because she, like him, is capable of consciously attending to the world around her. This is important first because Matt is acknowledging their shared status as subjects, and second because in order for Matt to *realize* that he is an object of Mary's consciousness, he must exercise his own subjectivity—he has to *perform* this realization that he is an object of Mary's consciousness *as an agent*. In other words, Matt must manifest his subjectivity in order to apprehend himself as an object for Mary. Mary, meanwhile, is performing the same exercise in relation to Matt. When both agents approach the other in this way, this means that their self-consciousness is rendered *explicit* through this manifestation of reciprocal (pure) recognition. If Matt recognizes Mary, who is in turn recognizing him, then Matt has his own subjectivity "given" back to him,<sup>25</sup> but in a way that opens it up to a kind of public affirmation. Matt apprehends another subject, who is, through her recognition of him as himself a subject, showing him his own agency "in the world." His status as a self-conscious agent becomes importantly *real* for him in a way that was impossible without this reciprocal recognition.

It should be clear at this point that the manifestation of recognition described above only works when both agents are willing to fully recognize the other. In Hegel's words, "[a]ction by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both."<sup>26</sup> It is in this necessity for reciprocity that the "purity" of pure recognition lies. Without reciprocity, the full benefits of recognition are lost to both parties. If Matt recognizes Mary, but she is unwilling to recognize him, then he does not have his own status as an agent rendered explicit, because Mary does not openly acknowledge this status. At the same time, Mary cannot have her own subjectivity made explicit, since she refuses to accept that Matt is a subject capable of acknowledging her own subjectivity. According to Hegel, the reciprocity of pure recognition is significant "because it is indivisibly

the action of one as well as of the other."<sup>27</sup> In pure recognition, in other words, the agents "*recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.*"<sup>28</sup> If one or both parties refuse to recognize the other, then recognition becomes *corrupted*.

The account of pure recognition described above is contained entirely in paragraphs 178-184 of the *Phenomenology*. Paragraph 185 serves as a transition between pure and corrupted recognition, and is worth quoting in its entirety:

We have now to see how the process of this pure Notion of recognition, of the duplicating of self-consciousness in its oneness, appears to self-consciousness. At first, it will exhibit the side of the inequality of the two, or the splitting-up of the middle term into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only *recognized*, the other only *recognizing*.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, what preceded paragraph 185 was an account of *reciprocal*, pure recognition, and what follows it is only *an* account of the dialectic of recognition in an impure form. Thus, "this pure Notion of recognition," only "appears," "at first," in the form of these two extremes (Master and Slave), but this is mere appearance, and should not be properly understood as a *normative* account of recognition as such. As I shall argue later, what is described in the Master/Slave dialectic is still recognition, but it is far from pure, and thus not meant to be a model upon which to base our own actions. What is more, this "at first" pertains to the development of consciousness in general, not necessarily to the chronology of development for a given individual.

The exclusive focus on the Master/Slave dialectic that so dominates appropriations of Hegel in the philosophy of oppression and liberation, therefore, leaves out a fundamental aspect of Hegelian recognition. Without pure recognition, we are indeed left with a picture of recognition that is thoroughly agonistic. But what should be apparent at this point is that any treatment of Hegelian recognition that works with this exclusive focus upon the Master/Slave dialectic is actually a treatment of Hegelian *misrecognition*, insofar as it takes corrupted recognition to be the norm. As a consequence, any critique of "Hegelian Recognition" that focuses upon this agonistic paradigm misses its target. Hegel would, in fact, agree that the Master/Slave

dialectic is far from ideal, that the "life and death struggle" is unnecessarily destructive, and that relations of domination and subordination are dehumanizing and contrary to human freedom. These are all ways in which, according to Hegel, we manifest a *corrupted* form of that which is ideal, which is constructive, and which is conducive (indeed, necessary) to human freedom—pure recognition.

Oliver raises the subject of "misrecognition," but points out that "insofar as misrecognition presupposes an ideal recognition we are still operating within an economy of recognition." She goes on to argue that while misrecognition "is very *effective* in explaining the existence of war and oppression, if *normalized* it makes it impossible to imagine peaceful compassionate relations with others across or through differences."<sup>30</sup> There are two important responses to this claim. First, when Oliver refers to an "economy of recognition," she is in fact referring to an economy of *corrupted* recognition, inasmuch as she treats the Master/Slave dialectic, and the agonistic model, as the paradigms of Hegelian recognition. Thus, she is correct in claiming that the normalization of that model would make it impossible to conceive of anything other than fundamentally agonistic relations between human beings, but my claim is that Hegel would agree with this. The purpose of the Master/Slave dialectic is to point out a way in which we can fail to manifest the ideal of pure recognition, and to reveal the pitfalls, and eventual resolution, of this particular detour from our "proper" path. Her rejection of "misrecognition," therefore, is unfounded.

The second important response has to do with our understanding of when recognition is present. Hegel's term "pure" (*reine*) in his own account connotes an ideal that admits of degrees of realization. If we add water to a glass of pure alcohol, we do not then deny that there is alcohol in the glass. The glass of alcohol is now merely *impure*. The same would apply to descriptions of recognition. Manifestations of recognition that fail to be fully pure are still manifestations of recognition, inasmuch as they are manifestations of *intersubjectivity*. This is clear for the slave, who, in recognizing the master, has already begun to move beyond the solipsistic moment of Desire, but it is also true for the Master. According to Hegel, "The lord relates himself *mediately* to the bondsman through a being [a thing] that is independent, for it is just this which holds the bondsman in

bondage."<sup>31</sup> It is not so much that the master refuses to recognize the slave as it is that the master refuses to recognize the slave as a full agent *like* the master. There is thus a rudimentary recognition even in this prime example of the corruption of recognition.

Thus, Oliver is correct to point out that "misrecognition" is still recognition. However, returning to my example, there is a real difference between pure and impure alcohol. They will behave differently when exposed to open flame, for instance, they have different density, and they affect the human body differently if consumed. In the same way, there is a real difference between pure and impure recognition. To point out that they are both manifestations of the same basic phenomenon does not mean that they are equally valuable, or that they function in the same way, or that they have the same impact on the participants. Conversely, to understand corrupted recognition as if it were not recognition at all would create a radical distinction between pure recognition on the one hand, and an utter *lack* of recognition on the other. Reciprocity would then be not an alteration (though an important one) of an already existing relation, but the emergence of a completely new and distinct relation. By maintaining the ultimate similarity of pure and corrupted recognition, the transition from corruption to purity becomes less opaque—it is a matter of shaping what already exists into a more ideal form. Pure recognition is qualitatively distinct from impure recognition, even if they are at root different manifestations of the same phenomenon.

Oliver is, of course, quite right to reject the norm that she describes. Recognition that is *conferred* upon a subordinate by one in a dominant position is far from liberating, and to seek to have this recognition conferred upon oneself by a superior is surely pathological. Frantz Fanon makes this point explicitly in his discussion of Hegel in *Black Skin, White Masks*, a text that Oliver appeals to in her own work. It is worth quoting Fanon at length:

There is not an open conflict between white and black. One day the White Master, *without conflict*, recognized the Negro slave.

But the former slave wants to *make himself recognized*.

At the foundation of Hegelian dialectic there is an absolute reciprocity which must be emphasized. It is in the degree to

which I go beyond my own immediate being that I apprehend the existence of the other as a natural and more than natural reality. If I close the circuit, if I prevent the accomplishment of movement in two directions, I keep the other within himself. Ultimately, I deprive him even of this being-for-itself.

The only means of breaking this vicious circle that throws me back on myself is to restore to the other, through mediation and recognition, his human reality, which is different from natural reality. The other has to perform the same operation.<sup>32</sup>

What is crucial about this passage is the way in which Fanon is explicitly referring to pure recognition as a remedy for dominance and subordination. Indeed, immediately after the section above, he directly quotes Hegel's claims that recognition must be reciprocal in paragraphs 182 and 184 of the *Phenomenology*. Fanon later offers some very stimulating criticisms of the application of Hegelian recognition within a racist/ colonial context, but it is clear that he does not simply reduce his understanding of recognition to an agonistic one. It is a serious mistake to reduce Hegelian recognition *as such* to the agonistic and oppressive model offered in the Master/Slave dialectic, and both Hegel and Fanon realized this.

A full account of Hegelian recognition, even one drawn only from the *Phenomenology*, is inconsistent with the agonistic interpretation. What is more, the critiques of recognition that prove so telling against the agonistic interpretation are not tenable when turned on an account that incorporates pure recognition. Hegel deserves to be criticized for his treatment of women and non-whites in his discussions of history, anthropology, and the family. The critiques of recognition offered by those who hold to the agonistic interpretation, however, have thus far missed the mark.

## **The Uses and Abuses of Recognition**

While it should be clear at this point that the agonistic model of Hegelian recognition is based upon a misinterpretation of the role of recognition in the *Phenomenology*, it remains to be seen how correcting this interpretive error will yield any benefits for theorists interested in addressing issues of oppression and domination. In order to make this case fully, it will be necessary to move beyond the

*Phenomenology* and look closely at Hegel's treatment of recognition both in the *Philosophy of Mind* and the *Philosophy of Right*.

It is the reciprocal nature of pure recognition which is key for understanding the role it plays, according to Hegel, in human freedom. Recall that the function of recognition is to provide a manifestation of one's own agency (subjectivity) *in the world*, by having it "given back" (or affirmed)<sup>33</sup> *by another consciousness*. For Hegel, what is essentially being affirmed in such cases is the *freedom* of oneself, and the other. In discussing recognition in the *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel makes this explicit:

Only in such a manner [pure recognition] is true freedom realized; for since this consists in my identity with the other, I am only truly free when the other is also free and is recognized by me as free. This freedom of one in the other unites men in an inward manner, whereas needs and necessity bring them together only externally. Therefore, men must will to find themselves again in one another.<sup>34</sup>

In short, only a free subject can truly recognize and affirm my own freedom.<sup>35</sup> According to Hegel, if I coerce recognition it is immediately corrupted, and the truth of my freedom remains obscured. This is why Hegel goes on in this same paragraph to discuss the importance of struggle and the risking of one's life for freedom. Indeed, as we shall see, according to Hegel, true freedom for one demands the freedom of all. In order to grasp this particular argument, however, three further general points need to be made.

First, some further discussion of the role of struggle and the staking of one's life in Hegelian recognition is warranted. This is, clearly, one of the cornerstones of the agonistic account of recognition, and there is, to be sure, ample textual evidence to support the fact that Hegel took struggle to be quite important. But again, this textual evidence needs to be placed within its proper context. First and foremost, Hegel makes it clear in the *Philosophy of Mind* that he does not intend struggle and conflict to be the norm:

To prevent any possible misunderstandings with regard to the standpoint just outlined [life and death struggle for recognition], we must here remark that the fight for recognition pushed to

the extreme here indicated can only occur in the natural state, where men exist only as single, separate individuals; but it is absent in civil society and the State because here the recognition for which the combatants fought already exists.<sup>36</sup>

It should be kept in mind here that "civil society" and the "State" refer to ideal (*Real* in Hegel's terminology) manifestations, and not necessarily to presently existing (*Actual*) ones. Recall also that the Master/Slave dialectic and the account of the life and death struggle for recognition are both "just-so" stories designed to make certain points about the nature and development of human consciousness. They are in many ways analogous to the Rawlsian "original position"—they are useful fictions designed to facilitate certain kinds of theoretical maneuvering. If it were truly necessary for every agent to engage in a life or death struggle with every other agent, then the Hegelian world would share many unsavory characteristics of the Hobbesian state of nature (especially nastiness, brutishness, and brevity).

The reason why the life and death struggle is important, for Hegel, is because it is through the staking of one's life that one asserts one's commitment to values and causes that transcend immediate physical existence.<sup>37</sup> This is not an endorsement of some form of mind/body dualism (indeed, Hegel is highly critical of any such distinction). Hegel is not urging us to reject our status as physical beings. The point is rather that we make explicit, through our willingness to risk our very existence, our commitment to something beyond ourselves. Part of the wrong of the corrupted recognition made manifest in the dialectic of Master and Slave is that the master attempts to reduce the slave to a purely physical object—a physical extension of the will of the master. The *choice* to risk one's life to alter this condition is in itself a rejection of that "objectification." In the "natural state" that Hegel references in the passage quoted above, this will require direct physical confrontation with another, but within a more sophisticated *social* setting, one's status as a subject can be *built in* to the practices, mores, and institutions within which one is so deeply enmeshed. In such a setting, literal life and death struggle can become no longer necessary, though of course, it is also possible to have corrupted recognition "built in" to one's social environment, which leads to the second general point.

In both the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel's discussions of recognition tend to focus on a two-agent, I/thou model. This has clear advantages in terms of exposition, but a reduction of recognition to this two-person norm can be very misleading. Real people in the real world do not wallow in the solipsistic excesses of the moment of Desire, only to at long last encounter another lone consciousness, and engage in a life or death struggle. We come into the world deeply enmeshed in a complex and sophisticated web of linguistic, cultural, religious, and institutional norms and practices that condition the ways and means whereby we interact with others, who are themselves likewise situated. We quite literally find ourselves in a series of situations in which we are able to experience and manifest relationships with varying degrees of reciprocity (purity). Gender, race, class, sexuality, and myriad other variables condition the possibilities of interaction with other individuals and institutions. While this opens up massive possibilities for *corrupting* recognition, it is also crucial to understanding the function of recognition in Hegel's *politics*—the cornerstone of which is his concept of *Ethical Life (Sittlichkeit)*.

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel describes Ethical Life as composed of the family, "civil society," and the state. These are interdependent facets that work together to provide ways and means whereby agents can interact with other agents and institutions in what Hegel hopes will be constructive ways. Ethical Life, put simply, is the larger social context in which all agents find themselves embedded. It both provides the ground upon which we are able to interact (language, custom, law, and so on), as well as conditioning that interaction—such that it either fosters or hinders manifestations of pure recognition. As the passage quoted above from the *Philosophy of Mind* makes clear, recognition is, for Hegel, ultimately directed toward freedom. The same holds for Ethical Life. As he states, "Ethical Life is accordingly the *concept of freedom which has become the existing [vorhandenen] world and the nature of self-consciousness.*"<sup>38</sup> Ethical Life, therefore, may be understood in part as the ways in which recognition (both pure and corrupted) becomes *ossified* and rendered concrete through our "normalized" social practices and ways of interacting. When the manifestations of recognition found in the institutions<sup>39</sup> and practices of Ethical Life are corrupted, then the recognition I am able to manifest will more likely be corrupted, and

vice-versa. The key to realizing human freedom, therefore, is not constant struggle or perpetual reiterations of the master/slave dialectic, but rather the formation of the kind of social world in which *pure* recognition is fostered as the *norm* of human interaction. It may very well involve (political and individual) struggle to achieve this end, but this is a far cry from the visions of gladiatorial bloodsport that tend to dominate the agonistic paradigm of Hegelian recognition.

The third and final general point to be made has to do with the treatment of recognition as a static *state of being*. Recognition, both pure and impure, must be understood as an always incomplete *process*, and not as something one accomplishes in any final way. It is not a static state, but a *manifestation* of a continuous process. Far from being a discrete event or task, recognition must be an ongoing effort to reveal what for Hegel is the underlying truth of human interaction. It therefore requires constant maintenance, critical reappraisal, and reaffirmation. Even on the more simplistic I/thou level, the moment one party decides that he is "finished" with the other, reciprocal recognition is lost, and the two agents will either part ways completely or begin to manifest some more or less corrupt form of recognition. If we begin to take into account our *social* being, things become rapidly more complex. One's ability to manifest pure recognition with any given agent will be conditioned and influenced by one's relations with other agents. And if we furthermore begin to take into account the formal and informal institutions and practices that make up the "substance" of Ethical Life, yet further levels of complexity emerge. Put as simply as I am able, the point is that, in order to really take seriously the freedom and agency of another, one needs to understand that that freedom and agency are themselves undergoing constant revision. If I ever take myself to have a complete grasp of another, so that I have "recognized" him fully, then I have already taken a step toward dehumanizing him by treating him as a "dead" object, rather than as a living, *changing*, subject. Thus, even corrupted recognition cannot be "granted" or "conferred," because it is not a thing or a static state of being. Recognition of any type requires constant nurturing and maintenance. Even the most oppressive manifestation of corrupted recognition will not simply continue on its own.

Pure recognition, I have argued, is a necessary component of any full appreciation of Hegelian recognition. What I have referred to as the "agonistic interpretation" not only maintains a narrow focus on the Master/Slave dialectic and the life and death struggle, it completely elides our status as socially embedded agents and the role of Ethical Life. Once these factors are addressed, the picture of Hegelian recognition that emerges is markedly different from that offered in much of the current literature on oppression and domination, in which the agonistic interpretation is hegemonic. It remains to be shown, however, that the interpretation of Hegelian recognition that I am offering here will have anything constructive to offer theorists of oppression and domination, and especially to show that, for Hegel, the freedom of one demands the freedom of all.

It will be helpful at this point to have an example to which I can appeal in the course of my argument. To be sure, there are myriad real-life examples of deeply embedded *mis*recognition upon which I could draw. Racism, sexism, classism, religious persecution, and any number of other manifestations of oppression could be used quite fruitfully. As much as I would normally prefer to use these actual examples, they are incredibly complex phenomena, and a proper treatment of them is not possible within this essay. Consequently, I will have to use a more "stripped-down" example, and offer only the occasional gesture toward linkages with these real-life phenomena.

That being said, consider a world in which there exist creatures very much like us, except that some significant minority, who have some clearly visible phenotypical difference from the rest of the populace (suppose they have three eyes), occupy a social position of power and privilege vis-à-vis everyone else. Three-eyed people (or "threes" for short) have for generations occupied important leadership positions in government, business, technology, science, media, and education, and have used their accumulated power to both prevent two-eyed people ("twos") from threatening their dominance, and to convince the twos that their inferior position is a natural consequence of their inherent inferiority as a separate species. Norms of behavior and interaction dictate that all twos should treat all threes with deference and respect, while threes may abuse, denigrate, or simply ignore the existence of twos. The legal system presumes the inherent criminality of twos and the inherent virtue of threes. The education

system teaches that all historical progress is the result of the exceptional talents of threes. Any two who complains about or resists her "place" in the social order is seen as deviant, and dismissed as a trouble-maker who is jealous of the "success" of others. Twos are severely punished for looking threes directly in the eyes, while both the content and methodology of education reinforces the intellectual inferiority of twos, and so on. In short, this is a world in which corrupted recognition is deeply embedded in the Ethical Life of this society. It impacts the way individuals understand themselves as individuals, how they understand themselves in relation to others, and how they understand themselves in relation to the formal and informal institutions of that Ethical Life.

The first important consequence of taking pure recognition seriously is that it rules out reducing domination and oppression to the individualistic I/thou level. To be sure, there are important ways in which individual interactions manifest corrupted recognition, but this should always be understood within a larger context that gives force and meaning to those manifestations. The deepest impact on any given individual's sense of self comes seldom from another individual, and more often from the innumerable symbols, practices, and institutions that serve as the medium in which those individual interactions take place. In my admittedly simplistic example, a teacher who is a three is able to successfully undermine the agency of his pupils who are twos because there is an established history of the legitimacy of this project, support and resources from the larger institutions of education, and a deeply entrenched expectation on the part of both teachers and students that this is what *normal* education is. To see this simply as an evil individual harming innocent victims is to vastly oversimplify this phenomenon, such that a disservice is done to both parties.

What is more, recognition is manifest whenever there is more than one subject. The important distinction is not between recognition and *lack of* recognition, but between varying degrees of *purity* of recognition. Hegel still refers to the Master/Slave dialectic as a manifestation of recognition, it is just recognition gone wrong. In my example, twos are recognized by threes, but they are *mis*recognized as inherently inferior and worthy of domination. Since, for Hegel, we come to know and understand ourselves through this interaction with

others, it stands to reason that systematically *corrupted* recognition can have a crippling impact on the first-person agency of those in the subordinate position. This phenomenon of "mental colonialization"—the idea that one can "internalize" damaging views and attitudes of those who are in the dominant position—is a common theme in literature on oppression, and the interpretation of Hegelian recognition I am offering is well-equipped to provide an account of it. Hegelian recognition allows for an account of oppression as a systemic corruption of recognition that saturates not only the interactions of individuals, but nearly every aspect of Ethical Life—the "concrete" social context in which each individual finds herself embedded. It provides an account of oppression and domination as a fundamentally *social* phenomenon, but not a reductively social one. That is, it sees the way in which larger social contexts and institutions *condition* individual interactions (fostering more or less pure manifestations of recognition on the individual level) without reducing oppression either to variations in distribution of social goods or to simple discrimination. Individuals still engage in and maintain oppression, but their actions must be understood within that larger social context that gives their individual actions force and meaning. Hegelian recognition, then, is a way to bridge the divide between reductively atomistic accounts of oppression on the one hand, reductively social/mechanical accounts on the other.

Another advantage of this interpretation of Hegelian recognition is that it provides a proper context in which to situate the role of struggle in relation to human liberation. I have argued that the agonistic interpretation's treatment of struggle as *normative* is an overstatement of the role of struggle in recognition (and therefore human freedom). But while it is a mistake to understand all human interaction on the model of struggle, it is surely questionable (at best) to think that liberation for the dominated and oppressed will emerge *without* some kind of struggle. Fanon is surely correct in his claim that genuine freedom cannot be simply bestowed upon one from without, and thus some effort must be made on the part of the oppressed to secure their freedom. In the agonistic interpretation, we struggle to make the other grant us recognition. From the perspective of pure recognition, however, the purpose of struggle is dramatically different. If I *compel* recognition from another person, or a group or persons, or an institution, then the recognition thereby made manifest will

necessarily be corrupted, since pure recognition must be freely undertaken by both parties. The recognition I receive from another who I have *forced* to recognize me is not the recognition of another free subject, and so cannot render concrete my own freedom through that recognition. Thus, any "struggle for recognition" which is directed toward *compelling* recognition can only ever truly be a struggle for *corrupted* recognition. What one is seeking through struggle, therefore, is not recognition as such, since a corrupted form of recognition already exists, but rather one is seeking a more *pure* manifestation of recognition. But what does this mean in practical terms?

First and foremost, a struggle for purification of recognition must be explicitly directed toward fostering reciprocity. This means that the annihilation of the other is ruled out from the start, as are such motives as vengeance or envy. Certainly one may struggle for any of these purposes, but such struggles cannot be properly understood as directed toward pure recognition. Indeed, a struggle to annihilate the other may in certain circumstances be necessary for survival, both on an individual level, and perhaps even on a larger political level. The point is that such struggles, necessary and important as they may be, should never be understood as struggles for pure recognition. They may be struggles for survival, or for power, but not reciprocity.

Genuine struggles for pure recognition perform two important and interrelated functions. Returning to the example of the differently-eyed peoples, we encounter a situation in which struggle will be an important component of any liberatory effort. The oppression of the twos by the threes is deeply entrenched both in formal and informal institutions, such that many twos, and most threes, will see it as normal and inevitable. The first important function of struggle will have to do with the consciousness of the twos. If freedom emerges, as Hegel believes, through pure recognition, then generations of deeply entrenched misrecognition will cripple freedom. By resisting this misrecognition, the twos are demonstrating to the threes, and equally importantly, *to themselves*, that they are indeed full agents capable of taking action to pursue human freedom. They thereby move from a passive state in which they are acted upon by forces beyond their control to an active one in which they gradually assume more and

more control over the world around them, challenging what was previously understood to be beyond question. Struggle for pure recognition, then, should be understood as a means of building and developing agency on the part of the oppressed and dominated.

The second function of struggle has to do with the consciousness of the oppressors (in my example, the threes). The struggle of the twos is directed practically toward changing the material and social conditions that keep them "in their place." As we have already seen, this also has the effect of demonstrating the agency and subjectivity of the twos both to themselves and to the threes. The ultimate function of struggle is to throw in the face of the oppressors the reality of the status of the oppressed as fully human agents. To be sure, many of the oppressors will resist this reality, by attempting to ignore it, or by explaining it away, or by attempting to crush those who resist their understanding of the world they inhabit. The point of the struggle is to make these efforts to evade the realization of the humanity of the oppressed as difficult as possible. One cannot *compel* this realization, but one can create conditions in which the usual means of avoidance become too cumbersome to pursue.

What is more, these two functions are mutually reinforcing. When I, as a two, participate in a political struggle against my position as a second-class citizen, I immediately realize that I am disproving the myth of the "natural" and "inevitable" status of my political subordination. I am, for perhaps the first time, coming to terms with the reality of my agency (this is what we mean when we refer to "empowerment"). As the threes scramble to resist my efforts, they make clear the extent to which my efforts are having a real impact. They may not be fully successful in the practical sense, but by taking action against me, the threes are implicitly acknowledging my efforts (this is an example of how */misrecognition* is still recognition). Already, my agency is being made concrete to me through the actions of others to crush it. Invigorated by this realization, I redouble my efforts, and the threes must take even more elaborate measures to resist my struggle. Simultaneously, when I, as a three, witness for the first time the struggle of the twos, I am likewise made immediately, if perhaps only implicitly, aware that my understanding of my dominance as natural and inevitable is no longer obviously true. At first, it may be

easy to ignore their efforts as the misguided antics of a few troublemakers, or explain them away as the inevitable expression of the inherently violent nature of twos, or simply unleash the full force of the police on those rioters and vandals. As the struggle persists and grows, however, this becomes more and more difficult, and the inconsistency of my position-that I am going to great efforts to resist the determined actions of those who I claim are without fully human agency-becomes harder to avoid.

By no means do I wish to elide the complications and difficulties that lurk throughout this account of struggle. There are important questions of strategy and tactics (especially as regards the use of violence), and issues involving internal political organization (the role of gender in anti-racist struggle, and vice-versa, for example), just to get the list started. These are crucial issues that should be addressed. For now, however, it is sufficient to see that this account of struggle, which I am arguing is consistent with a full account of Hegelian recognition, is a far cry from the treatment of struggle within the agonistic interpretation. From a strategic perspective, for example, it should be clear that non-violence is as much a kind of *struggle* in this sense as is violence. Non-violence seeks to demonstrate the agency of those who are taking up the struggle by thwarting "business as usual" for the oppressors. This is as much a demonstration of agency as fisticuffs or guerrilla war. My main concern at present is to show that the struggle for pure recognition, inasmuch as it seeks not domination but reciprocity, is different in kind from the understanding of struggle that one finds in the agonistic interpretation. If I truly seek reciprocity, I have to bear your agency in mind even as I struggle to demonstrate my own to you.

This being said, it is also important to emphasize that the expectations of results will be different within this interpretation of struggle, as well. Since recognition cannot be understood as static, what one seeks in struggle is not so much an end state of being but a new way of being. That is, there may be clearly defined practical and strategic goals (repeal this law, gain access to this public good, and so on), but "recognition" as a discrete end cannot be one of them. An understanding of pure recognition should inform any struggle, but only as an ideal of interaction toward which one aims, never as a final state. Indeed, as an explicit aim, a "struggle for recognition" is all but

incoherent. What one struggles for, in other words, is reciprocity as a way of interacting with others, and not as a state of being to achieve. Reciprocity demands that each takes seriously the goals and interests of the other, not such that one simply submits to the whims of the other or demands submission from the other, but such that decisions about action affecting the other are subject to negotiation and shared decision-making between moral equals.

Hegel refers to this reciprocity of pure recognition as the "third moment," wherein the abstractions of pure universality and pure particularity are reconciled. The following quote from the *Philosophy of Right* addresses this point by raising an important example:

The third moment is that "I" is with itself in its limitation, in this other; as it determines itself, it nevertheless still remains with itself and does not cease to hold fast to the universal. This, then, is the concrete concept of freedom, whereas the two previous moments have been found to be thoroughly abstract and one-sided. But we already possess this freedom in the form of feeling, for example in friendship and love. Here, we are not one-sidedly within ourselves, but willingly limit ourselves with reference to an other, even while knowing ourselves in this limitation as ourselves. In this determinacy, the human being should not feel determined; on the contrary, he attains his self-awareness only by regarding the other as other. Thus, freedom lies neither in indeterminacy nor in determinacy, but is both at once.<sup>40</sup>

Hegel's use of examples here is crucial. When he seeks individual exemplars of pure recognition, he turns not to struggles and battles to the death, but to friendship and love. If recognition truly is fundamentally agonistic, then friendship and love should themselves be either impossible, or simply mislabeled manifestations of dominance and subordination. It is clear, however, that Hegel, at least, *does not* understand them in this way. The real model of Hegelian recognition, therefore, is not the battle to the death and the master/slave dialectic, but rather relationships of friendship and love.

Hegel's own examples also help to make clear this point about recognition as a *way* of being rather than a *state* of being. Friendship is never an end state to be accomplished. Genuine friendship (understood in a more or less Aristotelian sense),<sup>41</sup> demands constant

attention and nurturing from both parties. This is because each continues to grow as individuals, which changes the nature of the friendship, and because the friendship itself impacts the development of the individuals. If two people are truly friends, they are in fact always seeking to better know the other and themselves through the friendship itself, in order to keep that friendship alive. The same is true with love. Love demands constant nurturing and flexibility in order to survive as love—it is never a "task" that can be accomplished, but is rather a way of relating to another that must be constantly reaffirmed by both parties. Pure recognition—reciprocity—should be understood in precisely the same way, even on the political level. The goal of struggle is not some altered manifestation of domination and oppression, but a relation between agents and groups of agents that will be seeking ever greater manifestations of reciprocity through an ever-evolving relationship that demands the constant (often critical) attention and affirmation of both parties. This becomes even more clear if we bear in mind Hegel's understanding of "self-consciousness" as an organizing principle for the unfolding of "Spirit" (and recognition). To *self-consciously* undertake something (like reciprocal recognition) means that one can never simply rest on one's proverbial laurels, but must constantly scrutinize oneself, and consequently one's relations with others.

## Concluding Remarks

Hegelian recognition is not about constant combat directed toward establishing one's dominance over another, or resisting attempts to be dominated by the other. Nor is it about demanding or compelling the conferral of recognition upon oneself. If this were so, then Hegelian recognition would indeed be worthy of rejection as a tool for theorizing human oppression and liberation. But in fact, Hegelian recognition is about the constant effort, on the individual level, to establish and maintain relationships of reciprocity that are freely given and freely accepted. On the larger social/political level, recognition is about the effort (and often, but not *necessarily*, the struggle) to establish conditions that are conducive to relationships of reciprocity. It is never a *fait accompli* but requires constant attention, affirmation, and revision.

To be sure, this is an ideal, and it is an open question whether it is ever in fact capable of realization either on the individual or the social levels. I submit, however, that recognition remains an important and useful conceptual tool even if it is an ideal that may only be approached asymptotically. Even if perfectly pure recognition is beyond the hope of mere humans, there remains a huge difference between varying degrees of corrupted recognition, such that the ideal can remain an important organizing and guiding principle, and most importantly, one that can have real practical impact on our political practice. Holding to the ideal of reciprocal recognition provides one with critical tools for evaluating organizational structure, modes of individual interactions, forms of communication, and so on. At the same time, the fact that recognition is a constant process, and not a state to be achieved, stresses the extent to which constant vigilance and re-assessment of our attitudes and practices is important not merely for practical reasons, but also because it is itself a part of reciprocity (freely recognizing one as an agent means understanding that we are constantly growing, changing, and developing, and therefore demands that we re-evaluate our relationship accordingly).

Ultimately, Hegelian recognition stands as the demand for the freedom of all. Even if Hegel himself saw this only dimly, or perhaps not at all (and there is ample textual evidence to support this), it follows necessarily from any full account of recognition. The extent to which I am able to participate in more or less pure manifestations of recognition is directly proportional to the extent to which I am a *free* human agent. When I fail to manifest pure recognition as a *process* or *effort* to gain reciprocity, I fail to find my own freedom, since it cannot be "given back to me" except by another free agent. By revealing the limitations and contradictions of corrupted recognition, Hegel makes this demand for total human freedom explicit.

## Footnote

<sup>1</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), and Carla Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in Patricia Jagentowicz Mills (ed.), *Feminist*

*Interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 275-97.

- <sup>3</sup> Paget Henry, "Whiteness and Africana Phenomenology," in George Yancy (ed.), *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 195-209.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Lynch has offered a thorough discussion of this phenomenon. See Richard A. Lynch, "Mutual Recognition and the Dialectic of Master and Slave: Reading Hegel against Kojève," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (2001): 33-48.
- <sup>5</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), p. 147(¶185).
- <sup>6</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing*, p. 9.
- <sup>7</sup> Of course, others can be manipulated into choosing subordination. This phenomenon has indeed been the subject of no small amount of literature in feminist traditions.
- <sup>8</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing*, p. 24.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36; emphasis added.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- <sup>11</sup> Kathy E. Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 40. This view is particularly puzzling in this work, since three pages later Ferguson acknowledges that Hegel views the dialectic as an "instructive fiction."
- <sup>12</sup> The agonistic view of recognition emerges from chapter IV, section A of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which includes the (in)famous discussion of the dialectic of Herrschaft and Knechtschaft. Depending upon the particular translation, this dialectic is either referred to as "Lordship and Bondage" (Miller's translation of the *Phenomenology*) or "Master and Slave" (Wallace's translation of Part Three of the *Encyclopedia*). Both translations have their respective advantages and disadvantages. The original German terms have a generality that can, however, be lost in both English translations, which bring to mind more or less formalized relations. In German, the terms are indicative

not only of this formal relationship of master and bondsman, but also of any general relationship of dominance and subordination. A focus on slavery, as such, can therefore be misleading. However, for the sake of consistency with the secondary literature, I will continue to employ the "Master/Slave" translation throughout this essay.

- <sup>13</sup> Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 1995); Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), and *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- <sup>14</sup> Richard Lynch has offered a compelling argument that much of this focus on the Master/Slave dialectic has its roots in Alexandre Kojève's French translation of parts of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which, though highly influential on twentieth-century continental philosophy, omitted entirely much of the account of pure recognition found in Hegel's original text. See Lynch, "Mutual Recognition."
- <sup>15</sup> This is indeed what Hegel means by *Aufhebung* ("supersession" in Miller's translation. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: [Oxford University Press](#), 1977)). "Corrupted" recognition should not be annihilated entirely, but rather superseded. One must preserve what is worthwhile and (in Hegel's language) necessary or essential, while transcending or overcoming what is inessential (and mistaken) about it.
- <sup>16</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 17.
- <sup>17</sup> Philip Kain, *Hegel and the Other: A Study of the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 8.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 109 (§174).
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Philip Kain offers a very clear account of the relation between Kant's Transcendental Deduction and the account of self-consciousness offered by Hegel. Kain, *Hegel and the Other*, pp. 21-37 and 50-56.

- <sup>22</sup> Throughout this essay, I will use "agency/agent" and "subjectivity/subject" to refer to our status as persons in the normative sense-either as bearers of rights, or as moral agents, or as free agents, depending upon the particular tradition or approach one espouses. I am well aware that this will be troublingly vague, but for reasons of focus and brevity, I cannot provide a complete account of human agency within the Hegelian tradition within the confines of the present effort.
- <sup>23</sup> A full account of these cultural manifestations of the moment of Desire is not possible within the scope of this project. What I have in mind, however, are the atomistic tendencies found within the dominant notions of "success" (which tend toward isolating oneself from meaningful interaction with all but a very few individuals), or the characterization of human interaction generally as fundamentally competitive and instrumental.
- <sup>24</sup> Indeed, at its root level, the Hegelian agent is a denial of this distinction altogether.
- <sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 111 (§180).
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 111-12 (§182).
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 112 (§183).
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., §184.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-13 (§185).
- <sup>30</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing*, p. 9.
- <sup>31</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 115 (§190); emphasis added.
- <sup>32</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 217.
- <sup>33</sup> It should be noted that this is not the same as "reflecting." There is an active participation on the part of both agents in pure recognition that cannot be captured by the reflection metaphor.
- <sup>34</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind* (Part Three of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*), trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 171 (§431).

<sup>35</sup> A full and complete account of Hegel's conception of freedom is not possible within the confines of the present project. For such a full account, see Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991), and Merold Westphal, *Hegel, Freedom, and Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 172 (§432).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 170-71 (§430 and §431).

<sup>38</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 189 (§142).

<sup>39</sup> By "institutions" here, and throughout this essay, I mean to refer to both the formal and informal practices that have become codified and/or normalized within a given social context. This would include formal institutions such as the state, or a legal code, or even a University administration, as well as such informal institutions as manners of greeting, appropriate use of slang, and body language (that nodding the head means "yes" in the United States, and "no" in Turkey, for example, is a matter of an informal institution in the sense I am using here).

<sup>40</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 42 (§7).

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VIII.

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